



The Ryle Anthology

J. C. RYLE

The RYLE ANTHOLOGY

by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

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Evangelistic Tracts

Are You Born Again?

This is one of life's most important questions. Jesus Christ said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3).

It is not enough to reply, "I belong to the church; I suppose I'm a Christian." Thousands of nominal Christians show none of the signs of being born again which the Scriptures have given us—many listed in the First Epistle of John.

1. No Habitual Sinning

First of all, John wrote: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1Jo 3:9). "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not" (5:18). A person who has been born again, or regenerated, does not habitually commit sin. He no longer sins with his heart and will and whole inclination. There was probably a time when he did not think about whether his actions were sinful or not, and he did not always feel grieved after doing evil. There was no quarrel between him and sin; they were friends. But the true Christian hates sin, flees from it, fights against it, considers it his greatest plague, resents the burden of its presence, mourns when he falls under its influence, and longs to be completely delivered from it. Sin no longer pleases him; it has become a horrible thing which he hates. However, he cannot eliminate its presence within him.

If he said that he had no sin, he would be lying (1Jo 1:8). But he can say that he hates sin and that the great desire of his soul is not to commit sin at all. He cannot prevent bad thoughts from entering his mind, or shortcomings, omissions, and defects from appearing in both his words and his actions. He knows that "in many things we offend all"

(Jam 3:2). But he can truly say, in the sight of God, that these things cause him grief and sorrow, and that his whole nature does not consent to them. *What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?*

2. Believing in Christ

Second, John wrote: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God” (1Jo 5:1).

A man who is born again, or regenerated, believes that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour who can pardon his soul, that He is the divine Person appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, and beside Him there is no Saviour at all. In himself he sees nothing but unworthiness. But he has full confidence in Christ, and trusting in Him, he believes that his sins are all forgiven. He believes that, for the sake of Christ’s finished work and death on the Cross, he is reckoned righteous in God’s sight, and he may look forward to death and judgment without alarm (Rom 4:20-5:1; 8:1).

He may have fears and doubts. He may sometimes tell you that he feels as if he had no faith at all. But ask him if he is willing to trust in anything instead of Christ, and see what he will say. Ask him if he will rest his hope of eternal life on his own goodness, his own works, his prayers, his minister, or his church, and listen to his reply. *What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?*

3. Practicing Righteousness

Third, John wrote: “Every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1Jo 2:29).

The man who is born again, or regenerated, is a holy man. He endeavors to live according to God’s will, to do the things that please God and to avoid the things that God hates. He wishes to continually look to Christ as his example as well as his Saviour, and to prove himself to be Christ’s friend by doing whatever He commands. He knows he is not perfect. He is painfully aware of his indwelling corruption. He finds an evil principle within himself that is constantly warring against grace and trying to draw him away from God. But he does not consent to it, though he cannot prevent its presence.

Though he may sometimes feel so low that he questions whether or not he is a Christian at all, he will be able to say with John Newton, “I am not what I ought to be; I am not what I want to be; I am not what I hope to be in another world—but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am.” *What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?*

4. Loving Other Christians

Fourth, John wrote: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1Jo 3:14).

A man who is born again has a special love for all true disciples of Christ. Like his Father in heaven, he loves all men with a great general love, but he has a special love for

those who share his faith in Christ. Like his Lord and Saviour, he loves the worst of sinners and could weep over them; but he has a peculiar love for those who are believers. He is never so much at home as when he is in their company.

He feels they are all members of the same family. They are his fellow soldiers, fighting against the same enemy. They are his fellow travelers, journeying along the same road. He understands them, and they understand him. They may be very different from himself in many ways—in rank, in station and in wealth. But that does not matter. They are his Father's sons and daughters and he cannot help loving them. *What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?*

5. Overcoming the World

Fifth, John wrote: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1Jo 5:4).

A man who is born again does not use the world's opinion as his standard of right and wrong. He does not mind going against the world's ways, ideas, and customs. What men think or say no longer concerns him. He overcomes the love of the world. He finds no pleasure in things which seem to bring happiness to most people. To him they seem foolish and unworthy of an immortal being.

He loves God's praise more than man's praise. He fears offending God more than offending man. It is unimportant to him whether he is blamed or praised; his first aim is to please God. *What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?*

6. Keeping Oneself Pure

Sixth, John wrote: "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself" (1Jo 5:18).

A man who is born again is careful of his own soul. He tries not only to avoid sin but also to avoid everything which may lead to it. He is careful about the company he keeps. He knows that evil communications corrupt the heart, and that evil is more catching than good, just as disease is more infectious than health. He is careful about the use of his time; his chief desire is to spend it profitably.

He desires to live like a soldier in an enemy country—to wear his armor continually and to be prepared for temptation. He is diligent to be a watchful, humble, prayerful man. *What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?*

The Test

These are the six great marks of a born again Christian.

There is a vast difference in the depth and distinctness of these marks in different people. In some they are faint and hardly noticeable. In others they are bold, plain, and unmistakable, so anyone may read them. Some of these marks are more visible than others in each individual. Seldom are all equally evident in any one person.

But still, after every allowance, here we find boldly painted six marks of being born of God.

How should we react to these things? We can logically come to only one conclusion—only those who are born again have these six characteristics, and those who do not have these marks are not born again. This seems to be the conclusion to which the apostle intended us to come. *Do you have these characteristics? Are you born again?*

Available in print as a tract from Chapel Library.

Remember Lot's Wife

There are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than this. The Lord Jesus Christ says to us, *"Remember Lot's wife"* (Luk 17:32).

Lot's wife was a professor of religion: her husband was a "righteous man" (2Pe 2:8). She left Sodom with him on the day when Sodom was destroyed; she looked back towards the city from behind her husband, against God's express command; she was struck dead at once, and turned into a pillar of salt. And the Lord Jesus Christ holds her up as a beacon to His church: He says, *"Remember Lot's wife."*

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the person Jesus names. He does not bid us remember Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Sarah, or Hannah, or Ruth. No: He singles out one whose soul was lost forever. He cries to us, *"Remember Lot's wife."*

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the subject Jesus is upon. He is speaking of His own second coming to judge the world: He is describing the awful state of unreadiness in which many will be found. The last days are on His mind, when He says, *"Remember Lot's wife."*

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the Person who gives it. The Lord Jesus is full of love, mercy, and compassion: He is One Who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. He could weep over unbelieving Jerusalem, and pray for the men that crucified Him; yet even He thinks it good to give this solemn warning and remind us of lost souls. Even He says, *"Remember Lot's wife."*

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the persons to whom it was first given. The Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples: He was not addressing the Scribes and Pharisees who hated him, but Peter, James, and John, and many others who loved Him: yet even to them He thinks good to address a caution. Even to them He says, *"Remember Lot's wife."*

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the manner in which it was given. He does not merely say, "Beware of following, take heed of imitating, do not be like Lot's wife." He uses a different word: He says, *"Remember."* He speaks as if we were all in danger of

forgetting the subject; He stirs up our lazy memories; He bids us keep the case before our minds. He cries, "*Remember Lot's wife.*"

I will speak of **the religious privileges which Lot's wife enjoyed**. In the days of Abraham and Lot, true saving religion was scarce upon earth; there were no Bibles, no ministers, no churches, no tracts, no missionaries. The knowledge of God was confined to a few favoured families; the greater part of the inhabitants of the world were living in darkness, ignorance, superstition, and sin. Not one in a hundred perhaps had such good example, such spiritual society, such clear knowledge, such plain warnings as Lot's wife. Compared with millions of her fellow-creatures in her time, Lot's wife was a favoured woman.

She had a godly man for her husband: she had Abraham, the father of the faithful, for her uncle by marriage. The faith, the knowledge, and the prayers of these two righteous men could have been no secret to her. It is impossible that she could have dwelt in tents with them for any length of time, without knowing whose they were and whom they served. Religion with them was no formal business; it was the ruling principle of their lives and the mainspring of their actions. All this Lot's wife must have seen and known. This was no small privilege.

When Abraham first received the promises, it is probable Lot's wife was there. When he built his tent between Hai and Bethel, it is probable she was there. When the angels came to Sodom and warned her husband to flee, she saw them; when they took them by the hand and led them out of the city, she was one of those whom they helped to escape. Once more, I say, these were no small privileges.

Yet what good effect had all these privileges on the heart of Lot's wife? None at all. Notwithstanding all her opportunities and means of grace—notwithstanding all her special warnings and messages from heaven—she lived and died graceless, godless, impenitent, and unbelieving. The eyes of her understanding were never opened; her conscience was never really aroused and quickened; her will was never really brought into a state of obedience to God; her affections were never really set on things above. The form of religion which she had was kept up for fashion's sake and not from feeling: it was a cloak worn for the sake of pleasing her company, but not from any sense of its value. She did as others around her in Lot's house; she conformed to her husband's ways; she made no opposition to his religion; she allowed herself to be passively towed along in his wake—but all this time her heart was wrong in the sight of God. The world was in her heart, and her heart was in the world. In this state she lived, and in this state she died.

In all this there is much to be learned: I see a lesson here which is of the greatest importance in the present day. You live in times when there are many persons just like Lot's wife: Come and hear the lesson which her case is meant to teach.

Learn, then, that **the mere possession of religious privileges will save no one's soul**. You may have spiritual advantages of every description; you may live in the full sunshine of the richest opportunities and means of grace; you may enjoy the best of preaching and the choicest instruction; you may dwell in the midst of light, knowledge, holiness, and

good company. All this may be, and yet you yourself may remain unconverted, and at last be lost for ever.

I dare say this doctrine sounds hard to some readers. I know that many fancy they want nothing but religious privileges in order to become decided Christians. They are not what they ought to be at present, they allow; but their position is so hard, they plead, and their difficulties are so many. Give them a godly husband, or a godly wife—give them godly companions, or a godly master—give them the preaching of the gospel—give them privileges, and then they would walk with God.

It is all a mistake. It is an entire delusion. It requires something more than privileges to save souls. Joab was David's captain; Gehazi was Elisha's servant; Demas was Paul's companion; Judas Iscariot was Christ's disciple; and Lot had a worldly, unbelieving wife. These all died in their sins. They went down to the pit in spite of knowledge, warnings, and opportunities; and they all teach us that it is not privileges alone that men need. *They need the grace of the Holy Ghost.*

Let us value our religious privileges, but let us not rest entirely upon them. Let us desire to have the benefit of them in all our movements in life, but let us not put them in the place of Christ. Let us use them thankfully, if God gives them to us, but let us take care they produce some fruit in our heart and life. If they do not do good, they often do positive harm; they sear the conscience, they increase responsibility, they aggravate condemnation. The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay; the same sun which makes the living tree grow, dries up the dead tree, and prepares it for burning. Nothing so hardens the heart of man as a barren familiarity with sacred things. Once more I say, it is not privileges alone which make people Christians, but *the grace of the Holy Ghost*. Without that no man will ever be saved.

I ask those who attend a sound ministry in the present day to mark well what I am saying. You go to Mr. A's, or Mr. B's church: you think him an excellent preacher; you delight in his sermons; you cannot hear anyone else with the same comfort; you have learned many things since you attended his ministry; you consider it a privilege to be one of his hearers! All this is very good. It is a privilege. I should be thankful if ministers like yours were multiplied a thousandfold. But, after all, what have you got in your heart? Have you yet received the Holy Ghost? *If not, you are no better than Lot's wife.*

I ask the children of religious parents to mark well what I am saying. It is the highest privilege to be the child of a godly father and mother, and to be brought up in the midst of many prayers. It is a blessed thing indeed to be taught the gospel from our earliest infancy, and to hear of sin, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and holiness, and heaven, from the first moment we can remember anything. But, O, take heed that you do not remain barren and unfruitful in the sunshine of all these privileges: beware lest your hearts remain hard, impenitent, and worldly, notwithstanding the many advantages you enjoy. You cannot enter the kingdom of God on the credit of your parents' religion. You must eat the bread of life for yourself, and have the witness of the Spirit in your own

heart. You must have repentance of your own, faith of your own, and sanctification of your own. *If not, you are no better than Lot's wife.*

I pray God that all professing Christians in these days may lay these things to heart. May we never forget that privileges alone cannot save us. Light and knowledge, and faithful preaching, and abundant means of grace, and the company of holy people are all great blessings and advantages. Happy are they that have them! But after all, there is one thing without which privileges are useless: that one thing is *the grace of the Holy Ghost*. Lot's wife had many privileges; but Lot's wife had not grace. ❧

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Useless Kinds of Religion

There are two ways by which a man may lose his own soul. What are they?

1. He may lose his soul by living and dying *without any religion* at all. He may live and die like a beast, prayerless, godless, graceless, faithless. This is a sure way to hell. Mind that you do not walk in it.

2. He may lose his soul by taking up *some kind of religion*. He may live and die contenting himself with a false Christianity and resting on a baseless hope. This is the commonest way to hell there is.

What do I mean by useless kinds of religion? I will tell you. The first thing I wish to say is this. *A religion is entirely useless in which Jesus Christ is not the principal object* and does not fill the principal place.

There are only too many baptized men and women who practically know nothing about Christ. Their religion consists in a few vague notions and empty expressions. "They trust they are no worse than others; they keep to their Church; they try to do their duty; they do nobody any harm; they hope God will be merciful to them! They trust the Almighty will pardon their sins and take them to heaven when they die." This is about the whole of their religion.

But what do these people know practically about Christ? Nothing: nothing at all! What experiential acquaintance have they with His offices and work, His blood, His righteousness, His mediation, His priesthood, His intercession? None: none at all! Ask them about a saving faith—ask them about being born again of the Spirit—ask them about being sanctified in Christ Jesus. What answer will you get? You are a barbarian to them. You have asked them simple Bible questions; but they know no more about them experientially than a Buddhist or a Muslim.

And yet this is the religion of hundreds of thousands of people who are called Christians all over the world.

If you are a man of this kind, I warn you plainly that such Christianity *will never take you to heaven*. It may do very well in the eyes of men; it may pass muster very decently at the [church] meeting, in the place of business, in the House of Commons, or in the streets. But it will never comfort you. It will never satisfy your conscience. *It will never save your soul*.

I warn you plainly that all notions and theories about God being merciful without Christ and excepting through Christ are baseless delusions and empty fancies. Such theories are purely an idol of man's invention. They are all of the earth, earthy: they never came down from heaven. The God of heaven has sealed and appointed Christ as the one and only Savior and way of life; and all who would be saved must be content to be saved by Him, or they will never be saved at all. I give you fair warning. *A religion without Christ will never save your soul* (Joh 14:6)!

But I have another thing yet to say. A religion is entirely useless *in which you join anything with Christ* in the matter of saving your soul. You must not only depend on Christ for salvation, but you must depend on Christ only and Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9).

There are multitudes of baptized men and women who profess to honor Christ, but in reality do Him great dishonor. They give Christ a certain place in their system of religion, but not the place which God intended Him to fill. Christ alone is not "all in all" to their souls (Eph 1:23). No: it is either Christ and the Church, or Christ and the Sacraments, or Christ and His ordained ministers, or Christ and their own goodness, or Christ and their own prayers, or Christ and their own sincerity and charity—on which they practically rest their souls.

If you are a Christian of this kind I warn you also plainly that your religion is an offence to God. You are changing God's plan of salvation into a plan of your own devising. You are, in effect, deposing Christ from His throne by giving the glory due to Him to another. I care not who it is that teaches you your religion and on whose word you build. Whether he be Pope or Cardinal, Archbishop or Bishop, Dean or Archdeacon, Presbyter or Deacon, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Baptist or Independent, Methodist or Plymouth Brother—whosoever adds anything to Christ, teaches you wrong (Gal 1:6-8).

I care not what it is that you add to Christ. Whether it be the necessity of joining the Church of Rome, or of being an Episcopalian, or of becoming a Free Churchman, or of giving up the liturgy, or of being baptized by immersion, whatever you may practically add to Christ in the matter of salvation, you do Christ an injury.

Take heed what you are doing. Beware of giving to Christ's servants the honour due to none but Christ. Beware of giving the Lord's ordinances the honour due unto the Lord. Beware of resting the burden of your soul on anything but Christ, and Christ alone. Beware of having a religion which is of no use, and cannot save.

[Christ] left the glory He had from all eternity with the Father and came down into the world to provide salvation. He took our nature upon Him and was born as a man. As

a man He did the will of God perfectly (Mat 17:5), which we all had left undone (Rom 3:23). As a man He suffered on the cross the wrath of God which we ought to have suffered (Rom 6:23). He brought in everlasting righteousness for us (Dan 9:24). He redeemed us from the curse of a broken law (Luk 1:68; Rev 5:9). He opened a fountain for all sin and uncleanness. He died for our sins. He rose again for our justification (Rom 4:25)). He ascended to God's right hand, and there sat down, waiting till His enemies should be made his footstool (Luk 20:42-43). And there He sits now, [calling] to all who will come to Him, interceding for all who believe in Him, and managing by God's appointment all that concerns the salvation of souls (Joh 3; Eph 1-2; Rom 3-5).

It is an awful thing to have no religion at all. To have an immortal soul committed to your charge and neglect it—this is dreadful. But it's no less an awful thing to be content with *a religion than can do you no good*. Do not let this be your case! ❧

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Salvation

Alive or Dead?

“You hath he quickened who were dead.”—Ephesians 2:1

This question deserves a thousand thoughts. Look at it carefully, and ponder it well. Search your own heart, and do not lay down this booklet without solemn self-inquiry. Are you among the living or the dead?

Listen to me while I try to help you to an answer, and show you what God has said about it in the Scriptures.

1. All Are Spiritually Dead

First then let me tell you that we are all by nature spiritually dead.

“Dead” is a strong word, but it is not my own coining and invention. I did not choose it. The Holy Ghost taught Paul to write it down about the Ephesians: “You hath he

quicken who were dead" (Eph 2:1). The Lord Jesus Christ made use of it in the parable of the prodigal son: "This my son was dead and is alive again" (Luk 15:24, 32). You will read it also in the First Epistle to Timothy: "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1Ti 5:6). Shall a mortal man be wise above that which is written? Must I not take heed to speak that which I find in the Bible, and neither less nor more?

"Dead" is an awful idea, and one that man is most unwilling to receive. He does not like to admit the whole extent of his soul's disease; he shuts his eyes to the real amount of his danger. Many will allow us to say that naturally most people "are not quite what they ought to be: they are thoughtless, they are unsteady, they are gay, they are wild, they are not serious enough." But dead? Oh no! We must not mention it. It is going too far to say that. The idea is a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.

But what we like in religion is of very little consequence. The only question is, What is written? What saith the Lord? God's thoughts are not man's thoughts, and God's words are not man's words. God says of every living person who is not a real, thorough, genuine Christian, be he high or low, rich or poor, old or young—he is spiritually dead.

In this, as in everything else, God's words are right. Nothing could be said more correct, nothing more faithful, nothing more true. Let me reason this out with you.

What would you have said if you had seen Joseph weeping over his father Jacob? "He fell upon his face, and wept upon him, and kissed him" (Gen 50:1). But there was no reply to his affection. All about that aged countenance was unmoved, silent, and still. Doubtless you would have guessed the reason—Jacob was dead.

What would you have thought if you had met the widow's son in the gate of Nain, lying on a bier, wrapped about with grave-clothes, followed by his weeping mother, carried slowly towards the tomb? (Luk 7:12). No doubt it would have been all clear to you. It would have needed no explanation—the young man was dead.

Now I say this is just the condition of every man by nature in the matter of his soul. I say this is just the state of the vast majority of people around us in spiritual things. God calls to them continually—by mercies, by afflictions, by ministers, by His word—but they do not hear His voice. The Lord Jesus Christ mourns over them, pleads with them, sends them gracious invitations, knocks at the door of their hearts—but they do not regard it. The crown and glory of their being, that precious jewel, their immortal soul, is being seized, plundered, and taken away—and they are utterly unconcerned. The devil is carrying them away, day after day, along the broad road that leads to destruction—and they allow him to make them his captives without a struggle. And this is going on everywhere, all around us, among all classes, throughout the length and breadth of the land. You know it in your conscience while you read these words. You cannot deny it. And what then, I ask, can be said more perfectly true than that which God says: we are all by nature spiritually dead?

When a man's heart is cold and unconcerned about religion, when his hands are never employed in doing God's work, when his feet are not familiar with God's ways, when his tongue is seldom or never used in prayer and praise, when his ears are deaf to the

voice of Christ in the Gospel, when his eyes are blind to the beauty of the kingdom of heaven, when his mind is full of the world, and has no room for spiritual things—when these marks are to be found in a man, the right word to use about him is the word “Dead.”

We may not like this perhaps. We may shut our eyes to facts in the world and to texts in the Word. But God’s truth must be spoken, and to keep it back does positive harm. Truth must be spoken, however condemning it may be. So long as a man does not serve God with body, soul, and spirit, he is not really alive. So long as he puts the first things last and the last first, buries his talent like an unprofitable servant, and brings the Lord no revenue of honour, in God’s sight he is dead. He is not filling the place in creation for which he was intended; he is not using his powers and faculties as God meant them to be used. The poet’s words are strictly true—

“He only lives who lives to God, And all are dead beside.”

This is the true explanation of sin not felt, and sermons not believed, and good advice not followed, and the Gospel not embraced, and the world not forsaken, and the cross not taken up, and self-will not mortified, and evil habits not laid aside, and the Bible seldom read, and the knees never bent in prayer. Why is all this on every side? The answer is simple—Men are dead.

This is the true account of that host of excuses, which so many make with one consent. Some have no learning, and some have no time. Some are oppressed with business and the care of money, and some with poverty. Some have difficulties in their own families, and some in their own health. Some have peculiar obstacles in their calling, which others, we are told, cannot understand; and others have peculiar drawbacks at home, and they wait to have them removed. But God has a shorter word in the Bible, which describes all these people. He says, They are dead. If spiritual life began in these people’s hearts their excuses would soon vanish away.

This is the true explanation of many things which wring a faithful minister’s heart. Many around him never attend a place of worship at all. Many attend so irregularly that it is clear they think it of no importance. Many attend once a Sunday who might just as easily attend twice. Many never come to the Lord’s table, and never appear at a week-day means of grace of any kind. And why is all this? Often, far too often, there can be only one reply about these people—They are dead.

See now how all professing Christians should examine themselves and try their own state. It is not in churchyards alone that the dead are to be found; there are only too many inside our churches, and close to our pulpits, too many on the benches, and too many in the pews. The land is like the valley in Ezekiel’s vision, “full of bones, very many, and very dry” (Eze 37:2). There are dead souls in all our parishes, and dead souls in all our streets. There is hardly a family in which all live to God; there is hardly a house in which there is not someone dead. Let us all search and look at home! Let us prove our own selves. Are we alive or dead?

How sad is the condition of all who have gone through no spiritual change, whose hearts are still the same as in the day they were born. There is a mountain of division between them and heaven. They have yet to “pass from death to life” (1Jo 3:14). Oh, that they did but see and know their danger! It is one fearful mark of spiritual death that, like natural death, it is not felt! We lay our beloved ones tenderly and gently in their narrow beds, but they feel nothing of what we do. “The dead,” says the wise man, “know not anything” (Ecc 9:5). And this is just the case with dead souls.

See, too, what reason ministers have to be anxious about their congregations. We feel that time is short, and life uncertain. We know that death spiritual is the high road that leads to death eternal. We fear lest any of our hearers should die in their sins, unprepared, unrenewed, impenitent, unchanged. Marvel not if we often speak strongly and plead with you warmly! We dare not give you flattering titles, amuse you with trifles, say smooth things, and cry “Peace, peace,” when life and death are at stake, and nothing less. The plague is among you. We feel that we stand between the living and the dead. We must and will “use great plainness of speech.” “If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?” (2Co 3:12; 1Co 14:8).

2. All Need to Be Made Alive

Let me tell you, in the second place, that every man needs to be quickened and made spiritually alive.

Life is the mightiest of all possessions. From death to life is the mightiest of all changes. And no change short of this will ever avail to fit man’s soul for heaven.

It is not a little mending and alteration, a little cleansing and purifying, a little painting and patching, a little turning over a new leaf and putting on a new outside that is wanted. It is the bringing in of something altogether new, the planting within us of a new nature, a new being, a new principle, a new mind; this alone, and nothing less than this, will ever meet the necessities of man’s soul. We need not merely a new skin, but a new heart.

To hew a block of marble from the quarry and carve it into a noble statue, to break up a waste wilderness and turn it into a garden of flowers, to melt a lump of ironstone and forge it into watch-springs—all these are mighty changes. Yet they all come short of the change which every child of Adam requires, for they are merely the same thing in a new form, and the same substance in a new shape. But man requires the grafting in of that which he had not before. He needs a change as great as a resurrection from the dead; he must become a new creature. Old things must pass away, and all things must become new. He must be “born again”—born from above, born of God. The natural birth is no more necessary to the life of the body, than is the spiritual birth to the life of the soul (2Co 5:17; Joh 3:3).

I know well this is a hard saying. I know the children of this world dislike to hear that they must be born again. It pricks their consciences: it makes them feel they are further off from heaven than they are willing to admit. It seems like a narrow door which

they have not yet stooped to enter, and they would gladly make the door wider, or climb in some other way. But I dare not give way in this matter. I will not foster a delusion and tell people they only need repent a little, and stir up a gift they have within them, in order to become real Christians. I dare not use any other language than that of the Bible; and I say, in the words which are written for our learning, "We all need to be born again; we are all naturally dead, and must be made alive."

If we had seen Manasseh, King of Judah, at one time filling Jerusalem with idols and murdering his children in honour of false gods, at another purifying the temple, putting down idolatry, and living a godly life;

if we had seen Zaccheus, the publican of Jericho, at one time cheating, plundering, and covetous, at another following Christ, and giving half his goods to the poor;

if we had seen the servants of Nero's household, at one time conforming to their master's profligate ways, at another of one heart and mind with the apostle Paul;

if we had seen the ancient father Augustine, at one time living in fornication, at another walking closely with God;

if we had seen our own reformer Latimer, at one time preaching earnestly against the truth as it is in Jesus, at another spending and being spent even to death in Christ's cause

—if we had seen any of these wonderful changes, I ask any sensible Christian what we should have said. Should we have been content to call them nothing more than amendments and alterations? Should we have been satisfied with saying that Augustine had "reformed his ways," and that Latimer had "turned over a new leaf"? If we said no more than this, the very stones would cry out. I say in all these cases there was nothing less than a new birth, a resurrection of human nature, a quickening of the dead. These are the right words to use. All other language is weak, poor, beggarly, unscriptural, and short of the truth.

Now I will not shrink from saying plainly, we all need the same kind of change, if we are to be saved. The difference between us and any of those I have just named is far less than it appears. Take off the outward crust, and you will find the same nature beneath, in us and them an evil nature, requiring a complete change. The face of the earth is very different in different climates, but the heart of the earth, I believe, is everywhere the same. Go where you will, from one end to the other, you would always find the granite, or other primitive rocks, beneath your feet, if you only bored down deep enough. And it is just the same with men's hearts. Their customs and their colours, their ways and their laws, may all be utterly unlike; but the inner man is always the same. Their hearts are all alike at the bottom—all stony, all hard, all ungodly, all needing to be thoroughly renewed. The Englishman and the heathen stand on the same level in this matter. Both are naturally dead, and both need to be made alive. Both are children of the same father Adam who fell by sin, and both need to be "born again," and made children of God.

Whatever part of the globe we live in, our eyes need to be opened; naturally we never see our sinfulness, guilt, and danger. Whatever nation we belong to our understandings

need to be enlightened; naturally we know little or nothing of the plan of salvation; like the Babel-builders, we plan to get to heaven our own way. Whatever church we may belong to, our wills need to be bent in the right direction; naturally we should never choose the things that are for our peace, we should never come to Christ. Whatever be our rank in life, our affections need to be turned to things above; naturally we only set them on things below, earthly, sensual, short-lived, and vain. Pride must give place to humility, self-righteousness to self-abasement, carelessness to seriousness, worldliness to holiness, unbelief to faith. Satan's dominion must be put down within us, and the kingdom of God set up. Self must be crucified, and Christ must reign. Till these things come to pass, we are dead as stones. When these things begin to take place, and not till then, we are alive.

I dare say this sounds like foolishness to some. But many a living man could stand up this day and testify that it is true. Many a man could tell us that he knows it all by experience, and that he does indeed feel himself a new man. He loves the things that once he hated, and hates the things that once he loved. He has new habits, new companions, new ways, new tastes, new feelings, new opinions, new sorrows, new joys, new anxieties, new pleasures, new hopes, and new fears. In short, the whole bias and current of his being is changed. Ask his nearest relations and friends, and they would bear witness to it. Whether they liked it or not, they would be obliged to confess he was no longer the same.

Many a person could tell you that once he did not think himself such a very great transgressor. At any rate he fancied he was no worse than others. Now he would say with the apostle Paul that he feels himself the "chief of sinners" (1Ti 1:15).

Once he did not consider he had a bad heart. He might have his faults, and be led away by bad company and temptations, but he had a good heart at the bottom. Now he would tell you, he knows no heart so bad as his own. He finds it "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9).

Once he did not purpose it was a very hard matter to get to heaven. He thought he had only to repent, and say a few prayers, and do what he could, and Christ would make up what was wanting. Now he believes the way is narrow, and few find it. He is convinced he could never have made his own peace with God. He is persuaded that nothing but the blood of Christ could wash away his sins. His only hope is to be "justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:28).

Once he could see no beauty and excellence in the Lord Jesus Christ. He could not understand some ministers speaking so much about Him. Now he would tell you He is the pearl of great price, the chiefest among ten thousand, his Redeemer, his Advocate, his Priest, his King, his Physician, his Shepherd, his Friend, his All.

Once he thought lightly about sin. He could not see the necessity of being so particular about it. He could not think a man's words, and thoughts, and actions, were of such importance, and required such watchfulness. Now he would tell you that sin is the abominable thing which he hates, the sorrow and burden of his life. He longs to be more

holy. He can enter thoroughly into Whitefield's desire, "I want to go where I shall neither sin myself, nor see others sin any more."

Once he found no pleasure in the means of grace. The Bible was neglected. His prayers, if he had any, were a mere form. Sunday was a tiresome day. Sermons were a weariness, and often sent him to sleep. Now all is altered. These things are the food, the comfort, the delight of his soul.

Once he disliked earnest-minded Christians. He shunned them as melancholy, low-spirited, weak people. Now they are the excellent of the earth, of whom he cannot see too much. He is never so happy as he is in their company. He feels that if all men and women were saints, it would be heaven upon earth.

Once he cared only for this world, its pleasures, its business, its occupations, its rewards. Now he looks upon it as an empty, unsatisfying place, an inn, a lodging, a training-school for the life to come. His treasure is in heaven. His home is beyond the grave.

I ask once more, What is all this but new life? Such a change as I have described is no vision and fancy. It is a real, actual thing, which not a few in this world have known or felt. It is not a picture of my own imagining. It is a true thing which some of us could find at this moment near at hand. But wherever such a change does take place, there you see the thing of which I am now speaking—you see the dead made alive, a new creature, a soul born again.

I would to God that changes such as this were more common! I would to God there were not such multitudes, of whom we must say even weeping, that they know nothing about the matter at all. But, common or not, one thing I say plainly, this is the kind of change we all need. I do not hold that all must have exactly the same experience. I allow most fully that the change is different, in degree, extent, and intensity, in different persons. Grace may be weak, and yet true; life may be feeble, and yet real. But I do confidently affirm we must all go through something of this kind, if ever we are to be saved. Till this sort of change has taken place, there is no life in us at all. We may be living churchmen, but we are not Christians.

Some time or other, between the cradle and the grave, all who would be saved must be made alive. The words which good old Berridge had engraven on his tombstone are faithful and true "Reader! art thou born again? Remember! no salvation without a new birth."

See what an amazing gulf there is between the man who is a Christian in name and form, and the one who is a Christian in deed and truth. It is not the difference of one being a little better, and the other a little worse than his neighbour; it is the difference between a state of life and a state of death. The meanest blade of grass that grows upon a highland mountain is a more noble object than the fairest wax flower that was ever formed, for it has that which no science of man can impart—it has life. The most splendid marble statue in Greece or Italy is nothing by the side of the poor sickly child that crawls over the cottage floor, for with all its beauty it is dead. And the weakest member of the family of Christ is far higher and more precious in God's eyes than the most gifted

man of the world. The one lives unto God, and shall live for ever; the other, with all his intellect, is still dead in sins.

You that have passed from death to life, you have reason indeed to be thankful! Remember what you once were by nature. Think what you are now by grace. Look at the dry bones thrown up from the graves. Such were you; and who has made you differ? Go and fall low before the footstool of your God. Bless Him for His grace, His free distinguishing grace. Say to Him often, "Who am I, Lord, that thou hast brought me hitherto? Why me? Why hast thou been merciful unto me?"

3. How a Dead Soul Is Made Alive

Let me tell you, in the third place, by what means a dead soul can be made spiritually alive.

Surely, if I did not tell you this, it would be cruelty to write what I have written. Surely, it would be leading you into a dreary wilderness, and then leaving you without bread and water. It would be commanding you to make bricks and yet refusing to provide you with straw. I will not do so. I will not leave you, till I have pointed out the wicket-gate towards which you must run. By God's help, I will set before you the full provision there is made for dead souls.

One thing is very clear; we cannot work this mighty change ourselves. It is not in us. We have no strength or power to do it. We may change our sins, but we cannot change our hearts. We may take up a new way, but not a new nature. We may make considerable reforms and alterations. We may lay aside many outward bad habits, and begin to do many outward duties. But we cannot create a new principle within us. We cannot bring something out of nothing. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots. No more can we put life into our own souls (Jer 13:23).

Another thing is equally clear; no man can do it for us. Ministers may preach to us, and pray with us, receive us at the front in baptism, admit us to the Lord's table, and give us the bread and wine, but they cannot bestow spiritual life. They may bring in regularity in the place of disorder, and outward decency in the place of open sin, but they cannot go below the surface. They cannot reach our hearts. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase (1Co 3:6).

Who then can make a dead soul alive? No one can do it but God. He only who formed the world out of nothing in the day of creation, can make a new creature. He only who formed man out of the dust and gave life to his body can ever give life to his soul. His is the special office to do it by His Holy Spirit, and His also is the power.

The glorious Gospel makes provision for this. The Lord Jesus is a complete Saviour. That mighty living Head has no dead members. His people are not only justified and pardoned, but quickened together with Him, and made partakers of His resurrection. To Him the Spirit joins the sinner, and raises him by that union from death, to life. In Him the sinner lives after he has believed. The spring of all his vitality is the union between Christ and his soul, which the Spirit begins and keeps up. Christ is the appointed foun-

tain of all spiritual life, and the Holy Ghost the appointed agent who conveys that life to our souls.

Come to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you would have life. He will not cast you out. The moment the dead man touched the body of Elisha, he revived and stood upon his feet (2Ki 13:21). The moment you touch the Lord Jesus with the hand of faith, you are alive unto God, as well as forgiven all your trespasses. Come, and your soul shall live.

I never despair of any one becoming a Christian, whatever he may have been in days gone by. I know how great the change is from death to life. I know the mountains of division that seem to stand between some of us and heaven. I know the hardness, the prejudices, the desperate sinfulness of the natural heart. But I remember that God the Father made this beautiful and well ordered world out of nothing. I remember the voice of the Lord Jesus could reach Lazarus when four days dead, and recall him even from the grave. I remember the amazing victories the Spirit of God has won in every nation under heaven. I remember all this, and feel that I never need despair. Those among us who now seem most utterly dead in sins, may yet be raised, and walk before God in newness of life.

The Holy Spirit is a merciful and loving Spirit. He turns away from no man because of his vileness. He passes by no one because her sins are black and scarlet.

There was nothing in the Corinthians that He should come down and quicken them. Paul says of them that they were “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners.” “Such,” he says, “were some of you.” Yet even them the Spirit made alive. “Ye are washed,” he writes, “ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God” (1Co 6:9-11).

There was nothing in the Colossians that He should visit their hearts. Paul tells us that “they walked in fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Yet them also the Spirit quickened. He made them “put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:5-10).

There was nothing in Mary Magdalene that the Spirit should make her soul alive. Once she had been “possessed with seven devils.” Yet even her the Spirit made a new creature, separated her from her sins, brought her to Christ, made her “last at the cross, and first at the tomb.”

Never, never will the Spirit turn away from a soul because of its corruption. He never has done so and He never will. It is His glory that He has purified the minds of the most impure, and made them temples for His own abode. He may yet take the worst of men, and make him a vessel of grace.

The Spirit is an almighty Spirit. He can change the stony heart into a heart of flesh. He can break up and destroy the strongest bad habits, like tow in the fire. He can make the most difficult things seem easy, and the mightiest objections melt away like snow in spring. He can cut the bars of brass, and throw the gates of prejudice wide open. He can fill up every valley, and make every rough place smooth. He has done it often, and He can do it again.

The Spirit can take a Jew, the bitterest enemy of Christianity, the fiercest persecutor of true believers, the strongest stickler for Pharisaical notions, the most prejudiced opposer of gospel doctrine, and turn that man into an earnest preacher of the very faith he once destroyed. He has done so already. He did it with the apostle Paul.

The Spirit can take a Roman Catholic monk, brought up in the midst of Romish superstition, trained from his infancy to believe false doctrine and obey the Pope, steeped to the eyes in error, and make that man the clearest upholder of justification by faith the world ever saw. He has done so already. He did it with Martin Luther.

The Spirit can take an English tinker, without learning, patronage, or money, a man at one time notorious for nothing so much as blasphemy and swearing, and make that man write a religious book, which shall stand unrivalled and unequalled by any book since the time of the apostles. He has done so already. He did it with John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*.¹

The Spirit can take a sailor drenched in worldliness and sin, a profligate captain of a slave ship, and make that man a most successful minister of the gospel, a writer of letters, which are a storehouse of experimental religion, and of hymns which are known and sung wherever English is spoken. He has done it already. He did it with John Newton.

All this the Spirit has done, and much more, of which I cannot speak particularly. And the arm of the Spirit is not shortened. His power is not decayed. He is like the Lord Jesus, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever" (Heb 13:8). He is still doing wonders, and will do to the very end.

Once more, I say, I never despair of any man's soul being made alive. I should if it depended on man himself. Some seem so hardened, I should have no hope. I should despair if it depended on the work of ministers. The very best of us are poor, weak creatures! But I cannot despair when I remember that God the Spirit is the agent who conveys life to the soul, for I know and am persuaded that with Him nothing is impossible..

I should not be surprised to hear, even in this life, that the hardest man in the list of my acquaintances has become softened, and the proudest has taken his place at the feet of Jesus as a weaned child.

I shall not be surprised to meet many on the right hand, in the day of judgment, whom I shall leave, when I die, travelling in the broad way. I shall not start, and say, "What! you here!" I shall only remind them, "Was not this my word, when I was yet among you? Nothing is impossible with Him that quickens the dead."

Does any of us desire to help the Church of Christ? Then let him pray for a great outpouring of the Spirit. He alone can give edge to sermons, and point to advice, and power to rebukes, and can cast down the high walls of sinful hearts. It is not better

¹ **Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*** – the Christian allegory has been in print continuously since its first printing in 1678, and is the bestselling book of all time after the Bible. Available from Chapel Library.

preaching and finer writing that is wanted in this day, but more of the presence of the Holy Ghost.

Does any one feel the slightest drawing towards God, the smallest concern about his immortal soul? Then flee to that open fountain of living waters, the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall receive the Holy Ghost (Joh 7:39). Begin at once to pray for the Holy Spirit. Do not think that you are shut up and cut off from hope. The Holy Ghost is promised to “them that ask Him” (Luk 11:13). His very name is the Spirit of promise and the Spirit of life. Give Him no rest till He comes down and makes you a new heart. Cry mightily unto the Lord, say unto Him, “Bless me, even me also, quicken me, and make me alive.”

4. Are You Alive?

And now let me wind up all I have said with a few words of application.

A. First let me put this question to every reader: “Are you dead, or are you alive?”

Permit me, as an ambassador for Christ, to press the inquiry on every conscience. There are only two ways to walk in—the narrow and the broad; two companions in the day of judgment—those on the right hand, and those on the left; two classes of people in the professing church of Christ, and to one of them you must belong. Where are you? Are you among the living, or among the dead?

I speak to you yourself, and to none else, not to your neighbour, but to you, not to Africans or New Zealanders, but to you. I do not ask whether you are an angel, or whether you have the mind of David or Paul, but I do ask whether you have a well-founded hope that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus. I do ask whether you have reason to believe you have put off the old man and put on the new, whether you are conscious of ever having gone through a real spiritual change of heart, whether, in one word, you are dead or alive.

1). Do not put me off by saying that you were admitted into the Church by baptism, you received grace and the spirit in that sacrament—you must be alive. It shall not avail you. Paul himself says of the baptised widow who lives in pleasure, “She is dead while she liveth” (1 Tim. 5:6). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself tells the chief officer of the church in Sardis, “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev. 3:1). The life you talk of is nothing if it cannot be seen. Show it to me, if I am to believe its existence. Grace is light, and light will always be discerned. Grace is salt, and salt will always be tasted. An indwelling of the Spirit which does not show itself by outward fruits, and a grace which men’s eyes cannot discover, are both to be viewed with the utmost suspicion. Believe me, if you have no other proof of spiritual life but your baptism, you are yet a dead soul.

2). Do not tell me that it is a question that cannot be decided, and that you call it presumptuous to give an opinion in such a matter. This is vain refuge, and a false humility. Spiritual life is no such dim and doubtful thing as you seem to fancy. There are marks and evidences by which its presence may be discerned by those who know the Bi-

ble. "We know," says John, "that we have passed from death unto life" (1 John 3:14). The exact time and season of that passage may often be hidden from a man. The fact and reality of it will seldom be entirely an uncertain thing. It was a true and beautiful saying of a Scottish girl to Whitefield, when asked if her heart was changed: she knew something was changed, it might be the world, it might be her own heart, but there was a great change somewhere, she was quite sure, for every thing seemed different from what it once did. Oh, cease to evade the inquiry! Are you dead or alive?

3). Do not reply that you do not know. You agree it is a matter of importance; you hope to know some time before you die; you mean to give your mind to it when you have a convenient season; but at present you do not know.

You do not know! Yet heaven or hell is wrapped up in this question. An eternity of happiness or misery hinges upon your answer. You do not leave your worldly affairs so unsettled. You do not manage your earthly business so loosely. You look far forward. You provide against every possible contingency. You insure life and property. Why not deal in the same way with your immortal soul?

You do not know! Yet all around you is uncertainty. You are a poor frail worm, your body fearfully and wonderfully made, your health liable to be put out of order in a thousand ways. The next time the daisies bloom, it may be over your grave. All before you is dark. You know not what a day may bring forth, much less a year. Why not bring your soul's business to a point without delay?

Let every reader begin the great business of self-examination. Rest not till you know the length and breadth of your own state in God's sight. Backwardness in this matter is an evil sign. It springs from an uneasy conscience. It shows that a man thinks ill of his own cause. He feels, like a dishonest tradesman, that his accounts will not bear inquiry. He dreads the light.

In spiritual things, as in everything else, it is the highest wisdom to make sure. Take nothing for granted. Do not measure your condition by that of others. Bring everything to the measure of God's Word. A mistake about your soul is a mistake for eternity. "Surely," says Leighton, "they that are not born again, shall one day wish they had never been born."

Sit down this day and think. Commune with your own heart and be still. Go to your own room and consider. Contrive to be alone with God. Look the question fairly, fully, honestly in the face. How does it touch you? Are you among the living or among the dead?

B. In the second place, let me speak in all affection to those who are dead.

What shall I say to you? What can I say? What words of mine are likely to have any effect on your hearts?

This I will say, I mourn over your souls. I do most unfeignedly mourn. You may be thoughtless and unconcerned. You may care little for what I am saying. You most scarcely run your eye over my words, and after reading them you may despise them and

return to the world; but you cannot prevent my feeling for you, however little you may feel for yourselves.

Do I mourn when I see a young man sapping the foundations of his bodily health by indulging his lusts and passions, sowing bitterness for himself in his old age? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

Do I mourn when I see men squandering away their inheritance, and wasting their property on trifles and follies? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

Do I mourn when I hear of one drinking slow poisons, because they are pleasant, as the Chinese take opium, putting the clock of his life on, as if it did not go fast enough, and inch by inch digging his own grave? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

I mourn to think of golden opportunities thrown away, of Christ rejected, of the blood of atonement trampled under foot, of the Spirit resisted, the Bible neglected, heaven despised, and the world put in the place of God. I mourn to think of the present happiness you are missing, the peace and consolation you are thrusting from you, the misery you are laying up in store for yourselves, and the bitter waking up which is yet to come.

I must mourn. I cannot help it. Others may think it enough to mourn over dead bodies. For my part, I think there is far more cause to mourn over dead souls. The children of this world find fault with us sometimes for being so serious and grave. Truly, when I look at the world, I marvel we can ever smile at all.

To every one who is dead in sins I say this day, Why will you die? Are the wages of sin so sweet and good that you cannot give them up? Is the world so satisfying that you cannot forsake it? Is the service of Satan so pleasant that you and he are never to be parted? Is heaven so poor a thing that it is not worth seeking? Is your soul of so little consequence that it is not worth a struggle to have it saved? Oh, turn! turn before it is too late! God is not willing that you should perish. "As I live," He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." Jesus loves you, and grieves to see your folly. He wept over wicked Jerusalem, saying, "I would have gathered thee, but thou wouldst not be gathered." Surely, if lost, your blood will be upon your own head. "Awake and arise from the dead, arid Christ shall give you light" (Eze 18:32; Mat 23:37; Eph 5:14).

Believe me, true repentance is that one step that no man ever regretted. Thousands have said at their latter end, they had "served God too little". No child of Adam ever said, as he left this world, that he had cared for his soul too much. The way of life is a narrow path, but the footsteps in it are all in one direction: not one child of Adam has ever come back and said it was a delusion. The way of the world is a broad way, but millions have forsaken it, and borne their testimony that it was a way of sorrow and disappointment.

C. Let me, in the third place, speak to those who are living.

Are you indeed alive unto God? Can you say with truth, "I was dead, and am alive again; I was blind, but now I see"? Then see that you prove it by your actions. Be a consistent witness. Let your words, and works, and ways, and tempers all tell the same story.

Let not your life be a poor torpid² life, like that of a tortoise or a sloth; let it rather be an energetic stirring life, like that of a deer or bird. Let your graces shine forth that those who live near you may see that the Spirit is abiding in your hearts. Let your light not be a dim, flickering, uncertain flame; let it burn steadily, like the eternal fire on the altar, and never become low. Let your Christianity be so unmistakable, your eye so single, your heart so whole, your walk so straightforward that all who see you may have no doubt whose you are, and whom you serve. If we are quickened by the Spirit, no one ought to be able to doubt it. It ought not to be necessary to tell people, as in the case of a badly painted picture, "This is a Christian." We ought not to be so sluggish and still that men shall be obliged to come close and look hard and say, "Is he dead or alive?"

Are you alive? Then see that you prove it by your growth. Let the great change within become more evident. Let your light be an increasing light, not like Joshua's sun in the valley of Aijalon, standing still (Jos 10:12), nor like Hezekiah's sun, going back (2Ki 20:9-11), but ever shining more and more to the very end of your days. Let the image of your Lord, wherein you are renewed, grow clearer and sharper every month. Let it not be like the image and superscription on a coin, more indistinct and defaced the longer it is used. Let it rather become more plain the older it is, and let the likeness of your King stand out more fully and sharply.

I have no confidence in a standing-still religion. I do not think a Christian was meant to be like an animal, to grow to a certain age, and then stop growing. I believe rather he was meant to be like a tree, and to increase more and more in strength and vigour all his days. Remember the words of the apostle Peter: "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity" (2Pe 1:5-7). This is the way to be a useful Christian. Men will believe you are in earnest when they see constant improvement, and perhaps be drawn to go with you. This is one way to obtain comfortable assurance. "So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly" (2Pe 1:11). If ever you would be useful and happy in your religion, let your motto be, "Forward, forward!" to your very last day. ✎

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

² **torpid** – deprived of the power of motion or feeling; benumbed.

Do You Think You Are Converted?

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted.”—Acts 3:19

The subject which forms the title of this paper is one which touches all mankind. It ought to come home to all ranks and classes, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, gentle or simple. Any one may get to heaven without money, rank, or learning. No one, however wise, wealthy, noble, or beautiful, will ever get to heaven without CONVERSION.

There are six points of view in which I wish to consider the subject of this paper. I will try to show that conversion is

- I. A Scriptural thing;
- II. A real thing;
- III. A necessary thing;
- IV. A possible thing;
- V. A happy thing;
- VI. A thing that may be seen.

Let me show, in the first place, that

I. Conversion Is a Scriptural Thing

I mean by this, that conversion is a thing plainly mentioned in the Bible. This is the first point we have to ascertain about anything in religion. It matters nothing who says a thing, and declares it to be religious truth; it matters nothing whether we like or dislike a doctrine. Is it in the Bible? That is the only question. If it is, we have no right to refuse it. If we reject a Bible truth because we do not like it, we do so at the peril of our souls, and might as well become infidels at once. This is a principle which ought never to be forgotten.

Let us turn to the Bible. Hear what David says: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul”—“Sinners shall be converted unto Thee” (Psa 19:7, 51:13). Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ says: “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 18:3). Hear what St. Peter says: “Repent ye, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Act 3:19). Hear what St. James says: “He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jam 5:20).

I could easily add to this Scriptural evidence. I could quote many passages in which the idea of conversion is contained, though the word itself is not used. To be renewed, to be transformed, to be created anew, to be raised from the dead, to be illuminated, to pass from death to life, to be born again, to put off the old man and put on the new man—all these are Scriptural expressions, which mean the same thing as conversion. They are all the same thing, seen from a different point of view. But enough is as good as a feast, in these matters. There can be no doubt of the truth of my first position: that conversion is a Scriptural thing. It is not a mere device of man's invention: it is in the Bible.

You may tell me, perhaps, that you do not care for "texts." You may say that you are not accustomed to make single texts decide questions in your religion. If this is your case, I am sorry for you. Our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles used to quote single texts frequently, and to make everything in their arguments hinge upon them. One plain text with them was sufficient to settle a point. Is it not a serious matter, that while the Lord Jesus and His apostles made such use of single texts, you do not care for them?

I entreat every reader of these pages to beware of ignorant prejudices on religious subjects. I have known people to find fault with doctrines and opinions as enthusiastic, fanatical, and absurd, in perfect ignorance that they were finding fault with Scripture itself. They have given sad proof that they spoke of things which they did not understand, and that they knew nothing, comparatively, of the contents of the Bible. It is recorded that, in Somersetshire, one hundred years ago, a great preacher was summoned before the magistrates for swearing in the pulpit. He had used in his sermon the well-known text, "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mar 16:16); and the constable who laid the information was so ignorant that he did not know the preacher was quoting God's Word. I myself remember a lady of rank being very indignant, because a speaker at a Missionary meeting described the heathen as "having no hope." And yet the speaker had only used the very expression used by St. Paul, in describing the state of the Ephesians before the Gospel came to them (Eph 2:12)! Beware of making a like mistake. Take care that you do not expose your own ignorance by talking against conversion. Search the Scriptures. **CONVERSION IS A SCRIPTURAL THING.**

Let me show, in the second place,

II. Conversion Is a Real Thing

I feel it very needful to say something about this point. We live in an age of shams, cheats, deceptions, and impositions. It is an age of white-wash, varnish, lacquer, and veneer. It is an age of plaster, compo, plating, gilding, and electrotyping. It is an age of adulterated food, paste diamonds, false weights and measures, unsound timber, and shoddy clothing. It is an age of wind-bags, and whitened sepulchers, and cymbals in religion. I can hardly wonder that many regard all Christian professors as suspicious characters, if not hypocrites, and deny the reality of any such thing as conversion.

Still, notwithstanding all that such people may say, I assert confidently, that there is such a thing as conversion. There are to be seen among men, every here and there, un-

mistakable cases of a complete turning round of heart, character, tastes, and life,—cases which deserve no other name than that of conversion. I say that when a man turns right round from sin to God,—from worldliness to holiness,—from self-righteousness to self-distrust,—from carelessness about religion to deep repentance,—from unbelief to faith,—from indifference to Christ to strong love to Christ,—from neglect of prayer, the Bible, and the Sabbath, to a diligent use of all means of grace,—I say boldly, that such a man is a converted man. When a man's heart is turned upside down in the way I have described, so that he loves what he once hated, and hates what he once loved, I say boldly, that it is a case of conversion. To deny it, is mere obstinacy and affectation. Such a change can be described in no other way. By far the most suitable name that can be given to it is the Scriptural name, "conversion."

Of such changes the Bible gives many unmistakable patterns. Let any one read attentively the histories of Manasseh king of Judah, of Matthew the apostle, of the woman of Samaria, of Zacchaeus the publican, of Mary Magdalene, of Saul of Tarsus, of the Philipian jailer, of Lydia the purple seller, of the Jews to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, of the Corinthians to whom St. Paul preached. (2Ch 33:1-19; Mat 9:9; Joh 4:1-29; Luk 19:1-10, 8:2; Act 9:1-22, 16:14-34, 2:37-41; 1Co 6:9-11). In every one of these cases there was a mighty change. What can that change be called but conversion?

Of such changes the history of the Church in every age can supply many well-known examples. Let any one study the life of Augustine, of Martin Luther, of Hugh Latimer, of John Bunyan, of Colonel Gardiner, of John Newton, of Thomas Scott. In every one of these lives he will find a description of a mighty turning of heart, opinion, and conduct, towards God. What can that turning be called better than conversion?

Of such changes every man's own neighborhood and circle of acquaintances will furnish many specimens. Let any honest-minded person of observation look around him, and consider what I assert. Let him deny, if he can, that he can put his finger on men and women of his own age and standing, who are now utterly unlike what they once were in the matter of religion. About their own souls and the importance of being saved—about sin, and God, and Christ, and repentance, and faith, and holiness—about Bible-reading, and praying, and Sabbath-keeping—about all these things they are completely changed. I challenge any sensible man to deny that he knows such persons. They are to be met with here and there in every part of the kingdom. Once more I ask, what can such changes be called but conversions?

I feel almost ashamed to dwell so long on this point. It seems like spending time in proving that two and two make four, or that the sun rises in the east. But, alas, there are too many people who will allow nothing, and will dispute everything, in religion! They know that they are not yet converted themselves, and they therefore try hard to make out that nobody was ever converted at all! I trust I have given a sufficient answer to all such persons. I have shown you that CONVERSION IS A REAL TRUE THING.

Let me show, in the third place, that

III. Conversion Is a Necessary Thing

This is a point of great importance. Some worthy people are ready enough to admit that conversion is a Scriptural truth and a reality, but not a thing which needs to be pressed on most English people. The heathen, they grant, need conversion. Even the thieves, and fallen characters, and inmates of jails, they allow, may require conversion. But to talk of conversion being necessary for Church-going people, is to talk of things which they cannot see at all. “Such people may, in some cases, need a little stirring up and amendment.³ They may not be quite as good as they ought to be: it would be better if they attended more to religion; but you have no right to say they need conversion! It is uncharitable, harsh, narrow-minded, bitter, wrong, to tell them they require conversion!”

This sadly common notion is a complete delusion. It is a pure invention of man’s, without a scrap of foundation in God’s Word. The Bible teaches expressly that the change of heart, called conversion, is a thing absolutely needed by every one. It is needed because of the total corruption of human nature. It is needed because of the condition of every man’s natural heart. All people born into the world, of every rank and nation, must have their hearts changed between the cradle and the grave, before they can go to heaven. All, all men, without exception, must be converted.

Without conversion of heart we cannot serve God on, earth. We have naturally neither faith, nor fear, nor love, toward God and His Son Jesus Christ. We have no delight in His Word. We take no pleasure in prayer or communion with Him. We have no enjoyment in His ordinances, His house, His people, or His day. We may have a form of Christianity, and keep up a round of ceremonies and religious performances. But without conversion we have no more heart in our religion than a brick or a stone. Can a dead corpse serve God? We know it cannot. Well, without conversion we are dead toward God.

Look round the congregation with which you worship every Sunday. Mark how little interest the great majority of them take in what is going on. Observe how listless,⁴ and apathetic,⁵ and indifferent, they evidently are about the whole affair. It is clear their hearts are not there! They are thinking of something else, and not of religion. They are thinking of business, or money, or pleasure, or worldly plans, or bonnets, or gowns, or new dresses, or amusements. Their bodies are there, but not their hearts. And what is the reason? What is it they all need? They need *conversion*. Without it they only come to church for fashion and form’s sake, and go away from church to serve the world or their sins.

But this is not all. Without conversion of heart we could not enjoy heaven, if we got there. Heaven is a place where holiness reigns supreme, and sin and the world have no

³ **amendment** – reformation; correction; removal of faults.

⁴ **listless** – not inclined to exert effort.

⁵ **apathetic** – showing a lack of interest or concern.

place at all. The company will all be holy; the employments will all be holy; it will be an eternal Sabbath-day. Surely if we go to heaven, we must have a heart in tune and able to enjoy it, or else we shall not be happy. We must have a nature in harmony with the element we live in, and the place where we dwell. Can a fish be happy out of water? We know it cannot. Well, without conversion of heart we could not be happy in heaven.

Look round the neighborhood in which you live, and the persons with whom you are acquainted. Think what many of them would do if they were cut off for ever from money, and business, and newspapers, and cards, and balls, and races, and hunting, and shooting, and worldly amusements! Would they like it? Think what they would feel if they were shut up for ever with Jesus Christ, and saints, and angels! Would they be happy? Would the eternal company of Moses, and David, and St. Paul, be pleasant to those who never take the trouble to read what those holy men wrote? Would heaven's everlasting praise suit the taste of those who can hardly spare a few minutes in a week for private religion, even for prayer? There is but one answer to be given to all these questions. We *must be converted* before we can enjoy heaven. Heaven would be no heaven to any child of Adam without conversion.

Let no man deceive us. There are two things which are of absolute necessity to the salvation of every man and woman on earth. One of them is the mediatorial work of Christ for us: His atonement, satisfaction, and intercession. The other is the converting work of the Spirit in us: His guiding, renewing, and sanctifying grace. We must have both a title and a heart for heaven. Sacraments are only generally necessary to salvation: a man may be saved without them, like the penitent thief. An interest in Christ and conversion are absolutely necessary: without them no one can possibly be saved. All, all alike, high or low, rich or poor, old or young, gentle or simple, churchmen or dissenters, baptized or unbaptized, all must be converted or perish. There is no salvation without conversion. IT IS A NECESSARY THING.

Let me now show, in the fourth place, that

IV. Conversion Is a Possible Thing

I think I know the feelings which come across many people's minds, when they read the things which I am writing in this paper. They take refuge in the idea that such a change as conversion is quite impossible, except for a favored few. "It is all very well," they argue, "for parsons to talk of conversion; but the thing cannot be done; we have work to mind, families to provide for, business to attend to. It is no use expecting miracles now. We cannot be converted." Such thoughts are very common. The devil loves to put them before us, and our own lazy hearts are only too ready to receive them: but they will not stand examination. I am not afraid to lay it down that conversion is a possible thing. If it were not so I would not say another word.

In saying this, however, I should be sorry to be mistaken. I do not for a moment mean that any one can convert himself, change his own heart, take away his own corrupt nature, put in himself a new spirit. I mean nothing of the kind. I should as soon expect

the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision to give themselves life (Eze 37:3). I only mean that there is nothing in Scripture, nothing in God, nothing in man's condition, which warrants any one in saying, "I can never be converted." There lives not the man or woman on earth of whom it could be said, "their conversion is an impossibility." Any one, however sinful and hardened, any one may be converted.

Why do I speak so confidently? How is it that I can look round the world, and see the desperate wickedness that is in it, and yet despair of no living man's soul? How is it that I can say to any one, however hard, fallen, and bad, "Your case is not hopeless: you, even you, may be converted?" I can do it because of the things contained in Christ's Gospel. It is the glory of that Gospel that under it nothing is impossible.

Conversion is a possible thing, because of the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him is life. In His hand are the keys of death and hell. He has all power in heaven and earth. He quickeneth whom He will (Joh 1:4; Rev. 1:18; Mat 28:18; Joh 5:21). It is as easy to Him to create new hearts out of nothing, as it was to create the world out of nothing. It is as easy to Him to breathe spiritual life into a stony, dead heart, as it was to breathe natural life into the clay of which Adam was formed, and make him a living man. There was nothing He could not do on earth. Wind, sea, disease, death, the devil, all were obedient to His word. There is nothing that He cannot do in heaven at God's right hand. His hand is as strong as ever: His love is as great as ever. The Lord Jesus Christ lives, and therefore conversion is not impossible.

But beside this, conversion is a possible thing, because of the almighty power of the Holy Ghost, whom Christ sends into the hearts of all whom He undertakes to save. The same divine Spirit who co-operated with the Father and Son in the work of creation, co-operates specially in the work of conversion. It is He who conveys life from Christ, the great Fountain of Life, into the hearts of sinners. He who moved on the face of the waters before those wonderful words were spoken, "Let there be light," is He who moves over sinners' souls, and takes their natural darkness away. Great indeed is the invisible power of the Holy Ghost! He can soften that which is hard. He can bend that which is stiff and stubborn. He can give eyes to the spiritually blind, ears to the spiritually deaf, tongues to the spiritually dumb, feet to the spiritually lame, warmth to the spiritually cold, knowledge to the spiritually ignorant, and life to the spiritually dead. "Who teacheth like Him?" (Job 36:22). He has taught thousands of ignorant sinners, and never failed to make them "wise unto salvation." The Holy Ghost lives, and therefore conversion is never impossible.

What can you say to these things? Away with the idea for ever that conversion is not possible. Cast it behind you: it is a temptation of the devil. Look not at yourself, and your own weak heart;—for then you may well despair. Look upward at Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and learn that with them nothing is impossible. Yes! the age of spiritual miracles is not yet past! Dead souls in our congregations can yet be raised; blind eyes can yet be made to see; dumb prayerless tongues can yet be taught to pray. No one ought ever to despair. When Christ has left heaven, and laid down His office as the Savior of sinners,

when the Holy Ghost has ceased to dwell in hearts and is no longer God, then and not till then, men and women may say, “We cannot be converted.” Till then, I say boldly: conversion is a possible thing. If men are not converted, it is because they will not come to Christ for life (Joh 5:40). CONVERSION IS POSSIBLE.

Let me show, in the fifth place, that

V. Conversion Is a Happy Thing

I shall have written in vain if I leave this point untouched. There are thousands, I firmly believe, who are ready to admit the truth of all I have said hitherto. Scriptural, real, necessary, possible,—all this they willingly allow conversion to be. “Of course,” they say, “we know it is all true. People ought to be converted.” But will it increase a man’s happiness to be converted? Will it add to a man’s joys, and lessen his sorrows, to be converted? Here alas, is a point at which many stick fast. They have a secret, lurking fear that if they are converted, they must become melancholy, miserable, and low-spirited. Conversion and a sour face, conversion and a gloomy brow, conversion and an ill-natured readiness to snub young people and put down all mirth, conversion and a sorrowful countenance, conversion and sighing and groaning—all these are things which they seem to think must go together! No wonder that such people shrink from the idea of conversion!

The notion I have just described is very common and very mischievous. I desire to protest against it with all my heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. I assert without hesitation, that the conversion described in Scripture is a happy thing and not a miserable one, and that if converted persons are not happy, the fault must be in themselves. The happiness of a true Christian, no doubt, is not quite of the same sort as that of a worldly man. It is a calm, solid, deep flowing, substantial joy. It is not made up of excitement, levity, and boisterous spasmodic mirth.⁶ It is the sober, quiet joy of one who does not forget death, judgment, eternity, and a world to come, even in his chief mirth. But in the main I am confident the converted man is the happiest man.

What says the Scripture? How does it describe the feelings and experience of persons who have been converted? Does it give any countenance to the idea that conversion is a sorrowful and melancholy thing? Let us hear what Levi felt, when he had left the receipt of custom to follow Christ. We read that he made “a great feast in his own house,” as if it was an occasion of gladness (Luk 5:29). Let us hear what Zacchaeus the publican felt, when Jesus offered to come to his house. We read that he “received Him joyfully” (Luk 19:6). Let us hear what the Samaritans felt, when they were converted through Philip’s preaching. We read that “there was great joy in that city” (Act 8:8). Let us hear what the Ethiopian eunuch felt in the day of his conversion. We read that “he went on his way rejoicing” (Act 8:39). Let us hear what the Philippian jailer felt in the hour of his conversion. We read that he “rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Act 16:34). In fact,

⁶ **boisterous, spasmodic mirth** – loud, noisy, outbursts of laughter and merriment.

the testimony of Scripture on this subject is always one and the same. Conversion is always described as the cause of joy and not of sorrow, of happiness and not of misery.

The plain truth, is that people speak ill of conversion because they know nothing really about it. They run down converted men and women as unhappy, because they judge them by their outward appearance of calmness, gravity, and quietness, and know nothing of their inward peace. They forget that it is not those who boast most of their own performances who do most, and it is not those who talk most of their happiness who are in reality the happiest people.

A converted man is happy, because he has peace with God. His sins are forgiven; his conscience is free from the sense of guilt: he can look forward to death, judgment, and eternity, and not feel afraid. What an immense blessing to feel forgiven and free!—He is happy because he finds order in his heart. His passions are controlled, his affections are rightly directed. Everything in his inner man, however weak and feeble, is in its right place, and not in confusion. What an immense blessing order is! He is happy, because he feels independent of circumstances. Come what will, he is provided for: sickness and losses and death can never touch his treasure in heaven, or rob him of Christ. What a blessing to feel independent! He is happy because he feels ready. Whatever happens he is somewhat prepared: the great business is settled; the great concern of life is arranged. What a blessing to feel ready. These are indeed true springs of happiness. They are springs which are utterly shut up and sealed to an unconverted man. Without forgiveness of sins, without hope for the world to come, dependent on this world for comfort, unprepared to meet God, he cannot be really happy. Conversion is an essential part of true happiness.

Settle it in your mind today that the friend who labors for your conversion to God is the best friend that you have. He is a friend not merely for the life to come, but for the life that now is. He is a friend to your present comfort as well as to your future deliverance from hell. He is a friend for time as well as for eternity. **CONVERSION IS A HAPPY THING.**

Let me now show you, in the last place, that

VI. Conversion May Be Seen

This is a part of my subject which ought never to be overlooked. Well would it be for the Church and the world, if in every age it had received more attention. Thousands have turned away in disgust from religion, because of the wickedness of many who profess it. Hundreds have caused the very name of conversion to stink; by the lives they have lived after declaring themselves converted. They have fancied that a few spasmodic sensations, and convictions were the true grace of God. They have imagined themselves converted, because their animal⁷ feelings were excited. They have called themselves “converts” without the slightest right or title to that honored name. All this has done immense

⁷ **animal** – carnal; fleshly; relating to the physical nature as opposed to the spiritual.

harm, and it is doing peculiar harm in the present day. The times demand a very clear assertion of the great principle, that true conversion is a thing that can always be seen.

I admit fully that the manner of the Spirit's working is invisible. It is like the wind. It is like the attractive power of the magnet. It is like the influence of the moon upon the tides. There is something about it far beyond the reach of man's eyes or understanding. But while I admit this decidedly, I maintain no less decidedly that the effects of the Spirit's work in conversion will always be seen. Those effects may be weak and feeble at first: to the natural man they may hardly be visible, and not understood. But effects there always will be: some fruit will always be seen where there is true conversion. Where no effect can be seen, there you may be sure there is no grace. Where no visible fruit can be found, there you may be sure is no conversion.

Does any one ask me what we may expect to see in a true conversion? I reply, There will always be something seen in a converted man's character, and feelings, and conduct, and opinions, and daily life. You will not see in him perfection; but you will see in him something peculiar, distinct, and different from other people. You will see him hating sin, loving Christ, following after holiness, taking pleasure in his Bible, persevering in prayer. You will see him penitent, humble, believing, temperate, charitable, truthful, good-tempered, patient, upright, honorable, kind. These, at any rate, will be his aims: these are the things which he will follow after, however short he may come of perfection. In some converted persons you will see these things more distinctly, in others less. This only I say, wherever there is conversion, something of this kind will be seen.

I care nothing for a conversion which has neither marks nor evidences to show. I shall always say, "Give me some marks if I am to think you are converted. Show me thy conversion without any marks, if thou canst." I do not believe in it. It is worth nothing at all. You may call such doctrine legal if you please. It is far better to be called legal than to be an Antinomian.⁸ Never, never, will I allow that the blessed Spirit can be in a man's heart, when no fruit of the Spirit can be seen in his life. A conversion which allows a man to live in sin, to lie, and drink, and swear, is not the conversion of the Bible. It is a counterfeit conversion, which can only please the devil, and will lead the man who is satisfied with it, not to heaven, but to hell.

Let this last point sink down into your heart and never be forgotten. Conversion is not only a scriptural thing, a real thing, a necessary thing, a possible thing, and a happy thing: there remains one more grand characteristic about it: it is **A THING THAT WILL ALWAYS BE SEEN.**

Appeals to Your Conscience

And now let me wind up this paper by a few plain appeals to the consciences of all who read it. I have tried to the best of my power to unfold and explain the nature of con-

⁸ **Antinomian** – from the Greek *anti*, against, and *nomos*, law, antinomianism basically means "against law." It generally means one who holds the theological view that God's Law has no place in the life of a believer.

version. I have endeavored to set it forth in every point of view. Nothing remains but to try to bring it home to the heart of every one into whose hands this book may fall.

Find out whether you are converted

First of all, I urge every reader of this paper to find out whether he is converted. I am not asking about other people. The heathen no doubt need conversion. The unhappy inmates of jails and reformatories need conversion. There may be people living near your own house who are open sinners and unbelievers, and need conversion. But all this is beside the question. I ask, Are you converted yourself?

Are you converted? It is no reply to tell me that many people are hypocrites and false professors. It is no argument to say that there are many sham revivals, and mock conversions. All this may be very true: but the abuse of a thing does not destroy the use of it. The circulation of bad money is no reason why there should not be good coin. Whatever others may be, Are you converted yourself?

Are you converted? It is no answer to tell me that you go to church or chapel, and have been baptized and admitted to the Table of the Lord. All this proves little: I could say as much for Judas Iscariot, Demas, Simon Magus, Ananias, and Sapphira. The question is still not answered. Is your heart changed? Are you really converted to God?

If you are not converted, never rest till you are

In the next place, I urge every reader of this book who is not converted, never to rest till he is. Make haste: awake to know your danger. Escape for your life: flee from the wrath to come. Time is short: eternity is near. Life is uncertain: judgment is sure. Arise and call upon God. The throne of grace is yet standing: the Lord Jesus Christ is yet waiting to be gracious. The promises of the Gospel are wide, broad, full, and free: lay hold upon them this day. Repent, and believe the Gospel: repent, and be converted. Rest not, rest not, rest not, till you know and feel that you are a converted man.

If you believe you are converted

In the last-place, I offer a word of exhortation to every reader who has reason to think that he has gone through that blessed change of which I have been speaking in this paper. You can remember the time when you were not what you are now. You can remember a time in your life when old things passed away, and all things became new. To you also I have something to say. Suffer the word of friendly counsel, and lay it to heart.

(a) Do you think that you are converted? Then give all diligence to make your calling and conversion sure. Leave nothing uncertain that concerns your immortal soul. Labor to have the witness of the Spirit with your spirit, that you are a child of God. Assurance is to be had in this world, and assurance is worth the seeking. It is good to have hope: it is far better to feel sure.

(b) Do you think that you are converted? Then do not expect impossibilities in this world. Do not suppose the day will ever come when you will find no weak point in your heart, no wanderings in private prayer, no distraction in Bible-reading, no cold desires in

the public worship of God, no flesh to mortify, no devil to tempt, no worldly snares to make you fall. Expect nothing of the kind. Conversion is not perfection! Conversion is not heaven! The old man within you is yet alive; the world around you is yet full of danger; the devil is not dead. Remember at your best, that a converted sinner is still a poor weak sinner, needing Christ every day. Remember this, and you will not be disappointed.

(c) Do you think that you are converted? Then labor and desire to grow in grace every year that you live. Look not to the things behind; be not content with old experience, old grace, old attainments in religion. Desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby (1Pe 2:2). Entreat the Lord to carry on the work of conversion more and more in your soul, and to deepen spiritual impressions within you. Read your Bible more carefully every year: watch over your prayers more jealously every year. Beware of becoming sleepy and lazy in your religion. There is a vast difference between the lowest and the highest forms in the school of Christ. Strive to get on in knowledge, faith, hope, charity, and patience. Let your yearly motto be, "Onward, Forward, Upward! "to the last hour of your life.

(d) Do you think you are converted? Then show the value you place on conversion by your diligence in trying to do good to others. Do you really believe it is an awful thing to be an unconverted man? Do you really think that conversion is an unspeakable blessing? Then prove it, prove it, prove it, by constant zealous efforts to promote the conversion of others. Look round the neighborhood in which you live: have compassion on the multitudes who are yet unconverted. Be not content with getting them to come to your church or chapel; aim at nothing less than their entire conversion to God. Speak to them, read to them, pray for them, stir up others to help them. But never, never, if you are a converted man, never be content to go to heaven alone! ❧

From "Conversion" in Old Paths by J. C. Ryle. Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

Doctrine

The Ruler of the Waves

“And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake Him, and say unto Him, Master, carest Thou not that we perish? And He arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And He said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”—Mark 4:37-40

It would be well if professing Christians in modern days studied the four *Gospels* more than they do. No doubt all Scripture is profitable. It is not wise to exalt one part of the Bible at the expense of another. But I think it should be good for some who are very familiar with the *Epistles*, if they knew a little more about *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*.

Now why do I say this? I say it because I want professing Christians to know more about Christ. It is well to be acquainted with all the doctrines and principles of Christianity. It is better to be acquainted with Christ Himself. It is well to be familiar with faith, and grace, and justification, and sanctification. They are all matters “pertaining to the King.” But it is far better to be familiar with Jesus Himself, to see the King’s own face, and to behold His beauty. This is one secret of eminent holiness. He that would be conformed to Christ’s image, and become a Christ-like man, must be constantly studying Christ Himself.

Now the *Gospels* were written to make us acquainted with Christ. The Holy Ghost has told us the story of His life and death—His sayings and His doings, four times over. Four different, inspired hands have drawn the picture of the Saviour. His ways, His manners, His feelings, His wisdom, His grace, His patience, His love, His power, are graciously unfolded to us by four different witnesses. Ought not the sheep to be familiar with the Shepherd? Ought not the patient to be familiar with the Physician? Ought not the bride to be familiar with the Bridegroom? Ought not the sinner to be familiar with the Saviour? Beyond doubt it ought to be so. The *Gospels* were written to make men familiar with Christ, and therefore I wish men to study the *Gospels*.

On whom must we build our souls if we would be accepted with God? We must build on the *Rock*, Christ. From whom must we draw that grace of the Spirit which we daily need in order to be fruitful? We must draw from the *Vine*, Christ. To whom must we look for sympathy when earthly friends fail us or die? We must look to our *elder Brother*, Christ. By whom must our prayers be presented, if they are to be heard on high? They must be presented by our *Advocate*, Christ. With whom do we hope to spend the thousand years of glory, and the after eternity? With the *King of kings*, Christ. Surely we cannot know this Christ too well! Surely there is not a word, nor a deed, nor a day, nor a step, nor a thought in the record of His life, which ought not to be precious to us. We should labour to be familiar with every line that is written about Jesus.

Come now, and let us study a page in our Master's history. Let us consider what we may learn from the verses of Scripture which stand at the head of this paper. You there see Jesus crossing the lake of Galilee, in a boat with His disciples. You see a sudden storm arise while He is asleep. The waves beat into the boat and fill it. Death seems to be close at hand. The frightened disciples awake their Master and cry for help. He arises and rebukes the wind and the waves, and at once there is a calm. He mildly reproves the faithless fears of His companions, and all is over. Such is the picture. It is one full of deep instruction. Come now, and let us examine what we are meant to learn.

I. Following Christ Will Not Prevent Earthly Sorrows

Let us learn, first of all, that following Christ will not prevent our having earthly sorrows and troubles.

Here are the chosen disciples of the Lord Jesus in great anxiety. The faithful little flock which believed, when priests, scribes, and Pharisees were all alike unbelieving, is allowed by the Shepherd to be much disquieted. The fear of death breaks in upon them like an armed man. The deep water seems likely to go over their souls. Peter, James, and John, the pillars of the Church about to be planted in the world, are much distressed.

Perhaps they had not reckoned on all this. Perhaps they had expected that Christ's service would at any rate lift them above the reach of earthly trials. Perhaps they thought that He who could raise the dead, and heal the sick, and feed multitudes with a few loaves, and cast out devils with a word—He would never allow His servants to be sufferers upon earth. Perhaps they had supposed He would always grant them smooth journeys, fine weather, an easy course, and freedom from trouble and care.

If the disciples thought so, they were much mistaken. The Lord Jesus taught them that a man may be one of His chosen servants, and yet have to go through many an anxiety, and endure many a pain.

It is good to understand this clearly. It is good to understand that Christ's service never did secure a man from all the ills that flesh is heir to, and never will. If you are a believer, you must reckon on having your share of sickness and pain, of sorrow and tears, of losses and crosses, of deaths and bereavements, of partings and separations, of vexations and disappointments, so long as you are in the body. Christ never undertakes

that you shall get to heaven without these. He has undertaken that all who come to Him shall have all things pertaining to life and godliness; but He has never undertaken that He will make them prosperous, or rich, or healthy, and that death and sorrow shall never come to their family.

I have the privilege of being one of Christ's ambassadors. In His name I can offer eternal life to any man, woman, or child who is willing to have it. In His name I do offer pardon, peace, grace, and glory, to any son or daughter of Adam who reads this paper. But I dare not offer that person worldly prosperity as a part and parcel of the Gospel. I dare not offer him long life, an increased income, and freedom from pain. I dare not promise the man who takes up the cross and follows Christ, that in the following he shall never meet with a storm.

I know well that many do not like these terms. They would prefer having Christ and good health, Christ and plenty of money, Christ and no deaths in their family, Christ and no wearing cares, and Christ and a perpetual morning without clouds. But they do not like Christ and the cross, Christ and tribulation, Christ and the conflict, Christ and the howling wind, Christ and the storm.

Is this the secret thought of anyone who is reading this paper? Believe me, if it is, you are very wrong. Listen to me, and I will try to show you that you have yet much to learn.

How should you know who are true Christians, if following Christ was the way to be free from trouble? How should we discern the wheat from the chaff, if it were not for the winnowing of trial? How should we know whether men served Christ *for His own sake or from selfish motives*, if His service brought health and wealth with it as a matter of course? The winds of winter soon show us which of the trees are evergreen and which are not. The storms of affliction and care are useful in the same way. They discover whose faith is real, and whose is nothing but profession and form.

How would the great work of sanctification go on in a man if he had no trial? Trouble is often the only fire which will burn away the dross that clings to our hearts. Trouble is the pruning knife which the great Husbandman employs in order to make us fruitful in good works. The harvest of the Lord's field is seldom ripened by sunshine only. It must go through its days of wind, and rain, and storm.

If you desire to serve Christ and be saved, I entreat you to take the Lord on His own terms. Make up your mind to meet with your share of crosses and sorrows, and then you will not be surprised. For want of understanding this, many seem to run well for a season, and then turn back in disgust, and are cast away.

If you profess to be a child of God, leave to the Lord Jesus to sanctify you in His own way. Rest satisfied that He never makes any mistakes. Be sure that He does all things well. The winds may howl around you, and the waters swell. But fear not, "He is leading you by the right way, that He may bring you to a city of habitation" (Psa 107:7).

II. The Lord Jesus Christ Is Truly Man

Let us learn, in the second place, that the *Lord Jesus Christ is truly and really Man*.

There are words used in this little history which, like many other passages in this Gospel, bring out this truth in a very striking way. We are told that when the waves began to break on the ship, Jesus was in the hinder part, "asleep on a pillow." He was weary; and who can wonder at it, after reading the account given in the fourth chapter of *Mark*? After labouring all day to do good to souls and after preaching in the open air to vast multitudes, Jesus was fatigued. Surely if the sleep of the labouring man is sweet, much more sweet must have been the sleep of our blessed Lord!

Let us settle in our minds this great truth, that Jesus Christ was verily and indeed Man. He was equal to the Father in all things, and the eternal God. But He was also Man, and took part of flesh and blood, and was made like unto us in all things—sin only excepted. He had a body like our own. Like us, He was born of a woman. Like us, He grew and increased in stature. Like us, He was often hungry and thirsty, and faint and weary. Like us, He ate and drank, rested and slept. Like us, He sorrowed, and wept, and felt. It is all very incredible, but so it is. He that made the heavens went to and fro as a poor, weary Man on earth! He that ruled over principalities and powers in heavenly places, took on Him a frail body like our own. He that might have dwelt forever in the glory which He had with the Father, amidst the praises of legions of angels, came down to earth and dwelt as a Man among sinful men. Surely this fact alone is an amazing miracle of condescension, grace, pity, and love.

I find a deep mine of comfort in this thought, that Jesus is perfect Man no less than perfect God. He in whom I am told by Scripture to trust is not only a great High Priest, but a feeling High Priest. He is not only a powerful Saviour, but a sympathizing Saviour. He is not only the Son of God, mighty to save—but also the Son of man, able to feel.

Who does not know that sympathy is one of the sweetest things to us in this sinful world? It is one of the bright seasons in our dark journey here below, when we can find a person who enters into our troubles, and goes along with us in our anxieties—who can weep when we weep, and rejoice when we rejoice.

Sympathy is far better than money, and far rarer too. Thousands can give who know not what it is to feel. Sympathy has the greatest power to draw us and to open our hearts. Proper and correct counsel often falls dead and useless on a heavy heart. Cold advice often makes us shut up, shrink, and withdraw into ourselves, when tendered in the day of trouble. But genuine sympathy in such a day will call out all our better feelings, if we have any, and obtain an influence over us when nothing else can. Give me the friend who, though poor in gold and silver, has always ready a sympathizing heart.

Our God knows all this well. He knows the very secrets of man's heart. He knows the ways by which that heart is most easily approached, and the springs by which that heart is most readily moved. He has wisely provided that the Saviour of the Gospel should be feeling as well as mighty. He has given us one who has not only a strong hand to pluck

us as brands from the burning, but a sympathizing heart on which the labouring and heavy-laden may find rest.

I see a marvellous proof of love and wisdom in the union of two natures in Christ's person. It was marvellous love in our Saviour to condescend to go through weakness and humiliation for our sakes, ungodly rebels as we are. It was marvellous wisdom to fit Himself in this way to be the very Friend of friends, who could not only save man, but meet him on his own ground. I want one able to perform all things needful to redeem my soul. This Jesus can do, for He is the eternal Son of God. I want one able to understand my weakness and infirmities, and to deal gently with my soul, while tied to a body of death. This again Jesus can do, for He was the Son of man, and had flesh and blood like my own. Had my Saviour been God only, I might perhaps have *trusted* Him, but I never could have come near to Him without fear. Had my Saviour been Man only, I might have *loved* Him, but I never could have felt sure that He was able to take away my sins. But, blessed be God, my Saviour is God as well as Man, and Man as well as God—God, and so able to deliver me—Man, and so able to feel with me. Almighty power and deepest sympathy are met together in one glorious person, Jesus Christ, my Lord. Surely a believer in Christ has a strong consolation. He may well trust, and not be afraid.

If any reader of this paper knows what it is to go to the throne of grace for mercy and pardon, let him never forget that the Mediator by whom he draws near to God is the Man Christ Jesus.

Your soul's business is in the hand of a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities. You have not to do with a being of so high and glorious a nature that your mind can in no wise comprehend Him. You have to do with Jesus, who had a body like your own and was a Man upon earth like yourself. He well knows that world through which you are struggling, for He dwelt in the midst of it thirty-three years. He well knows "the contradictions of sinners," which so often discourages you, for He endured it Himself (Heb 12:3). He well knows the art and cunning of your spiritual enemy, the devil, for He wrestled with him in the wilderness. Surely, with such an advocate you may well feel bold.

If you know what it is to apply to the Lord Jesus for spiritual comfort in earthly troubles, you should well remember the days of His flesh, and His human nature.

You are applying to One who knows your feelings by experience, and has drunk deep of the bitter cup, for He was "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). Jesus knows the heart of a man, the bodily pains of a man, and the difficulties of a man, for he was a Man Himself and had flesh and blood upon earth. He sat wearied by the well at Sychar. He wept over the grave of Lazarus at Bethany. He sweat great drops of blood at Gethsemane. He groaned with anguish at Calvary.

Acquainted with Human Nature

He is no stranger to your sensations. He is acquainted with everything that belongs to human nature, sin only excepted.

(a) Are you poor and needy? So also was Jesus. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay His head. He dwelt in a despised city. Men used to say, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (Joh 1:46). He was esteemed a carpenter’s son. He preached in a borrowed boat, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed ass, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

(b) Are you alone in the world, and neglected by those who ought to love you? So also was Jesus. He came unto His own, and they received Him not. He came to be a Messiah to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and they rejected Him. The princes of this world would not acknowledge Him. The few that followed Him were publicans and fishermen. And even these at the last forsook Him, and were scattered every man to his own place.

(c) Are you misunderstood, misrepresented, slandered, and persecuted? So also was Jesus. He was called a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans, a Samaritan, a madman, and a devil. His character was belied. False charges were laid against Him. An unjust sentence was passed upon Him, and though innocent, He was condemned as a malefactor, and as such died on the cross.

(d) Does Satan tempt you, and offer horrid suggestions to your mind? So also did he tempt Jesus. He bade Him to distrust God’s fatherly providence. “Command these stones to be made bread.” He proposed to Him to tempt God by exposing Himself to unnecessary danger. “Cast thyself down” from the pinnacle of the temple. He suggested to Him to obtain the kingdoms of the world for His own, by one little act of submission to himself. “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Mat 4:1-10).

(e) Do you ever feel great agony and conflict of mind? Do you feel in darkness as if God had left you? So did Jesus. Who can tell the extent of the sufferings of mind He went through in the garden? Who can measure the depth of His soul’s pain when He cried, “My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46).

It is impossible to conceive a Saviour more suited to the wants of man’s heart than our Lord Jesus Christ—suited not only by His power, but by His sympathy—suited not only by His divinity, but by His humanity. Labour, I beseech you, to get firmly impressed on your mind that Christ, the refuge of souls, is Man as well as God. Honour Him as King of kings and Lord of lords; but while you do this, never forget that He had a body and was a Man. Grasp this truth and never let it go. The unhappy Socinian⁹ errs fearfully when he says that Christ was only man, and not God. But let not the rebound from that error make you forget that while Christ was very God, He was also very Man.

Listen not for a moment to the wretched argument of the Roman Catholic when he tells you that the virgin Mary and the saints are more sympathizing than Christ. Answer

⁹ **Socinian** – the heretical theological system named after Italian Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), which denied the doctrine of the Trinity by making Christ to be a mere man with no existence prior to His birth.

him that such an argument springs from ignorance of the Scriptures and of Christ's true nature. Answer him, that you have not so learned Christ as to regard Him only as an austere Judge and a Being to be feared. Answer him, that the four *Gospels* have taught you to regard Him as the most loving and sympathizing of friends, as well as the mightiest and most powerful of Saviours. Answer him, that you want no comfort from saints and angels, from the virgin Mary or from Gabriel, so long as you can repose your weary soul on THE MAN CHRIST JESUS.

III. There May Be Much Weakness in a True Christian

Let us learn, in the third place, that there may be much weakness and infirmity, even in a true Christian.

You have a striking proof of this in the conduct of the disciples here recorded, when the waves broke over the ship. They awoke Jesus in *haste*. They said to Him, in fear and anxiety, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?"

There was *impatience*. They might have waited till their Lord thought fit to answer from His sleep.

There was *unbelief*. They forgot that they were in the keeping of One who had all power in His hand. "We perish."

There was *distrust*. They spoke as if they doubted their Lord's care and thoughtfulness for their safety and well-being. "Carest thou not that we perish?"

Poor faithless men! What business had they to be afraid? They had seen proof upon proof that all must be well so long as the Bridegroom was with them. They had witnessed repeated examples of His love and kindness towards them, sufficient to convince them that He would never let them come to real harm. But all was forgotten in the present danger. Sense of immediate peril often makes men have a bad memory. Fear is often unable to reason from past experience. They heard the winds. They saw the waves. They felt the cold waters beating over them. They fancied death was close at hand. They could wait no longer in suspense. "Carest thou not," said they, "that we perish?"

But, after all, let us understand this is only a picture of what is constantly going on among believers in every age. There are too many disciples, I suspect, at this very day, like those who are here described.

Many of God's children get on very well so long as they have no trials. They follow Christ very tolerably in the time of fair weather. They fancy they are trusting Him entirely. They flatter themselves they have cast every care on Him. They obtain the reputation of being very good Christians.

But suddenly some unlooked-for trial assails them. Their property makes itself wings and flies away. Their own health fails. Death comes up into their house. Tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word. And where now is their faith? Where is the strong confidence they thought they had? Where is their peace, their hope, their resignation? Alas, they are sought for and not found. They are weighed in the balances and

found wanting. Fear, doubt, distress, and anxiety break in upon them like a flood, and they seem at their wits' end. I know that this is a sad description. I only put it to the conscience of every real Christian, whether it is not correct and true.

The plain truth is that there is no literal and absolute perfection among true Christians, so long as they are in the body. The best and brightest of God's saints is but a *poor mixed being*. Converted, renewed, and sanctified though he be, he is still compassed with infirmity. There is not a just man upon earth that always doeth good and sinneth not. In many things we offend all. A man may have true saving faith, and yet not have it always close at hand, and ready to be used (Ecc 7:20, Jam 3:2).

Abraham was the father of the faithful. By faith he forsook his country and his kindred, and went out according to the command of God, to a land he had never seen. By faith he was content to dwell in the land as a stranger, believing that God would give it to him for an inheritance. And yet this very Abraham was so far overcome by unbelief, that he allowed Sarah to be called his sister and not his wife, through the fear of man. Here was great infirmity. Yet there have been few greater saints than Abraham.

David was a man after God's own heart. He had faith to go out to battle with the giant Goliath when he was but a youth. He publicly declared his belief that the Lord who delivered him from the paw of the lion and bear, would deliver him from this Philistine. He had faith to believe God's promise that he should one day be King of Israel—though he was owned by few followers, and though Saul pursued him like a partridge on the mountains and there often seemed but a step between him and death. And yet this very David at one time was so far overtaken by fear and unbelief that he said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul" (1Sa 27:1). He forgot the many wonderful deliverances he had experienced at God's hand. He only thought of his present danger, and took refuge among the ungodly Philistines. Surely here was great infirmity. Yet there have been few stronger believers than David.

I know it is easy for a man to reply, "All this is very true, but it does not excuse the fears of the disciples. They had Jesus actually with them. They ought not to have been afraid. I should never have been so cowardly and faithless as they were!" I tell the man who argues in that way, that he knows little of his own heart. I tell him, no one knows the length and breadth of his own infirmities, if he says he has not been tempted. No one can say how much weakness might appear in himself, if he were placed in circumstances to call it forth.

Does any reader of this paper think that he believes in Christ? Do you feel such love and confidence in Him that you cannot understand being greatly moved by any event that could happen? It is all well. I am glad to hear it. But has this faith been tried? Has this confidence been put to the test? If not, take heed of condemning these disciples hastily. Be not high-minded, but fear. Think not because your heart is in a lively frame now, that such a frame will always last. Say not, because your feelings are warm and fervent today, "tomorrow shall be as today, and much more abundant." Say not, because your heart is lifted up just now with a strong sense of Christ's mercy, "I shall never for-

get Him as long as I live.” Oh, learn to abate something of this flattering estimate of yourself. You do not know yourself thoroughly. There are more things in your inward man than you are at present aware of. The Lord may leave you as He did Hezekiah, to show you all that is in your heart (2Ch 32:31). Blessed is he that is “clothed with humility.” “Happy is he that feareth always.” “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” (1Pe 5:5; Pro 28:14; 1Co 10:12).

Why do I dwell on this? Do I want to apologize for the corruptions of professing Christians, and excuse their sins? God forbid! Do I want to lower the standard of sanctification, and countenance anyone in being a lazy, idle soldier of Christ? God forbid! Do I want to wipe out the broad line of distinction between the converted and the unconverted, and to wink at inconsistencies? Once more I say, God forbid! I hold strongly that there is a mighty difference between the true Christian and the false, between the believer and the unbeliever, between the children of God and the children of the world. I hold strongly that this difference is not merely one of faith, but of life—not only one of profession, but of practice. I hold strongly that the ways of the believer should be as distinct from those of the unbeliever, as bitter from sweet, light from darkness, heat from cold.

But I do want *young Christians* to understand what they must expect to find in themselves. I want to prevent their being stumbled and puzzled by the discovery of their own weakness and infirmity. I want them to see that they may have true faith and grace, in spite of all the devil’s whispers to the contrary, though they feel within doubts and fears. I want them to observe that Peter, James, John, and their brethren were true disciples, and yet not so spiritual but that they could be afraid. I do not tell them to make the unbelief of the disciples an excuse for themselves. But I do tell them that it shows plainly, that so long as they are in the body they must not expect faith to be above the reach of fear.

Above all, I want all Christians to understand what they must expect *in other believers*. You must not hastily conclude that a man has no grace merely because you see in him some corruption. There are spots on the face of the sun, and yet the sun shines brightly and enlightens the whole world. There is quartz and dross mixed up with many a lump of gold that comes from Australia, and yet who thinks the gold on that account worth nothing at all? There are flaws in some of the finest diamonds in the world, and yet they do not prevent their being rated at a priceless value. Away with this morbid squeamishness which makes many ready to excommunicate a man if he only has a few faults! Let us be more quick to see grace and more slow to see imperfections! Let us know that, if we cannot allow there is grace where there is corruption, we shall find no grace in the world. We are yet in the body. The devil is not dead. We are not yet like the angels. Heaven has not yet begun. The leprosy is not out of the walls of the house, however much we may scrape them, and never will be till the house is taken down. Our bodies are indeed the temple of the Holy Ghost, but not a perfect temple until they are raised or changed. Grace is indeed a treasure, but a treasure in earthen vessels. It is pos-

sible for a man to forsake all for Christ's sake, and yet to be overtaken occasionally with doubts and fears.

I beseech every reader of this paper to remember this. It is a lesson worth attention. The apostles believed in Christ, loved Christ, and gave up all to follow Christ. And yet you see in this storm the apostles were afraid. Learn to be charitable in your judgment of them. Learn to be moderate in your expectations from your own heart. Contend to the death for the truth that no man is a true Christian who is not converted, and is not a holy man. But allow that a man may be converted, have a new heart, and be a holy man, and yet be liable to infirmity, doubts and fears.

IV. The Power of the Lord Jesus Christ

Let us learn, in the fourth place, *the power of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

You have a striking example of His power in the history upon which I am now dwelling. The waves were breaking into the ship where Jesus was. The terrified disciples awoke Him, and cried for help. "He arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." This was a wonderful miracle. No one could do this but One who was almighty.

Make the winds cease with a word! Who does not know that it is a common saying, in order to describe an impossibility, "You might as well speak to the wind!" Yet Jesus rebukes the wind and at once it ceases. This was power.

Calm the waves with a voice! What reader of history does not know that a mighty King of England tried in vain to stop the tide rising on the shore? Yet here is one who says to raging waves in a storm, "Peace, be still," and at once there was a calm. Here was power.

It is good for all men to have clear views of the Lord Jesus Christ's power. Let the sinner know that the merciful Saviour to whom he is urged to flee, and in whom he is invited to trust, is nothing less than the Almighty, and has power over all flesh to give eternal life (Rev 1:8; Joh 17:2). Let the anxious inquirer understand that if he will only venture on Jesus, and take up the cross, he ventures on One who has all power in heaven and earth (Mat 28:18). Let the believer remember as he journeys through the wilderness, that his Mediator, Advocate, Physician, Shepherd, and Redeemer—is Lord of lords and King of kings, and that through Him all things may be done (Rev 17:14; Phi 4:13). Let all study the subject, for it deserves to be studied.

(a) Study it in His works of **creation**. "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made" (Joh 1:3). The heavens and all their glorious host of inhabitants, the earth and all that it contains and the sea and all that is in it—all creation, from the sun on high to the least worm below, was the work of Christ. He spake and they came into being. He commanded and they began to exist. That very Jesus, who was born of a poor woman at Bethlehem and lived in a carpenter's house at Nazareth, had been the Former of all things. Was not this power?

(b) Study it in His works of **providence**, and the orderly continuance of all things in the world. "By him all things consist" (Col 1:17). Sun, moon, and stars roll round in a perfect system. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter follow one another in regular order. They continue to this day and fail not, according to the ordinance of Him who died on Calvary (Psa 119:91). The kingdoms of this world rise and increase, and decline and pass away. The rulers of the earth plan, scheme, make laws and change laws, war, and pull down one and raise up another. But they little think that they rule only by the will of Jesus and that nothing happens without the permission of the Lamb of God. They do not know that they and their subjects are all as a drop of water in the hand of the crucified One, and that He increases the nations and diminishes the nations, just according to His mind. Is not this power?

(c) Study the subject not least **in the miracles** worked by our Lord Jesus Christ during the three years of His ministry upon earth. Learn from the mighty works which He did, that the things which are impossible with man are possible with Christ. Regard every one of His miracles as an emblem and figure of spiritual things. See in it a lovely picture of what He is able to do for your soul. He that could raise the dead with a word can just as easily raise man from the death of sin. He that could give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb, can also make sinners to see the kingdom of God, hear the joyful sound of the Gospel, and speak forth the praise of redeeming love. He that could heal leprosy with a touch, can heal any disease of heart. He that could cast out devils can bid every besetting sin yield to His grace. Oh, begin to read Christ's miracles in this light! Wicked, and bad, and corrupt as you may feel, take comfort in the thought that you are not beyond Christ's power to heal. Remember that in Christ there is not only a fullness of mercy, but a fullness of power.

(d) Study the subject in particular **as placed before you this day**. I dare be sure your heart has sometimes been tossed to and fro like the waves in a storm. You have found it agitated like the waters of the troubled sea when it cannot rest. Come and hear this day that there is One who can give you rest. Jesus can say, to your heart, whatever may be its ailment, "Peace, be still!"

What though your conscience within be lashed by the recollection of countless transgressions, and torn by every gust of temptation? What though the remembrance of past hideous profligacy be grievous unto you, and the burden intolerable? What though your heart seems full of evil, and sin appears to drag you whither it will like a slave? What though the evil rides to and fro over your soul like a conqueror, and tells you it is vain to struggle against him, there is no hope for you? I tell you there is One who can give even you pardon and peace. My Lord and Master Jesus Christ can rebuke the devil's raging, can calm even your soul's misery, and say even to you, "Peace, be still!" He can scatter that cloud of guilt which now weighs you down. He can bid despair depart. He can drive fear away. He can remove the spirit of bondage and fill you with the spirit of adoption. Satan may hold your soul like a strong man armed, but Jesus is stronger than

he—and when He commands, the prisoners must go free. Oh, if any troubled reader wants a calm within, let him go this day to Jesus Christ and all shall yet be well!

But what if your heart be right with God, and yet you are pressed down with a load of earthly trouble? What if the fear of poverty is tossing you to and fro and seems likely to overwhelm you? What if pain of body be racking you to distraction day after day? What if you are suddenly laid aside from active usefulness, and compelled by infirmity to sit still and do nothing? What if death has come into your home and taken away your Rachael, or Joseph, or Benjamin and left you alone, crushed to the ground with sorrow? What if all this has happened? Still there is comfort in Christ. He can speak peace to wounded hearts as easily as calm troubled seas. He can rebuke rebellious wills as powerfully as raging winds. He can make storms of sorrow abate and silence tumultuous passions as surely as He stopped the Galilean storm. He can say to the heaviest anxiety, “Peace, be still!” The floods of care and tribulation may be mighty, but Jesus sits upon the water-floods and is mightier than the waves of the sea (Psa 93:4). The winds of trouble may howl fiercely round you, but Jesus holds them in His hand and can stay them when He lists. Oh, if any reader of this paper is broken-hearted, and care-worn, and sorrowful, let him go to Jesus Christ and cry to Him, and he shall be refreshed. “Come unto me,” He says, “all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mat 11:28).

I invite all who profess and call themselves Christians, to take large views of Christ’s power. Doubt anything else if you will, but never doubt Christ’s power. Whether you do not secretly love sin, may be doubtful. Whether you are not privately clinging to the world, may be doubtful. Whether the pride of your nature is not rising against the idea of being saved as a poor sinner by grace, may be doubtful. But one thing is not doubtful, and that is that Christ is “able to save to the uttermost,” and will save you, if you will [seek] Him (Heb 7:25).

V. The Lord Jesus Deals Tenderly with Weak Believers

Let us learn, in the last place, how tenderly and patiently the Lord Jesus deals with weak believers.

We see this truth brought out in His words to His disciples, when the wind ceased and there was a calm. He might well have rebuked them sharply. He might well have reminded them of all the great things He had done for them and reproved them for their cowardice and mistrust. But there is nothing of anger in the Lord’s words. He simply asks two questions. “Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?”

The whole of our Lord’s conduct towards His disciples on earth deserves close consideration. It throws a beautiful light on the compassion and longsuffering that there is in Him. No master surely ever had scholars so slow to learn their lessons as Jesus had in the apostles. No scholars surely ever had so patient and forbearing a teacher as the apostles had in Christ. Gather up all the evidence on this subject that lies scattered through the *Gospels*, and see the truth of what I say.

At no time of our Lord's ministry did the disciples seem to comprehend fully the object of His coming into the world. The humiliation, the atonement, the crucifixion, were hidden things to them. The plainest words and clearest warnings from their Master of what was going to befall Him seemed to have had no effect on their minds. They understood not. They perceived not. It was hid from their eyes. Once Peter even tried to dissuade our Lord from suffering. "Be it far from thee, Lord," he said, "this shall not be unto thee" (Mat 16:22; Luk 18:34; 9:45).

Frequently you will see things in their spirit and demeanour which are not at all to be commended. One day we are told they disputed among themselves who should be greatest (Mar 9:34). Another day they considered not His miracles and their hearts were hardened (Mar 6:52). Once two of them wished to call down fire from heaven upon a village, because it did not receive them (Luk 9:54). In the garden of Gethsemane the three best of them slept when they should have watched and prayed. In the hour of His betrayal they all forsook Him and fled. And worst of all, Peter, the most forward of the twelve, denied his Master three times with an oath.

Even after the resurrection, you see the same unbelief and hardness of heart cling to them; though they saw their Lord with their eyes, and touched Him with their hands, even then some doubted. So weak were they in faith! So slow of heart were they to "believe all that the prophets had spoken" (Luk 24:25). So backward were they in understanding the meaning of our Lord's words, and actions, and life, and death.

But what do you see in our Lord's behaviour towards these disciples all through His ministry? You see nothing but unchanging pity, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering, and love. He does not cast them off for their stupidity. He does not reject them for their unbelief. He does not dismiss them forever for cowardice. He teaches them as they are able to bear. He leads them on step by step, as a nurse does an infant when it first begins to walk. He sends them kind messages as soon as He is risen from the dead. "Go," He said to the women, "Go tell my *brethren* that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Mat 28:10). He gathers them round Himself once more. He restores Peter to his place, and bids him "feed His sheep" (Joh 21:17). He condescends to sojourn with them forty days before He finally ascends. He commissions them to go forth as His messengers, and preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He blesses them in parting, and encourages them with that gracious promise, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Mat 28:20). Truly this was a love that passeth knowledge. This is not the manner of man.

Let all the world know that the Lord Christ is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. As a father pitieth his children, so He pitieth them that fear Him. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will He comfort His people (Jam 5:11; Mat 12:20; Psa 103:13; Isa 66:13). He cares for the lambs of His flock as well as for the old sheep. He cares for the sick and feeble ones of His fold as well as for the strong. It is written that He will carry them in His bosom, rather than let one of them be lost (Isa 40:11). He cares for the least members of His body, as well as

for the greatest. He cares for the babes of His family as well as the grown-up men. He cares for the tenderest little plants in His garden as well as for the cedar of Lebanon. All are in His book of life, and all are under His charge. All are given to Him in an everlasting covenant, and He has undertaken, in spite of all weaknesses, to bring every one safe home. Only let a sinner lay hold on Christ by faith and then, however feeble, Christ's word is pledged to him, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." He may correct him occasionally in love. He may gently reprove him at times. But He will never, never give him up. The devil shall never pluck him from Christ's hand.

Let all the world know that the Lord Jesus will not cast away His believing people because of shortcomings and infirmities. The husband does not put away his wife because he finds failings in her. The mother does not forsake her infant because it is weak, feeble and ignorant. And the Lord Christ does not cast off poor sinners who have committed their souls into His hands because He sees in them blemishes and imperfections. Oh, no! It is His glory to pass over the faults of His people, and heal their backslidings—to make much of their weak graces and to pardon their many faults. The eleventh of *Hebrews* is a wonderful chapter. It is marvelous to observe how the Holy Ghost speaks of the worthies whose names are recorded in that chapter. The faith of the Lord's people is there brought forward and had in remembrance. But the faults of many a one, which might easily have been brought up also, are left alone, and not mentioned at all.

Who is there now among the readers of this paper that feels desires after salvation, but is afraid to become decided, lest by-and-by he should fall away? Consider, I beseech you, the tenderness and patience of the Lord Jesus and be afraid no more. Fear not to take up the cross and come out boldly from the world. That same Lord and Saviour who bore with the disciples is ready and willing to bear with you. If you stumble, He will raise you. If you err, He will gently bring you back. If you faint, He will revive you. He will not lead you out of Egypt, and then suffer you to perish in the wilderness. He will conduct you safe into the promised land. Only commit yourself to His guidance, and then, my soul for yours, He shall carry you safely home. Only hear Christ's voice, and follow Him, and you shall never perish.

Who is there among the readers of this paper that has been converted and desires to do his Lord's will? Take example, this day, by your Master's gentleness and longsuffering, and learn to be tender-hearted and kind to others. Deal gently with *young beginners*. Do not expect them to know everything and understand everything all at once. Take them by the hand. Lead them on and encourage them. Believe all things and hope all things, rather than make that heart sad which God would not have made sad.

Deal gently with *backsliders*. Do not turn your back on them as if their case was hopeless. Use every lawful means to restore them to their former place. Consider yourself, and your often infirmities, and do as you would be done by. Alas, there is a painful absence of the Master's mind among many of His disciples. There are few churches, I fear, in the present day, which would have received Peter into communion again for many a long year, after denying His Lord. There are few believers ready to do the work of

Barnabas—willing to take young converts by the hand, and encourage them at their first beginnings. Verily we want an outpouring of the Spirit upon believers almost as much as upon the world.

Applications

And now, I have only to ask my readers to make a practical use of the lessons I have brought before them. You have heard this day five things...

First, that Christ's service will not secure you against troubles. The holiest saints are liable to them.

Second, that Christ is very Man as well as God.

Third, that believers may have much weakness and infirmity, and yet be true believers.

Fourth, that Christ has all power; and

Fifth, that Christ is full of patience and kindness towards His people.

Remember these five lessons, and you will do well.

Bear with me a few moments while I say a few words to impress the things you have been reading more deeply on your heart.

(1) This paper will very likely be read by some who know nothing of Christ Himself, or of Christ's service by experience.

There are only too many who take no interest whatever in the things about which I have been writing. Their treasure is all below. They are wholly taken up with the things of the world. They care nothing about the believer's conflict, and struggles, and infirmities, and doubts, and fears.

They care little whether Christ did miracles or not. It is all a matter of words, names, and forms, about which they do not trouble themselves. They are without God in the world.

If perchance you are such a man as this, I can only warn you solemnly that your present course cannot last. You will not live for ever. There must be an end. Grey hairs, age, sickness, infirmities, death—all are before you, and must be met one day. What will you do when that day comes?

Remember my words this day. You will find no comfort when sick and dying, unless Jesus Christ is your friend. You will discover, to your sorrow and confusion, that however much men may talk and boast, they cannot do without Christ when they come to their deathbed. You may send for ministers, and get them to read prayers, and give you the sacrament. You may go through every form and ceremony of Christianity. But if you persist in living a careless and worldly life, and despising Christ in the morning of your days, you must not be surprised if Christ leaves you to yourself in your latter end. Alas! these are solemn words, and are often sadly fulfilled: "I will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh" (Pro 1:26).

Come then, this day, and be advised by one who loves your soul. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Forsake the foolish, and go in the path of understanding. Cast away that pride which hangs about your heart, and seek the Lord Jesus while He may be found. Cast away that spiritual sloth which is palsying your soul, and resolve to take trouble about your Bible, your prayers, and your Sundays. Break off from a world which can never really satisfy you, and seek that treasure which alone is truly incorruptible. Oh, that the Lord's own words might find a place in your conscience! "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you" (Pro 1:22-23). I believe the crowning sin of Judas Iscariot was that he would not seek pardon and turn again to his Lord. Beware, lest that be your sin also.

(2) *This paper will probably fall into the hands of some who love the Lord Jesus, and believe in Him, and yet desire to love Him better.* If you are such a man, suffer the word of exhortation and apply it to your heart.

For one thing, keep before your mind, as an ever-present truth, that *the Lord Jesus is an actual, living Person*, and deal with Him as such.

I fear the personality of our Lord is sadly lost sight of by many professors in the present day. Their talk is more about salvation than about the Saviour, more about redemption than about the Redeemer, more about justification than about Jesus and more about Christ's work than about Christ's person. This is a great fault, and one that fully accounts for the dry and sapless character of the religion of many professors.

As ever you would grow in grace and have joy and peace in believing, beware of falling into this error. Cease to regard the Gospel as a mere collection of dry doctrines. Look at it rather as the revelation of a mighty, living *Being* in whose sight you are daily to live. Cease to regard it as a mere set of abstract propositions and abstruse principles and rules. Look at it as the introduction to a glorious, personal *Friend*. This is the kind of Gospel that the apostles preached. They did not go about the world telling men of love, and mercy, and pardon, in the abstract. The leading subject of all their sermons was the loving heart of *an actual living Christ*. This is the kind of Gospel which is most calculated to promote sanctification and meetness for glory. Nothing, surely, is so likely to prepare us for that heaven where Christ's personal presence will be all, and that glory where we shall meet Christ face to face, as to realize communion with Christ as an actual living Person here on earth. There is all the difference in the world between an *idea* and a *person*.

For another thing, try to keep before your mind, as an everpresent truth, that the Lord Jesus is utterly unchanged.

That Saviour, in whom you trust, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He knows no variableness, nor shadow of turning. Though high in heaven at God's right hand, He is just the same in heart that He was 1900 years ago on earth. Remember this and you will do well.

Follow Him all through His journeys to and fro in Palestine. Mark how He received all that came to Him and cast out none. Mark how He had an ear to listen to every tale of sorrow, a hand to help every case of distress, a heart to feel for all who needed sympathy. And then say to yourself, "This same Jesus is He who is my Lord and Saviour. Place and time have made no difference in Him. What He was, He is, and will be forevermore."

Surely this thought will give life and reality to your daily religion. Surely this thought will give substance and shape to your expectation of good things to come. Surely it is matter for joyful reflection, that He who was thirty-three years upon earth, and whose life we read in the Gospels, is the very Saviour in whose presence we shall spend eternity.

The last word of this paper shall be the same as the first. I want men to read the four Gospels more than they do. I want men to become better acquainted with Christ. I want unconverted men to know Jesus, that they may have eternal life through Him. I want believers to know Jesus better, that they may become more happy, more holy, and more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. He will be the holiest man who learns to say with Paul, "To me to live is Christ" (Phi 1:21). ❧

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Flee from Idolatry

"Flee from idolatry."—1 Corinthians 10:14

This text may seem at first sight to be hardly needed in England. In an age of education and intelligence like this, we might almost fancy it is a waste of time to tell an Englishman to "flee from idolatry."

I am bold to say that this is a great mistake. I believe that we have come to a time when the subject of idolatry demands a thorough and searching investigation. I believe that idolatry is near us, and about us, and in the midst of us, to a very fearful extent. The Second Commandment, in one word, is in peril. "The plague is begun."

Without further preface, I propose in this paper to consider the four following points:

- I. The Definition of Idolatry. *What Is It?*
- II. The Cause of Idolatry. *Whence Comes It?*
- III. The Form Idolatry Assumes in the Visible Church of Christ. *Where Is It?*
- IV. The Ultimate Abolition of Idolatry. *What Will End It?*

I feel that the subject is encompassed with many difficulties. Our lot is cast in an age when truth is constantly in danger of being sacrificed to toleration, charity, and peace falsely so-called. Nevertheless, I cannot forget, as a clergy man, that the Church of England is a church which has “given no uncertain sound” on the subject of idolatry; and unless I am greatly mistaken, truth about idolatry is, in the highest sense, truth for the times.

I. What Idolatry Is

Let me, then, first of all, supply *a definition of idolatry*. Let me show WHAT IT IS. It is of the utmost importance that we should understand this. Unless I make this clear, I can do nothing with the subject. Vagueness and indistinctness prevail upon this point, as upon almost every other in religion. The Christian who would not be continually running aground in his spiritual voyage must have his channel well- buoyed, and his mind well-stored with clear definitions.

I say then that “idolatry is a worship in which the honor due to God in Trinity, and to Him only, is given to some of His creatures, or to some invention of His creatures.” It may vary exceedingly. It may assume exceedingly different forms, according to the ignorance or the knowledge, the civilization or the barbarism, of those who offer it. It may be grossly absurd and ludicrous,¹⁰ or it may closely border on truth and admit of being most speciously¹¹ defended. But whether in the adoration of the idol of Juggernaut,¹² or in the adoration of the Host in St. Peter’s at Rome, the principle of idolatry is in reality the same. (In either case the honor due to God is turned aside from Him and bestowed on that which is not God. And whenever this is done, whether in heathen temples or in professedly Christian churches, there is an act of idolatry.

It is not necessary for a man formally to deny God and Christ, in order to be an idolater. Far from it. Professed reverence for the God of the Bible and actual idolatry are perfectly compatible: They have often gone side by side, and they still do so. The children of Israel never thought of renouncing God when they persuaded Aaron to make the golden calf. “These be thy gods,” they said, “which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” And the feast in honor of the calf was kept as “a feast unto the LORD” (Exo 32:4, 5). Jeroboam, again, never pretended to ask the ten tribes to cast off their allegiance to the God of David and Solomon. When he set up the calves of gold in Dan and Bethel, he only said, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt” (1Ki 12:28). In both instances, we should observe, the idol was not set up as a rival to God, but under the pretence of being a help—a stepping

¹⁰ **ludicrous** – laughably absurd; ridiculous.

¹¹ **specious** – having the ring of truth, but actually false and deceptive.

¹² **Juggernaut** – as early as 1321 at Puri in east-central India, the idol of Jagannath or Juggernaut, a form of the Hindu idol Krishna, is drawn on an enormous cart through the town. In the past, frenzied Hindu pilgrims have thrown themselves under the wheels of the cart, which crushed them to death. Hence, Juggernaut was used to describe an invincible, crushing force.

stone to His service. But, in both instances, a great sin was committed. The honor due to God was given to a visible representation of Him. The majesty of Jehovah was offended. The Second Commandment was broken. There was, in the eyes of God, a flagrant act of *idolatry*.

Let us mark this well. It is high time to dismiss from our minds those loose ideas about idolatry which are common in this day. We must not think, as many do, that there are only two sorts of idolatry—the spiritual idolatry of the man who loves his wife, or child, or money more than God; and the open, gross idolatry of the man who bows down to an image of wood, or metal, or stone because he knows no better. We may rest assured that idolatry is a sin which occupies a far wider field than this. It is not merely a thing in Hindustan¹³ that we may hear of and pity at missionary meetings; nor yet is it a thing confined to our own hearts that we may confess before the mercy-seat upon our knees. It is a pestilence that walks in the Church of Christ to a much greater extent than many suppose. It is an evil that, like the man of sin, “sits in the very temple of God” (2Th 2:4). It is a sin that we all need to watch and pray against continually. It creeps into our religious worship insensibly and is upon us before we are aware. Those are tremendous words which Isaiah spoke to the formal Jew—not to the worshipper of Baal,¹⁴ remember, but to the man who actually came to the temple: “He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol” (Isa 66:3).

This is that sin which God has especially denounced in His Word. One commandment out of ten is devoted to the prohibition of it. Not one of all the ten contains such a solemn declaration of God’s character and of His judgments against the disobedient—“I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Exo 20:5). Not one, perhaps, of all the ten is so emphatically repeated and amplified, and especially in the fourth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy.

This is the sin of all others to which the Jews seem to have been most inclined before the destruction of Solomon’s temple. What is the history of Israel under their judges and kings but a melancholy record of repeated falling away into idolatry? Again and again we read of “high places” and false gods. Again and again we read of captivities and chastisements on account of idolatry. Again and again we read of a return to the old sin. It seems as if the love of idols among the Jews was naturally bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh. The besetting sin of the Old Testament church, in one word, was idolatry. In the

¹³ **Hindustan** – sometimes means the entire sub-continent of India and sometimes solely to the republic of India.

¹⁴ **Baal** – Hebrew noun *ba’al* means “master,” “possessor,” or “husband.” Often used with suffixes, such as Baal-peor or Baal-berith, the word may have retained something of its original sense; but in general Baal is a proper name in the OT, and refers to a specific deity, Hadad, the W Semitic storm-god, the most important deity in the Canaanite pantheon.

face of the most elaborate ceremonial ordinances that God ever gave to His people, Israel was incessantly turning aside after idols and worshipping the work of men's hands.

This is the sin of all others which has brought down the heaviest judgments on the visible church. It brought on Israel the armies of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. It scattered the ten tribes, burned up Jerusalem, and carried Judah and Benjamin into captivity. It brought on the Eastern churches, in later days, the overwhelming flood of the Saracenic¹⁵ invasion and turned many a spiritual garden into a wilderness. The desolation which reigns where Cypria¹⁶ and Augustine¹⁷ once preached, the living death in which the churches of Asia Minor and Syria are buried, are all attributable to this sin. All testify to the same great truth which the Lord proclaims in Isaiah: "My glory will I not give to another" (Isa 42:8). Let us gather up these things in our minds and ponder them well. Idolatry is a subject which, in every church of Christ that would keep herself pure, should be thoroughly examined, understood, and known. It is not for nothing that St. Paul lays down the stern command, "Flee from idolatry."

II. The Cause of Idolatry

Let me show, in the second place, *the cause to which idolatry may be traced*. WHENCE COMES IT? To the man who takes an extravagant and exalted view of human intellect and reason, idolatry may seem absurd. He fancies it too irrational for any but weak minds to be endangered by it. To a mere superficial thinker about Christianity, the peril of idolatry may seem very small. Whatever commandments are broken, such a man will tell us, professing Christians are not very likely to transgress the second.

Now, both these persons betray a woeful ignorance of human nature. They do not see that there are secret roots of idolatry within us all. The prevalence of idolatry in all ages among the heathen must necessarily puzzle the one—the warnings of Protestant ministers against idolatry in the Church must necessarily appear uncalled for to the other. Both are alike blind to its cause.

The cause of all idolatry is the natural corruption of man's heart. That great family disease, with which all the children of Adam are infected from their birth, shows itself in this, as it does in a thousand other ways. Out of the same fountain from which "proceed evil thoughts, fornications, adulteries, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit," and the like (Mar 7:21-22)—out of that same fountain arise false views of God, and false views of the worship due to Him; and therefore, when the Apostle Paul tells the Ga-

¹⁵ **Saracenic** – from *Saracens* which was an early name for Arabs, and by extension the Muslims during the Crusades.

¹⁶ **Caecilius Cyprianus** (200-258) – Bishop of Carthage, North Africa. His views were very influential in the early church and later Roman Catholicism.

¹⁷ **Aurelius Augustine**, Bishop of Hippo (354-430) – early church theologian born in Tagaste, North Africa. Known by many as the father of orthodox theology; taught the depravity of man and the grace of God in salvation.

latians what are the “works of the flesh,” he places prominently among them “idolatry” (Gal 5:19-20).

A religion of some kind, man will have. God has not left Himself without a witness in us all, fallen as we are. Like old inscriptions hidden under mounds of rubbish—like the almost obliterated under-writing of palimpsest¹⁸ manuscripts—even so there is a dim *something* engraven at the bottom of man’s heart, however faint and half-erased—a *something* which makes him feel he must have a religion and a worship of some kind. The proof of this is to be found in the history of voyages and travels in every part of the globe. The exceptions to the rule are so few, if indeed there are any, that they only confirm its truth. Man’s worship in some dark corner of the earth may rise no higher than a vague fear of an evil spirit, and a desire to propitiate¹⁹ him; but a worship of some kind, man will have.

But then comes in the effect of the fall. Ignorance of God, carnal and low conceptions of His nature and attributes, earthly and sensual notions of the service which is acceptable to Him, all characterize the religion of the natural man. There is a craving in his mind after something he can see, and feel, and touch in his divinity. He would fain²⁰ bring his God down to his own crawling level. He would make his religion a thing of sense and sight. He has no idea of the religion of heart, and faith, and spirit. In short, just as he is willing to live on God’s earth, but until renewed by grace, a fallen and degraded life; so he has no objection to worship after a fashion, but until renewed by the Holy Ghost, it is always with a fallen worship. In one word, idolatry is a natural product of man’s heart. It is a weed which, like the earth uncultivated, the heart is always ready to bring forth.

And now does it surprise us when we read of the constantly recurring idolatries of the Old Testament church—of Peor,²¹ and Baal, and Moloch²² and Chemosh²³ and Ash-taroath;²⁴ of high places and hill altars, and groves and images—and this in the full light of the Mosaic ceremonial? Let us cease to be surprised. It can be accounted for. There is a cause.

¹⁸ **palimpsest** – A manuscript, typically of papyrus or parchment, that has been written on more than once, with the earlier writing incompletely erased and often legible.

¹⁹ **propitiate** – to appease; to reconcile someone who has been offended.

²⁰ **fain** – gladly; willingly.

²¹ **Peor** – name of a deity, Baal-peor, to which the Israelites were attracted (Num 25:3) and for the worship of which they were severely punished.

²² **Moloch** – name of a deity, usually written Molech (Heb. molek), Melech (‘king’, melek), Malcham (‘their king’) or once Moloch; worshipped in the ancient Near East in the second millennium BC and associated with death and the underworld.

²³ **Chemosh** – god of the Moabites, the people of Chemosh (Num 21:29; Jer 48:46). The sacrifice of children as a burnt-offering was part of his worship.

²⁴ **Ashtoroath** – a mother goddess with aspects as goddess of fertility, love, and war, known to the Israelites through the Canaanites; also identified with Astarte, Ishtar, and Aphrodite.

Does it surprise us when we read in history how idolatry crept in by degrees into the Church of Christ, how little by little it thrust out gospel truth, until, in Canterbury,²⁵ men offered more at the shrine of Thomas a'Becket²⁶ than they did at that of the Virgin Mary, and more at that of the Virgin Mary than at that of Christ? Let us cease to be surprised. It is all intelligible. There is a cause.

Does it surprise us when we hear of men going over from Protestant churches to the Church of Rome in the present day? Do we think it unaccountable and feel as if we ourselves could never forsake a pure form of worship for one like that of the Pope? Let us cease to be surprised. There is a solution for the problem. There is a cause.

That cause is nothing else but the deep corruption of man's heart. There is a natural proneness and tendency in us all to give God a sensual, carnal worship, and not that which is commanded in His Word. We are ever ready, by reason of our sloth and unbelief, to devise visible helps and stepping stones in our approaches to Him, and ultimately to give these inventions of our own the honor due to Him. In fact, idolatry is all natural, downhill, easy, like the broad way. Spiritual worship is all of grace, all uphill, and all against the grain. Any worship whatsoever is more pleasing to the natural heart than worshipping God in the way which our Lord Christ describes, "in spirit and in truth" (Joh 4:23).

I, for one, am not surprised at the quantity of idolatry existing, both in the world and in the visible church. I believe it perfectly possible that we may yet live to see far more of it than some have ever dreamed of. It would never surprise me if some mighty personal antichrist were to arise before the end—mighty in intellect, mighty in talents for government, aye,²⁷ and mighty, *perhaps*, in miraculous gifts too. It would never surprise me to see such an one as him setting up himself in opposition to Christ and forming an infidel conspiracy and combination against the gospel. I believe that many would rejoice to do him honor, who now glory in saying, "We will not have this Christ to reign over us." I believe that many would make a god of him, and reverence him as an incarnation of truth, and concentrate their idea of hero-worship on his person. I advance it as *a possibility*, and no more. But of this at least I am certain—that no man is less safe from danger of idolatry than the man who now sneers at every form of religion; and that from infidelity to credulity,²⁸

From atheism to the grossest idolatry, there is but a single step. Let us not think, at all events, that idolatry is an old-fashioned sin, into which we are never likely to fall. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." We shall do well to look into our

²⁵ **Canterbury** – town of southeast England on the Stour River east-southeast of London. Canterbury Cathedral (11th-16th centuries) is the seat of the archbishop and primate of the Anglican Communion.

²⁶ **Thomas A'Becket** – English Roman Catholic martyr. Chancellor to Henry II, archbishop of Canterbury (1162), and murdered by four knights in Canterbury Cathedral.

²⁷ **aye** – yes.

²⁸ **incredulity** – a disbelieving frame of mind.

own hearts: the seeds of idolatry are all there. We should remember the words of St. Paul: "Flee from idolatry."

III. The Forms of Idolatry

Let me show, in the third place, *the forms which idolatry has assumed, and does assume, in the visible church*. WHERE IS IT? I believe there never was a more baseless fabric than the theory which obtains favor with many—that the promises of perpetuity and preservation from apostasy belong to the visible church of Christ. It is a theory supported neither by Scripture nor by facts. The Church against which "the gates of hell shall never prevail," is not the visible church, but the whole body of the elect, the company of true believers out of every nation and people. The greater part of the visible church has frequently maintained gross heresies. The particular branches of it are never secure against deadly error, both of faith and practice. A departure from the faith—a falling away, a leaving of first love in any branch of the visible church—need never surprise a careful reader of the New Testament.

That idolatry would arise seems to have been the expectation of the apostles, even before the canon of the New Testament was closed. It is remarkable to observe how St. Paul dwells on this subject in his epistle to the Corinthians. If any Corinthian called a brother was an idolater, with such an one the members of the church were "not to eat" (1Co 5:11). "Neither be ye idolaters, as were some" of our fathers (1Co 10:7). He says again, in the text which heads this paper, "My dearly beloved, flee from idolatry" (1Co 10:14). When he writes to the Colossians, he warns them against "worshipping of angels" (Col 2:18). And St. John closes his first epistle with the solemn injunction, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1Jo 5:21). It is impossible not to feel that all these passages imply an expectation that idolatry would arise, and that soon, among professing Christians.

The famous prophecy in the fourth chapter of the *First Epistle to Timothy* contains a passage which is even more directly to the point: "The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1Ti 4:1). I will not detain my readers with any lengthy discussion of that remarkable expression, "doctrines of devils." It may be sufficient to say that our excellent translators of the Bible are considered for once to have missed the full meaning of the apostle in their rendering of the word translated as "devils" in our version, and that the true meaning of the expression is "doctrines about departed spirits." And in this view, which, I may as well say, is maintained by all those who have the best right to be heard on such a question, the passage becomes a direct prediction of the rise of that most specious form of idolatry, the *worship of dead saints*.

The last passage I will call attention to is the conclusion of the ninth chapter of Revelation. We there read, at the twentieth verse: "The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues, yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and wood: which neither

can see, nor hear, nor walk.” Now, I am not going to offer any comment on the chapter in which this verse occurs. I know well there is a difference of opinion as to the true interpretation of the plagues predicted in it. I only venture to assert that it is the highest probability these plagues are to fall upon the visible church of Christ; and the highest improbability that St. John was here prophesying about the heathen, who never heard the gospel. And this once conceded, the fact that idolatry is a *predicted sin of the visible church* does seem most conclusively and forever established.

And now, if we turn from the Bible to facts, what do we see? I reply unhesitatingly that there is unmistakable proof that Scripture warnings and predictions were not spoken without cause, and that idolatry has actually arisen in the visible church of Christ and does still exist.

The rise and progress of the evil in former days, we shall find well summed up in the homily of the Church of England on “Peril of Idolatry.” To that homily²⁹ I beg to refer all churchmen, reminding them once for all, that in the judgment of the Thirty-nine Articles,³⁰ the *Book of Homilies* “contains a godly and wholesome doctrine, and necessary for these times.” There we read how, even in the *fourth century*, Jerome³¹ complains “that the errors of images have come in, and passed to the Christians from the Gentiles”; and Eusebius³² says, “We do see that images of Peter and Paul, and of our Savior Himself, be made, and tables be painted, which I think to have been derived and kept indifferently by an heathenish custom.” There we may read how “Pontius Paulinus, Bishop of Nola, in the *fifth century*, caused the walls of the temples to be painted with stories taken out of the Old Testament; that the people beholding and considering these pictures, might the better abstain from too much surfeiting and riot. But from learning by painted stories, it came by little and little to idolatry.” There we may read how Gregory the First, Bishop of Rome, in the beginning of the *seventh century*, did allow the free having of images in churches. There we may read how Irene, mother of Constantine the Sixth, in the *eighth century*, assembled a council at Nicaea³³ and procured a decree that “images should be put up in all the churches of Greece, and that honor and worship should be given to the said images.” And there we may read the conclusion with which the homily winds up its historical summary that laity and clergy learned and unlearned, all ages, sorts, and degrees of men, women, and children of whole Christendom, have been at

²⁹ **homily** – a sermon.

³⁰ **Thirty-Nine Articles** – set of doctrinal statements generally accepted in the Anglican Communion as having primary doctrinal significance; devised in the Convocation of Canterbury of the Church of England in 1563.

³¹ **Jerome** (c. 347-419/420) – Biblical translator, monastic leader, often regarded as the most learned of the Latin churchmen. Known for his Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate.

³² **Eusebius** of Caesarea (c. 260-c. 339) – theologian, church historian, and scholar. Quoted from his *Ecclesiastical History*.

³³ **Nicaea** – ancient city of Bithynia in northwest Asia Minor; the Nicene Creed was adopted at an ecumenical council convened here by Constantine I in A.D. 325.

once drowned in abominable idolatry, of all other vices most detested of God, and most damnable to man, and that by the space of 800 years and more.

This is a mournful account, but it is only too true. There can be little doubt the evil began even before the time just mentioned by the homily writers. No man, I think, need wonder at the rise of idolatry in the primitive church, who considers calmly the excessive reverence which it paid, from the very first, to the visible parts of religion. I believe that no impartial man can read the language used by nearly all the Fathers about the Church, the bishops, the ministry, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the martyrs, the dead saints generally—no man can read it without being struck with the wide difference between their language and the language of Scripture on such subjects. You seem at once to be in a new atmosphere. You feel that you are no longer treading on holy ground. You find that things which in the Bible are evidently of second-rate importance are here made of first-rate importance. You find the things of sense and sight exalted to a position in which Paul, and Peter, and James, and John, speaking by the Holy Ghost, never for a moment placed them. It is not merely the weakness of uninspired writings that you have to complain of; it is something worse: it is a new system. And what is the explanation of all this? It is, in one word, that you have got into a region where the malaria of idolatry has begun to arise. You perceive the first workings of the mystery of iniquity. You detect the buds of that huge system of idolatry which, as the homily describes, was afterwards formally acknowledged, and ultimately blossomed so luxuriantly in every part of Christendom.

*Idolatry in the Visible Church*³⁴

But let us now turn from the past to the present. Let us examine the question which most concerns ourselves. Let us consider in what form idolatry presents itself to us as a sin of the visible church of Christ in our own time. I find no difficulty in answering this question. I feel no hesitation in affirming that idolatry never yet assumed a more glaring form than it does *in the Church of Rome at this present day*.

And here I come to a subject on which it is hard to speak, because of the times we live in. But the whole truth ought to be spoken by ministers of Christ, without respect of times and prejudices. And I should not lie down in peace, after writing on idolatry, if I did not declare my solemn conviction that idolatry is one of the crying sins of which the Church of Rome is guilty. I say this in all sadness. I say it, acknowledging fully that we have our faults in the Protestant church; and practically, perhaps, in some quarters, not a little idolatry. But from formal, recognized, systematic idolatry, I believe we are almost entirely free. While, as for the Church of Rome, if there is not in her worship an enormous quantity of systematic, organized idolatry, I frankly confess I do not know what idolatry is.

³⁴ **visible church** – the outward visible church composed of professing “Christians,” some of whom may be false professors.

(a) To my mind, it is idolatry to have images and pictures of saints in churches and to give them a reverence for which there is no warrant or precedent in Scripture. And if this be so, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

(b) To my mind, it is idolatry to invoke the Virgin Mary and the saints in glory and to address them in language never addressed in Scripture except to the Holy Trinity. And if this be so, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

(c) To my mind, it is idolatry to bow down to mere material things, and attribute to them a power and sanctity far exceeding that attached to the ark or altar of the Old Testament dispensation; and a power and sanctity too, for which there is not a tittle³⁵ of foundation in the Word of God. And if this be so with the holy coat of Treves,³⁶ and the wonderfully-multiplied wood of the true cross, and a thousand other so-called relics in my mind's eye, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

(d) To my mind, it is idolatry to worship that which man's hands have made—to call it God and adore it when lifted up before our eyes. And if this be so with the notorious doctrine of transubstantiation,³⁷ and the elevation of the Host in my recollection, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

(e) To my mind, it is idolatry to make ordained men mediators between ourselves and God, robbing, as it were, our Lord Christ of His office, and giving them an honor which even apostles and angels in Scripture flatly repudiate. And if this be so with the honor paid to popes and priests before my eyes, I say there is *idolatry in the Church of Rome*.

I know well that language like this jars the minds of many. Men love to shut their eyes against evils which it is disagreeable to allow. They will not see things which involve unpleasant consequences. That the Church of Rome is an *erring* church, they will acknowledge. That she is *idolatrous*, they will deny.

They tell us that the reverence which the Romish church gives to saints and images does not amount to idolatry. They inform us that there are distinctions between the worship of “latria”³⁸ and “dulia,”³⁹ between a mediation of redemption and a mediation of intercession, which clear her of the charge. My answer is that the Bible knows nothing of such distinctions; and that, in the actual practice of the great bulk of Roman Catholics, they have no existence at anxiety which the Church of Rome has often displayed to exclude that Second Commandment from her catechisms is of itself a great fact which speaks volumes to a candid observer.

³⁵ **tittle** – a small mark, such as an accent, a vowel mark, or a dot over an i; therefore, the tiniest bit.

³⁶ **Holy coat of Treves** – said to be the seamless coat of our Savior. Deposited at Treves by the Empress Helena, who discovered it in the fourth century.

³⁷ **transubstantiation** – Roman Catholic doctrine holding that the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are transformed into the body and blood of Jesus, although their appearances remain the same.

³⁸ **latria** – in Roman Catholic language, the highest kind of worship which is due to God alone.

³⁹ **dulia** – the inferior kind of veneration paid by Roman Catholics to saints and angels.

They tell us that we have no evidence for the assertions we make on this subject; that we found our charges on the abuses which prevail among the ignorant members of the Romish communion; and that it is absurd to say that a church containing so many wise and learned men is guilty of idolatry. My answer is that the devotional books in common use among Roman Catholics supply us with unmistakable evidence. Let anyone examine that notorious book, *The Garden of the Soul*,⁴⁰ if he doubts my assertion, and read the language there addressed to the Virgin Mary. Let him remember that this language is addressed to a woman who, though highly favored, and the mother of our Lord, was yet one of our fellow-sinners—to a woman who actually confesses her need of a Savior for herself. She says, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luk 1:47). Let him examine this language in the light of the New Testament, and then let him tell us fairly whether the charge of idolatry is not fully made out.

But I answer, beside this, that we want no better evidence than that which is supplied in the city of Rome itself. What do men and women do under the light of the Pope’s own countenance? What is the religion that prevails around St. Peter’s and under the walls of the Vatican? What is Romanism at Rome, unfettered, unshackled, and free to develop itself in full perfection? Let a man honestly answer these questions, and I ask no more. Let him read such a book as Seymour’s *Pilgrimage to Rome*,⁴¹ or *Alford’s Letters*, and ask any visitor to Rome if the picture is too highly colored. Let him do this, I say, and I believe he cannot avoid the conclusion that Romanism in perfection is a gigantic system of church-worship, sacrament-worship, Mary-worship, saint-worship, image-worship, relic-worship, and priest-worship—that it is, in one word, *a huge organized idolatry*.

I know how painful these things sound to many ears. To me it is no pleasure to dwell on the shortcomings of any who profess and call themselves Christians. I can say truly that I have said what I have said with pain and sorrow.

They tell us that it is a mistake to suppose that Roman Catholics really worship the images and pictures before which they perform acts of adoration; that they only use them as helps to devotion, and in reality look far beyond them. My answer is that many a heathen could say just as much for his idolatry; that it is notorious, in former days, that they did say so; and that in Hindustan many idol-worshippers do say so at the present day. But the apology does not avail. The terms of the Second Commandment are too stringent.⁴² It prohibits *bowing down*, as well as worshipping. I draw a wide distinction between the accredited dogmas of the Church of Rome and the private opinions of many of her members. I believe and hope that many a Roman Catholic is in heart inconsistent

⁴⁰ *The Garden of the Soul*—written by Bishop Richard Challoner (1691 - 1781), English Roman Catholic churchman, born in Lewes, East Sussex.

⁴¹ *Pilgrimage to Rome* (London, Seeleys, 1849) — written by M. Hobart Seymour, an Anglican clergyman, cataloguing many of Rome’s swindles regarding relics.

⁴² **stringent** — rigorous; severe.

with his profession and is better than the church to which he belongs. I cannot forget the Jansenists,⁴³ and Quesnel,⁴⁴ and Martin Boos.⁴⁵

I believe that many a poor Italian at this day is worshipping with an idolatrous worship, simply because he knows no better. He has no Bible to instruct him. He has no faithful minister to teach him. He has the fear of the priest before his eyes, if he dares to think for himself. He has no money to enable him to get away from the bondage he lives under, even if he feels a desire. I remember all this; and I say that the Italian eminently deserves our sympathy and compassion. But all this must not prevent my saying that the Church of Rome is an *idolatrous church*.

I should not be faithful if I said less. The church of which I am a minister has spoken out most strongly on the subject. The homily on “Peril of Idolatry,” and the solemn protest following the rubrics at the end of our Prayer Book Communion Service, which denounces the adoration of the sacramental bread and wine as “idolatry to be abhorred of all faithful Christians,” are plain evidence that I have said no more than the mind of my own church. And in a day like this—when some are disposed to secede to the Church of Rome, and many are shutting their eyes to her real character and wanting us to be reunited to her—in a day like this, my own conscience would rebuke me if I did not warn men plainly that the Church of Rome is an idolatrous church, and that if they will join her they are “*joining themselves to idols*.”

But I may not dwell longer on this part of my subject. The main point I wish to impress on men’s minds is this—that idolatry has decidedly manifested itself in the visible church of Christ, and nowhere so decidedly as in the Church of Rome.

IV. The Abolition of All Idolatry

And now let me show, in the last place, *the ultimate abolition of all idolatry*. WHAT WILL END IT? I consider that man’s soul must be in an unhealthy state who does not long for the time when idolatry shall be no more. That heart can hardly be right with God which can think of the millions who are sunk in heathenism, or honor the false prophet Mahomet, or daily offer up prayers to the Virgin Mary, and not cry, “O my God, what shall be the end of these things? How long, O Lord, how long?”

Here, as in other subjects, the sure word of prophecy comes in to our aid. The end of all idolatry shall one day come. Its doom is fixed. Its overthrow is certain. Whether in heathen temples, or in so-called Christian churches, idolatry shall be destroyed at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴³ **Jansenists** – movement of religious reform especially important in 17th- and 18th-century France, which defended Augustine’s doctrine of predestination and grace; named after Cornelius Otto Jansen (1585-1638).

⁴⁴ **Pasquier Quesnel** (1634-1719) – Jansenist theologian.

⁴⁵ **Martin Boos** (1762-1825) – a Roman Catholic priest forced into exile and his followers persecuted, when he discovered that the truth of salvation lay not in the church, but in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

Then shall be fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, “The idols he shall utterly abolish” (Isa 2:18). Then shall be fulfilled the words of Micah: “Their graven images also will I cut off, and their standing images out of the midst of thee, and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands” (Mic 5:13). Then shall be fulfilled the prophecy of Zephaniah: “The LORD will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen” (Zep 2:11). Then shall be fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah: “It shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered” (Zec 13:2). In a word, the Ninety-seventh Psalm shall then receive its full accomplishment:

“The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the LORD of the whole earth. The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods” (Psa 97:1-7).

The second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is that blessed hope which should ever comfort the children of God under the present dispensation. It is the polestar by which we must journey. It is the one point on which all our expectations should be concentrated.

“Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb 10:37). Our David shall no longer dwell in Adullam,⁴⁶ followed by a despised few, and rejected by the many. He shall take to Himself His great power, and reign, and cause every knee to bow before Him.

Till then our redemption is not perfectly enjoyed; as Paul tells the Ephesians, “We are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). Till then our salvation is not completed; as Peter says, we “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1Pe 1:5). Till then our knowledge is still defective; as Paul tells the Corinthians: “Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; then shall I know even also as I am known” (1Co 13:12). In short, our best things are yet to come.

But in the day of our Lord’s return every desire shall receive its full accomplishment. We shall no more be pressed down and worn out with the sense of constant failure, feebleness, and disappointment. In His presence we shall find there is a *fulness* of joy, if nowhere else; and when we awake up after His likeness we shall be *satisfied*, if we never were before (Psa 16:11; 17:15).

⁴⁶ **Adullam** – Canaanite city in Judah, identified with Tell eshSheikh Madhkur, midway between Jerusalem and Lachish, usually associated with the cave in which David hid when pursued by Saul (1 Sa. 22:1).

There are many abominations now in the visible church, over which we can only sigh and cry, like the faithful in Ezekiel's day (Eze 9:4). We cannot remove them. The wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest. But a day comes when the Lord Jesus shall once more purify His temple and cast forth everything that defiles. He shall do that work of which the doings of Hezekiah and Josiah were a faint type long ago. He shall cast forth the images and purge out idolatry in every shape.

Who is there now that longs for the conversion of the heathen world? You will not see it in its fullness until the Lord's appearing. Then, and not till then, will that often-misapplied text be fulfilled: "A man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats" (Isa 2:20).

Who is there now that longs for the redemption of Israel? You will never see it in its perfection till the Redeemer comes to Zion. Idolatry in the professing church of Christ has been one of the mightiest stumbling blocks in the Jew's way. When it begins to fall, the veil over the heart of Israel shall begin to be taken away (Psa 102:16).

Who is there now that longs for the fall of Antichrist, and the purification of the Church of Rome? I believe that will never be until the winding up of this dispensation. That vast system of idolatry may be consumed and *wasted* by the Spirit of the Lord's mouth, but it shall never be *destroyed* excepting by the brightness of His coming (2Th 2:8).

Who is there now that longs for a perfect church—a church in which there shall not be the slightest taint of idolatry? You must wait for the Lord's return. Then, and not till then, shall we see a perfect church, a church having neither spot nor wrinkle, nor any such thing (Eph 5:27), a church of which all the members shall be regenerate, and everyone a child of God.

If these things be so, men need not wonder that we urge on them the study of prophecy, and that we charge them above all to grasp firmly the glorious doctrine of Christ's second appearing and kingdom. This is the "light shining in a dark place," to which we shall do well to take heed (2Pe 1:19). Let others indulge their fancy if they will, with the vision of an imaginary "Church of the future." Let the children of this world dream of some "coming man" who is to understand everything, and set everything right. They are only sowing to themselves bitter disappointment. They will awake to find their visions baseless and empty as a dream. It is to such as these that the prophet's words may be well applied: "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Isa 50:11).

But let our eyes look right onward to the day of Christ's Second Advent. That is the only day when every abuse shall be rectified, and every corruption and source of sorrow completely purged away. Waiting for that day, let us each work on and serve our generation; not idle, as if nothing could be done to check evil, but not disheartened because we

see not yet all things put under our Lord. After all, the night is far spent, and the day is at hand (Rom 13:12). Let us wait, I say, on the Lord.

If these things be so, men need not wonder that we warn them to beware of all leanings towards the Church of Rome. Surely, when the mind of God about idolatry is so plainly revealed to us in His Word, it seems the height of infatuation in anyone to join a church so steeped in idolatries as the Church of Rome. To enter into communion with her when God is saying, “Come out of her...that ye be not partakers of her sins, and receive not of her plagues” (Rev 18:4); to seek her when the Lord is warning us to leave her; to become her subjects when the Lord’s voice is crying, “Escape for thy life, flee from the wrath to come” (Mat 3:7)—all this is mental blindness indeed—a blindness like that of him who, though forewarned, embarks in a sinking ship—a blindness which would be almost incredible, if our own eyes did not see examples of it continually.

We must all be on our guard. We must take nothing for granted. We must not hastily suppose that we are too wise to be ensnared and say, like Hazeel, “is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (2Ki 8:13). Those who preach must cry aloud and spare not, and allow no false tenderness to make them hold their peace about the heresies of the day. Those who hear must have their loins girt about with truth, and their minds stored with clear prophetic views of the end to which all idol-worshippers must come. Let us all try to realize that the latter ends of the world are upon us, and that the abolition of all idolatry is hastening on. Is this a time for a man to draw nearer to Rome? Is it not rather a time to draw further back and stand clear, lest we be involved in her downfall? Is this a time to extenuate⁴⁷ and palliate⁴⁸ Rome’s manifold corruptions, and refuse to see the reality of her sins? Surely we ought rather to be doubly jealous of everything of a Romish tendency in religion—doubly careful that we do not connive at any treason against our Lord Christ—and doubly ready to protest against unscriptural worship of every description. Once more, then, I say, let us remember that the destruction of all idolatry is certain, and remembering that, *beware of the Church of Rome*.

The subject I now touch upon is of deep and pressing importance, and demands the serious attention of all Protestant church-men. It is vain to deny that a large party of English clergy and laity in the present day are moving heaven and earth to reunite the Church of England with the idolatrous Church of Rome. The publication of that monstrous book, Dr. Pusey’s *Eirenicon*⁴⁹ and the formation of a “Society for Promoting the Union of Christendom” are plain evidence of what I mean. He that runs may read.

The existence of such a movement as this will not surprise any one who has carefully watched the history of the Church of England during the last forty years. The tendency

⁴⁷ **extenuate** – an attempt to lessen the seriousness of something by making excuses.

⁴⁸ **palliate** – to soften or to disguise the enormity of something wicked by favorable representations.

⁴⁹ ***Eirenicon*** – a three-part book written by Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-1882), British clergyman and theologian, a leader of the Oxford movement; it was an attempt to find a meeting ground for uniting Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism.

of Tractarianism⁵⁰ and ritualism has been steadily towards Rome. Hundreds of men and women have fairly and honestly left our ranks and become downright Papists. But many hundreds more have stayed behind and are yet nominal churchmen within our pale. The pompous semi-Romish ceremonial which has been introduced into many churches has prepared men's minds for changes. An extravagantly theatrical and idolatrous mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper has paved the way for transubstantiation. A regular process of un-Protestantizing has been long and successfully at work. The poor old Church of England stands on an inclined plane. Her very existence, as a Protestant church, is in peril.

I hold, for one, that this Romish movement ought to be steadily and firmly resisted. Notwithstanding the rank, the learning, and the devotedness of some of its advocates, I regard it as a most mischievous, soul-ruining, and unscriptural movement. To say that reunion with Rome would be an insult to our martyred Reformers is a very light thing; it is far more than this: it would be a sin and an offence against God! Rather than be reunited with the idolatrous Church of Rome, I would willingly see my own beloved church perish and go to pieces. Rather than become Popish once more, she had better die!

Unity in the abstract is no doubt an excellent thing; but unity without truth is useless. Peace and uniformity are beautiful and valuable: but peace without the gospel—peace based on a common episcopacy, and not on a common faith—is a worthless peace, not deserving of the name. When Rome has repealed the decrees of Trent, and her additions to the Creed; when Rome has recanted her false and unscriptural doctrines; when Rome has formally renounced image-worship, Mary-worship, and transubstantiation—then, and not till then, it will be time to talk of reunion with her. Till then there is a gulf between us which cannot be honestly bridged. Till then I call on all churchmen to resist to the death this idea of reunion with Rome. Till then let our watchwords be, “No peace with Rome! No communion with idolaters!” Well says the admirable Bishop Jewel,⁵¹ in his *Apology*, “We do not decline concord and peace with men; but we will not continue in a state of war with God that we might have peace with men! If the Pope does indeed desire we should be reconciled to him, he ought first to reconcile himself to God.”

This witness is true! Well would it be for the Church of England, if all her bishops had been like Jewel!

I write these things with sorrow. But the circumstances of the times make it absolutely necessary to speak out. To whatever quarter of the horizon I turn, I see grave reason for alarm. For the true church of Christ I have no fears at all. But for the Established Church of England, and for all the Protestant churches of Great Britain, I have very

⁵⁰ **Tractarianism** – a system of Anglican High Church principles set forth in a series of tracts at Oxford, England. Leaders included Pusey and John Henry Newman, an Anglican priest who embraced and returned to Romanism.

⁵¹ **John Jewel** (1522-1571) – orthodox Anglican Bishop of Salisbury; Ryle's reference is to Jewel's book, *The Apology [Defense] of the Church of England; and an Epistle to Signior Scipio a Venetian Gentleman, Concerning the Counsel of Trent*.

grave fears indeed. The tide of events seems running strongly against Protestantism and in favor of Rome. It looks as if God had a controversy with us as a nation, and was about to punish us for our sins.

I am no prophet. I know not where we are drifting. But at the rate we are going, I think it quite within the verge of possibility that in a few years the Church of England may be reunited to the Church of Rome. The Crown of England may be once more on the head of a Papist. Protestantism may be formally repudiated. A Romish archbishop may once more preside at Lambeth Palace. Mass may be once more said at Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's. And one result will be that all Bible-reading Christians must either leave the Church of England or else sanction idol-worship and become idolaters! God grant we may never come to this state of things! But at the rate we are going, it seems to me quite possible.

How We May Be Safe from Idolatry

And now it only remains for me to conclude what I have been saying, by mentioning some safeguards for the souls of all who read this paper. We live in a time when the Church of Rome is walking amongst us with renewed strength and loudly boasting that she will soon win back the ground that she has lost. False doctrines of every kind are continually set before us in the most subtle and specious forms. It cannot be thought unseasonable if I offer some practical safeguards against idolatry. What it is, whence it comes, where it is, what will end it—all this we have seen. Let me point out how we may be safe from it, and I will say no more.

(1) *Let us arm ourselves, then, for one thing, with a thorough knowledge of the Word of God.* Let us read our Bibles more diligently than ever and become familiar with every part of them. Let the Word dwell in us richly. Let us beware of anything which would make us give less time, and less heart, to the perusal of its sacred pages. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit—let it never be laid aside. The Bible is the true lantern for a dark and cloudy time—let us beware of traveling without its light. I strongly suspect—if we did but know the secret history of the numerous secessions from our church to that of Rome, which we deplore—I strongly suspect that in almost every case, one of the most important steps in the downward road would be found to have been a neglected Bible—more attention to forms, sacraments, daily services, primitive Christianity, and so forth, and diminished attention to the written Word of God. The Bible is the King's highway. If we once leave that for any bypath, however beautiful, and old, and frequented it may seem, we must never be surprised if we end with worshipping images and relics, and going regularly to a confessional.

(2) *Let us arm ourselves, in the second place, with a godly jealousy about the least portion of the gospel.* Let us beware of sanctioning the slightest attempt to keep back any jot or tittle of it, or to throw any part of it into the shade by exalting subordinate matters in religion. When Peter withdrew himself from eating with the Gentiles, it seemed but a little thing; yet Paul tells the Galatians, "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal 2:11). Let us count nothing little that concerns our

souls. Let us be very particular whom we hear, where we go, and what we do, in all the matters of our own particular worship; and let us care nothing for the imputation of squeamishness and excessive scrupulosity. We live in days when great principles are involved in little acts, and things in religion, which fifty years ago were utterly indifferent, are now by circumstances rendered indifferent no longer. Let us beware of tampering with anything of a Romanizing tendency. It is foolishness to play with fire. I believe that many of our perverts and seceders began with thinking there could be no mighty harm in attaching a *little* more importance to certain outward things than they once did. But once launched on the downward course, they went on from one thing to another. They provoked God, and He left them to themselves! They were given over to strong delusion and allowed to believe a lie (2Th 2:11-12). They tempted the devil, and he came to them! They started with trifles, as many foolishly call them. They have ended with downright idolatry.

(3) *Let us arm ourselves, last of all, with clear sound views of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the salvation that is in Him.* He is the “image of the invisible God”—the express “image of his person”—and the true preservative against all idolatry, when truly known. Let us build ourselves deep down on the strong foundation of His finished work upon the cross. Let us settle it firmly in our minds that Christ Jesus has done everything needful in order to present us without spot before the throne of God, and that simple, childlike faith on our part is the only thing required to give us an entire interest in the work of Christ. Let us not doubt that, having this faith, we are completely justified in the sight of God—will never be more justified if we live to the age of Methuselah and do the works of the Apostle Paul—and can add *nothing* to that complete justification by any acts, deeds, words, performances, fastings, prayers, alms-deeds, attendance on ordinances, or anything else of our own.

Above all, let us keep up continual communion with the person of the Lord Jesus! Let us abide in Him daily, feed on Him daily, look to Him daily, lean on Him daily, live upon Him daily, draw from His fullness daily. Let us realize this, and the idea of other mediators, other comforters, other intercessors, will seem utterly absurd. “What need is there?” we shall reply: “I have Christ, and in Him I have all. What have I to do with idols? I have Jesus in my heart, Jesus in the Bible, and Jesus in heaven, and I want nothing more!”

Once let the Lord Christ have His rightful place in our hearts, and all other things in our religion will soon fall into their right places. Church, ministers, sacraments, ordinances, all will go down and take the second place.

Except Christ sits as Priest and King upon the throne of our hearts, that little kingdom within will be in perpetual confusion. But only let Him be “all in all” there, and all will be well. Before Him every idol, every Dagon, shall fall down (1Sa 5:1-3). *Christ rightly known, Christ truly believed, and Christ heartily loved is the true preservative against ritualism, Romanism, and every form of idolatry.* ❧

Sanctification

Forgiveness

“Your sins are forgiven you.”—1 John 2:12

There is a clause near the end of the *Belief, or Apostle’s Creed*, which I fear is often repeated without thought or consideration. I refer to the clause which contains these words, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” Thousands, I am afraid, never reflect what those words mean. I propose to examine the subject of them in the following paper, and I invite the attention of all who care for their souls and want to be saved. Do we believe in the “Resurrection of our bodies”? Then let us see to it that we know something by experience of the “Forgiveness of our sins.”

I. Our Need of Forgiveness

Let me show, first of all, our need of forgiveness. All men need forgiveness, because all men are sinners. He that does not know this, knows nothing in religion. It is the very A B C of Christianity that a man should know his right place in the sight of God and understand his deserts.

We are all great sinners. “There is none righteous, no, not one”; “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:10, 23). Sinners we were born, and sinners we have been all our lives. We take to sin naturally from the very first. No child ever needs schooling and education to teach it to do wrong. No devil or bad companion ever leads us into such wickedness as our own hearts. And “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6: 23). We must either be forgiven, or lost eternally.

We are all guilty sinners in the sight of God. We have broken His holy law. We have transgressed His precepts. We have not done His will. There is not a commandment in all the ten which does not condemn us. If we have not broken it in deed we have in word; if we have not broken it in word, we have in thought and imagination—and that continually. Tried by the standard of the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, there is not one of us that would be acquitted. All the world is “guilty before God.” And, “As it is appointed unto

men once to die, but after this [comes] the judgment." We must either be forgiven, or perish everlastingly (Rom 3:19; Heb 9: 27).

And then *what is the Lord God, whose eyes are on all our ways, and before whom we have one day to give account?* "Holy, holy, holy," is the remarkable expression applied to Him by those who are nearest to Him (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). It sounds as if no one word could express the intensity of His holiness. One of His prophets says, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity" (Hab 1:13). We think the angels exalted beings, and far above ourselves; but we are told in Scripture, "his angels he charged with folly" (Job 4:18). We admire the moon and stars as glorious and splendid bodies; but we read, "Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not, the stars are not pure in his sight" (Job 25:5). We talk of the heavens as the noblest and purest part of creation; but even of them it is written, "The heavens are not clean in His sight" (Job 15:15). What then is any one of us but a miserable sinner in the sight of such a God as this?

Surely, we ought all to cease from proud thoughts about ourselves. We ought to lay our hands upon our mouths, and say with Abraham, I am "dust and ashes"; and with Job, "I am vile"; and with Isaiah, "We are all as an unclean thing"; and with John, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (Gen 18:27; Job 40:4; Isa 64:6; 1Jo 1:8). Where is the man or woman in the whole catalogue of the Book of Life that will ever be able to say more than this, "I obtained mercy"? What is the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs—what are they all but pardoned sinners? Surely there is but one conclusion to be arrived at: *we are all great sinners, and we all need a great forgiveness.*

See now what just cause I have to say that to know our need of forgiveness is the first thing in true religion. Sin is a burden, and must be taken off. Sin is a defilement, and must be cleansed away. Sin is a mighty debt, and must be paid. Sin is a mountain standing between us and heaven, and must be removed. Happy is that mother's child amongst us that feels all this! The first step towards heaven is to see clearly that we *deserve hell*. There are but two alternatives before us: we must either be forgiven, or be miserable for ever.

II. The Way of Forgiveness

Let me point out, in the second place, the way of forgiveness. I ask particular attention to this point, for none can be more important. Granting for a moment that you want pardon and forgiveness, what ought you to do? Whither will you go? Which way will you turn? Every thing hinges on the answer you give to this question.

Will you turn to *ministers* and put your trust in them? They cannot give you pardon: they can only tell you where it is to be found. They can set before you the bread of life; but you yourself must eat it. They can show you the path of peace; but you yourself must walk in it. The Jewish priest had no power to cleanse the leper, but only to declare him

cleansed. The Christian minister has no power to forgive sins; he can only declare and pronounce who they are that are forgiven.

Will you turn to *sacraments and ordinances*, and trust in them? They cannot supply you with forgiveness, however diligently you may use them. By sacraments “faith is confirmed and grace increased,” in all who rightly use them (See Article 27). But they cannot justify the sinner. They cannot put away transgression. You may go to the Lord’s Table every Sunday in your life: but unless you look far beyond the sign to the thing signified, you will after all die in your sins. You may attend a daily service regularly, but if you think to establish a righteousness of your own by it, in the slightest degree, you are only getting further away from God every day.

Will you trust in your own *works and endeavours*, your virtues and your good deeds, your prayers and your alms? They will never buy for you an entrance into heaven. They will never pay your debt to God. They are all imperfect in themselves, and only increase your guilt. There is no merit or worthiness in them at the very best. The Lord Jesus Christ says expressly, “When you have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants” (Luk 17:10).

Will you trust in your own *repentance and amendment*? You are very sorry for the past. You hope to do better for time to come. You hope God will be merciful. Alas, if you lean on this, you have nothing beneath you but a broken reed! The judge does not pardon the thief because he is sorry for what he did. Today’s sorrow will not wipe off the score of yesterday’s sins. It is not an ocean of tears that would ever cleanse an uneasy conscience and give it peace.

Where then must a man go for pardon? Where is forgiveness to be found? There is a way both sure and plain, and into that way I desire to guide every inquirer’s feet.

That way is simply to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. It is to cast your soul, with all its sins, unreservedly on Christ; to cease completely from any dependence on your own works or doings, either in whole or in part; and to rest on no other work but Christ’s work, no other righteousness but Christ’s righteousness, no other merit but Christ’s merit, as your ground of hope. Take this course and you are a pardoned soul. To Christ, says Peter, “give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). “Through this man,” says Paul at Antioch, “is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things” (Acts 13:38). In Him, writes Paul, “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14).

The Lord Jesus Christ, in great love and compassion, has made a full and complete satisfaction for sin, by suffering death in our place upon the cross. There He offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, and allowed the wrath of God, which we deserved, to fall on His own head. For our sins, as our Substitute, He gave Himself, suffered, and died, the just for the unjust, the innocent for the guilty—that He might deliver us from the curse of a broken law, and provide a complete pardon for all who are willing to receive it. And by so doing, as Isaiah says, He “shall bear” our sins; as John the Baptist says, He “taketh

away” sin”; as Paul says, He “purged our sins,” and “put away” sin; and as Daniel says, He “make[s] an end of sins,” and “finish[es] the transgressions” (Isa 53:11; Joh 1:29; Heb 1:3; Heb 9:26; Dan 9: 24).

Christ, in one word, has purchased a full forgiveness, if we are only willing to receive it. He has done all, paid all, suffered all that was needful to reconcile us to God. He has provided a garment of righteousness to clothe us. He has opened a fountain of living waters to cleanse us. He has removed every barrier between us and God the Father, taken every obstacle out of the way, and made a road by which the vilest may return. All things are now ready, and the sinner has only to believe and be saved, to eat and be satisfied, to ask and receive, to wash and be clean.

And faith, simple faith, is the only thing required, in order that you and I may be forgiven. That we will come by faith to Jesus as sinners with our sins—trust in Him, rest on Him, lean on Him, confide in Him, commit our souls to Him, and *forsaking all other hope, cleave only to Him*—this is all and everything that God asks for. Let a man only do this, and he shall be saved. His iniquities shall be found completely pardoned, and his transgressions entirely taken away. Every man and woman that so trusts is wholly forgiven, and reckoned perfectly righteous. His sins are clean gone, and his soul is justified in God’s sight, however bad and guilty he may have been.

This is the doctrine which is the true strength of any church on earth at this day. It is not orders, endowments, liturgies, or learning that will keep a church alive. Let free forgiveness through Christ be faithfully proclaimed in her pulpits, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Let it be buried, or kept back, and her candlestick will soon be taken away. A church is only useful so far as she exalts *free forgiveness through Christ*.

This is the doctrine which, of all others, is the mightiest engine for pulling down the kingdom of Satan. Preach salvation by the sacraments, exalt the church above Christ, and keep back the doctrine of the atonement, and the devil cares little—his goods are at peace. But preach a full Christ, and a free pardon by faith in Him, and then Satan will have great wrath, for he knows he has but a short time.

This is the only doctrine which will ever bring peace to an uneasy conscience, and rest to a troubled soul. A man may get on pretty well without it so long as he is asleep about his spiritual condition. But once let him awake from his slumber, and nothing will ever calm him but the blood of Atonement, and the peace which comes by faith in Christ.

You should ask yourself whether you have really received the truth which I have been dwelling on, and know it by experience. Jesus, and faith in Him, is the only way to the Father. He that thinks to climb into Paradise by some other road will find himself fearfully mistaken. Other foundation can no man lay for an immortal soul than that of which I have been feebly speaking. He that ventures himself here is safe. He that is off this rock has got no standing ground at all.

You should seriously consider what kind of a ministry you are in the habit of attending, supposing you have a choice. You have reason indeed to be careful. It is not *all the same* where you go, whatever people may say. There are many places of worship, I fear, where you might look long for Christ crucified, and never find Him. He is buried under outward ceremonies, thrust behind the baptismal font, and lost sight of under the shadow of the church. "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him" (Joh 20:13). Take heed where you settle yourself. Try all by this single test, "Is Jesus and free forgiveness proclaimed here?" There may be comfortable pews; there may be good singing; there may be learned sermons. But if Christ's Gospel is not the sun and centre of the whole place, do not pitch your tent there. Say rather with Isaac, "Here, is the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb?" (Gen 22:7). Be very sure, this is not the place for your soul.

III. Encouragement to All Who Wish to Be Forgiven

Let me, in the third place, encourage all who wish to be forgiven. I dare be sure this paper will be read by some one who feels he is not yet a forgiven soul. My heart's desire and prayer is that such an one may seek his pardon at once. And I would fain⁵² help him forward, by showing him the kind of forgiveness offered to him, and the glorious privileges within his reach.

Consider, then, for one thing, that the forgiveness set before you is a *great and broad forgiveness*. Hear what the Prince of Peace Himself declares: "All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies, wherewith soever they shall blaspheme" (Mar 3:28). "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall become as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa 1:18). Yes: though your trespasses be more in number than the hairs of your head, the stars in heaven, the leaves of the forest, the blades of grass, the grains of sand on the sea shore, still they can all be pardoned. As the waters of Noah's flood covered over and hid the tops of the highest hills, so can the blood of Jesus cover over and hide your mightiest sins. His blood "cleanseth us from all sin" (1Jo 1:7). Though to you they seem written with the point of a diamond, they can all be effaced from the book of God's remembrance by that precious blood. Paul names a long list of abominations which the Corinthians had committed, and then says, "Such were some of you: but ye are washed" (1Co 6:11).

Furthermore, it is a *full and complete forgiveness*. It is not like David's pardon to Absalom—a permission to return home, but not a full restoration to favour (2Sa 14:24). It is not, as some fancy, a mere letting off, and letting alone. It is a pardon so complete that he who has it is reckoned as righteous as if he had never sinned at all! His iniquities are blotted out. They are removed from him as far as the east from the west (Psa 103:12). There remains no condemnation for him. The Father sees him joined to Christ and is well pleased. The Son beholds him clothed with His own righteousness and says, "Thou

⁵² **fain** – gladly.

art all fair...there is no spot in thee" (Sol 4:7). Blessed be God that it is so! I verily believe if the best of us all had only one blot left for himself to wipe out, he would miss eternal life. If the holiest child of Adam were in heaven all but his little finger, and to get in depended on himself, I am sure he would never enter the kingdom. If Noah, Daniel, and Job, had had but one day's sins to wash away, they would never have been saved. Praised be God, that in the matter of our pardon there is nothing left for man to do! Jesus does all, and man has only to hold out an empty hand and to receive.

Furthermore, it is a *free and unconditional forgiveness*. It is not burdened with an "if," like Solomon's pardon to Adonijah: "If he will show himself a worthy man" (1Ki 1:52). Nor yet are you obliged to carry a price in your hand, or to bring a character with you to prove yourself deserving of mercy. Jesus requires but one character, and that is that you should feel yourself a sinful, bad man. He invites you to "buy wine and milk without money and without price," and declares, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Isa 55:1; Rev 22:17). Like David in the cave of Adullam, He receives every one that feels in distress and a debtor, and rejects none (1Sa 22:2). Are you a sinner? Do you want a Saviour? Then come to Jesus just as you are, and your soul shall live.

Again, it is an *offered forgiveness*. I have read of earthly kings who knew not how to show mercy: of Henry the Eighth of England who spared neither man nor woman; of James the Fifth of Scotland, who would never show favour to a Douglas. The King of Kings is not like them. He calls on men to come to Him, and be pardoned. "Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of man" (Pro 8:4). "Ho! Every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" (Isa 55:1). "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink" (Joh 8:37). "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mat 11:28). It ought to be a great comfort to you and me to hear of any pardon at all; but to hear Jesus Himself inviting us, to see Jesus Himself holding out His hand to us—the Saviour seeking the sinner before the sinner seeks the Saviour—this is encouragement, this is strong consolation indeed!

Again, it is a *willing forgiveness*. I have heard of pardons granted in reply to long entreaty, and wrung out by much importunity. King Edward the Third of England would not spare the citizens of Calais till they came to him with halters round their necks, and his own Queen interceded for them on her knees. But Jesus is "good and ready to forgive" (Psa 86:5). He "delighteth in mercy" (Mic 7:18). You and I may well come boldly to the throne of grace. He who sits there is far more willing and ready to give mercy than we are to receive it (Heb 4:16).

Besides this, it is a *tried forgiveness*. Thousands and tens of thousands have sought for pardon at the mercy seat of Christ, and not one has ever returned to say that he sought in vain. Sinners of every name and nation—sinners of every sort and description—have knocked at the door of the fold, and none have ever been refused admission. Zacchaeus the extortioner, Magdalen the harlot, Saul the persecutor, Peter the denier of his Lord, the Jews who crucified the Prince of Life, the idolatrous Athenians, the adulterous Corinthians, the ignorant Africans, the bloodthirsty New Zealanders—all have

ventured their souls on Christ's promises of pardon, and none have ever found them fail. If the way which the Gospel sets before us were a new and untraveled way, we might well feel faint-hearted. But it is not so. It is an old path. It is a path worn by the feet of many pilgrims, and a path in which the footsteps are all one way. The treasury of Christ's mercies has never been found empty. The well of living waters has never proved dry.

Besides this, it is a *present forgiveness*. All that believe in Jesus are at once justified from all things (Acts 13:39). The very day the younger son returned to his father's house he was clothed with the best robe, had the ring put on his hand, and the shoes on his feet (Luk 15:22). The very day Zacchaeus received Jesus he heard those comfortable words, "This day is salvation come to this house" (Luk 19:9). The very day that David said, "I have sinned against the Lord," he was told by Nathan, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin" (2Sa 12:13). The very day you first flee to Christ, your sins are all removed. Your pardon is not a thing far away, to be obtained only after many years. It is nigh at hand. It is close to you, within your reach, all ready to be bestowed. Believe, and that very moment it is your own. "He that believeth is not condemned" (Joh 3:18). It is not said, "He shall not be," or "will not be," but "*is not*." From the time of his believing, condemnation is gone. "He that believeth...hath everlasting life" (Joh 3:36). It is not said, "He shall have," or "will have," it is "*hath*." It is his own as surely as if he was in heaven, though not evidently so to his own eyes. You must not think forgiveness will be nearer to a believer in the Day of Judgment than it was in the hour he first believed. His complete salvation from the *power* of sin is every year nearer and nearer to him; but as to his forgiveness and justification, and deliverance from the *guilt* of sin, it is a finished work from the very minute he first commits himself to Christ.

Last, and best of all, it is an *everlasting forgiveness*. It is not like Shimei's pardon—a pardon that may some time be revoked and taken away (1Ki 2:9). Once justified, you are justified for ever. Once written down in the book of life, your name shall never be blotted out. The sins of God's children are said to be cast into the depths of the sea, to be sought for and not found, to be remembered no more, to be cast behind God's back (Mic 7:19; Jer 50:20; 31:34; Isa 38:17). Some people fancy they may be justified one year and condemned another; children of adoption at one time, and strangers by and by; heirs of the kingdom in the beginning of their days, and yet servants of the devil in their end. I cannot find this in the Bible. It seems to me to overturn the good news of the Gospel altogether, and to tear up its comforts by the roots. I believe the salvation Jesus offers is an everlasting salvation, and a pardon once sealed with His blood shall never be reversed.

I have set before you the nature of the forgiveness offered to you. I have told you but a little of it, for my words are weaker than my will. The half of it remains untold. The greatness of it is far more than any report of mine. But I think I have said enough to show you it is worth the seeking, and I can wish you nothing better than that you may strive to make it your own.

Do you call it nothing to look forward to death without fear, and to judgment without doubtings, and to eternity without a sinking heart? Do you call it nothing to feel the

world slipping from your grasp, and to see the grave getting ready for you, and the valley of the shadow of death opening before your eyes, and yet to be not afraid? Do you call it nothing to be able to think of the great day of account, the throne, the books, the Judge, the assembled worlds, the revealing of secrets, the final sentence, and yet to feel, "I am safe"? This is the portion, and this the privilege of a forgiven soul.

Such an one is *on a rock*. When the rain of God's wrath descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, his feet shall not slide, his habitation shall be sure.

Such an one is *in an ark*. When the last fiery deluge is sweeping over all things on the surface of the earth, it shall not come nigh him. He shall be caught up, and borne securely above it all.

Such an one is *in an hiding place*. When God arises to judge terribly the earth, and men are calling to rocks and mountains to fall upon them and cover them, the Everlasting Arms shall be thrown around him, and the storm shall pass over his head. He shall "abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa 91:1).

Such an one is *in a city of refuge*. The accuser of the brethren can lay no charge against him. The law cannot condemn him. There is a wall between him and the avenger of blood. The enemies of his soul cannot hurt him. He is in a secure sanctuary.

Such an one is *rich*. He has treasure in heaven which cannot be affected by worldly changes, compared to which Peru and California are nothing at all. He need not envy the richest merchants and bankers. He has a portion that will endure when bank-notes and sovereigns are worthless things. He can say, like the Spanish ambassador, when shown the treasury at Venice, "My Master's treasury has no bottom." He has Christ.

Such an one is *insured*. He is ready for anything that may happen. Nothing can harm him. Banks may break, and governments may be overturned. Famine and pestilence may rage around him. Sickness and sorrow may visit his own fireside. But still he is ready for all: ready for health, ready for disease; ready for tears, ready for joy; ready for poverty, ready for plenty; ready for life, ready for death. He has Christ. He is a pardoned soul. "Blessed" indeed "is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered" (Psa 32:1).

How will any one escape if he neglects so great salvation? Why should you not lay hold on it at once, and say, Pardon me, even me also, O my Saviour! What would you have, if the way I have set before you does not satisfy you? Come while the door is open. Ask, and you shall receive.

IV. Some Marks of Having Found Forgiveness

Let me, in the last place, supply the readers of this paper with some marks of having found forgiveness. I dare not leave out this point. Too many persons presume they are forgiven, who have no evidence to show. Not a few cannot think it possible they are forgiven, who are plainly in the way to heaven, though they may not see it themselves. I would fain raise hope in some, and self-inquiry in others; and to do this, let me set down in order the leading marks of a forgiven soul.

(a) Forgiven souls *hate sin*. They can enter most fully into the words of our Communion Service: "The remembrance of sin is grievous unto them, and the burden of it is intolerable." It is the serpent which bit them; how should they not shrink from it with horror? It is the poison which brought them to the brink of eternal death; how should they not loathe it with a godly disgust? It is the Egyptian enemy which kept them in hard bondage; how should not the very memory of it be bitter to their hearts? It is the disease of which they carry the marks and scars about them, and from which they have scarcely recovered; well may they dread it, flee from it, and long to be delivered altogether from its power! Remember how the woman in Simon's house wept over the feet of Jesus (Luk 7:38). Remember how the Ephesians publicly burned their wicked books (Acts 19:19). Remember how Paul mourned over his youthful transgressions: "I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1Co 15:9). If you and sin are friends, you and God are not yet reconciled. You are not meet for heaven; for one main part of heaven's excellence is the absence of all sin.

(b) Forgiven souls *love Christ*. This is that one thing they can say, if they dare say nothing else: they do love Christ. His person, His offices, His work, His name, His cross, His blood, His words, His example, His day, His ordinances—all, all are precious to forgiven souls. The ministry which exalts Him most, is that which they *enjoy* most. The books which are most full of Him, are most pleasant to their minds. The people on earth they feel most drawn to, are those in whom they see something of Christ. His name is as ointment poured forth, and comes with a peculiar sweetness to their ears (Sol 1:3). They would tell you they cannot help feeling as they do. He is their Redeemer, their Shepherd, their Physician, their King, their strong Deliverer, their gracious Guide, their hope, their joy, their All. Were it not for Him they would be of all men most miserable. They would as soon consent that you should take the sun out of the sky, as Christ out of their religion. Those people who talk of "the Lord," and "the Almighty," and "the Deity," and so forth, but have not a word to say about Christ, are in anything but a right state of mind. What saith the Scripture? "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him" (Joh 5:23). "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema" (1Co 16:22).

(c) Forgiven souls *are humble*. They cannot forget that they owe all they have and hope for to free grace, and this keeps them lowly. They are brands plucked from the fire, debtors who could not pay for themselves, captives who must have remained in prison for ever but for undeserved mercy, wandering sheep who were ready to perish when the Shepherd found them—and what right then have they to be proud? I do not deny that there are proud saints. But this I do say, they are of all God's creatures the most inconsistent, and of all God's children the most likely to stumble and pierce themselves with many sorrows. Forgiveness more often produces the spirit of Jacob: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant" (Gen 32:10); and of Hezekiah: "I shall go softly all my years" (Isa 38:15); and of the Apostle Paul: "I am less than the least of all saint...chief of sinners" (Eph 3:8; 1Ti 1:15). When

you and I have nothing we can call our own but sin and weakness, there is surely no garment that becomes us so well as humility.

(d) Forgiven souls are holy. Their chief desire is to please Him who has saved them, to do His will, to glorify Him in body and in Spirit, which are His. “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?” (Psa 116:12), is a leading principle in a pardoned heart. It was the remembrance of Jesus showing mercy that made Paul in labours so abundant, and in doing good so unwearied. It was a sense of pardon that made Zaccheus say, “The half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luk 19:8). If any one points out to me believers who are in a carnal, slothful state of soul, I reply in the words of Peter, “They have forgotten they were purged from their old sins” (2Pe 1:9). But if you show me a man deliberately living an unholy and licentious life, and yet boasting that his sins are forgiven, I answer, “He is under a ruinous delusion, and is not forgiven at all.” I would not believe he is forgiven if an angel from heaven affirmed it, and I charge you not to believe it too. Pardon of sin and love of sin are like oil and water—they will never go together. All that are washed in the blood of Christ are also sanctified by the Spirit of Christ.

(e) Forgiven souls are forgiving. They do as they have been done by. They look over the offences of their brethren. They endeavour to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved” them, and gave Himself for them (Eph 5:2). They remember how God for Christ’s sake forgave them, and endeavour to do the same towards their fellow-creatures. Has He forgiven them pounds,⁵³ and shall they not forgive a few pence?⁵⁴ Doubtless in this, as in every thing else, they come short; but this is their desire and their aim. A spiteful, quarrelsome Christian is a scandal to his profession. It is very hard to believe that such an one has ever sat at the foot of the cross and has ever considered how he is praying against himself every time he uses the Lord’s Prayer. Is he not saying as it were, “Father, do not forgive me my trespasses at all”? But it is still harder to understand what such a one would do in heaven, if he got there. All ideas of heaven in which forgiveness has not a place, are castles in the air and vain fancies. Forgiveness is the way by which every saved soul enters heaven. Forgiveness is the only title by which he remains in heaven. Forgiveness is the eternal subject of song with all the redeemed who inhabit heaven. Surely an unforgiving soul in heaven would find his heart completely out of tune. Surely we know nothing of Christ’s love to us but the name of it, if we do not love our brethren.

I cannot conceal from you, these marks should raise in many minds great searchings of heart. I must be plain. I fear there are thousands of persons called Christians, who know nothing of these marks. They are baptized. They attend the services of their church. They would not on any account be reckoned infidels. But as to true repentance and saving faith, union with Christ and sanctification of the Spirit, they are “names and words” of which they know nothing at all.

⁵³ **pounds** – the basic monetary unit of the United Kingdom.

⁵⁴ **pence** – plural for penny. 100 pence equal one pound.

Now if this paper is read by such persons, it will probably either alarm them, or make them very angry. If it makes them angry, I shall be sorry. If it alarms them, I shall be glad. I want to alarm them. I want to awaken them from their present state. I want them to take in the great fact, that they are not yet forgiven, that they have not peace with God, and are on the high road to destruction.

I must say this, for I see no alternative. It seems neither Christian faithfulness, nor Christian charity, to keep it back. I see certain marks of pardoned souls laid down in Scripture. I see an utter want of these marks in many men and women around me. How then can I avoid the conclusion that they are not yet “forgiven”? And how shall I do the work of a faithful watchman, if I do not write it down plainly in so many words? Where is the use of crying Peace! Peace! when there is no peace? Where is the honesty of acting the part of a lying physician, and telling people there is no danger, when in reality they are fast drawing near to eternal death? Surely the blood of souls would be required at my hands if I wrote to you anything less than the truth. “If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” (1Co 14:8).

Examine yourself, then, before this subject is forgotten. Consider of what sort your religion is. Try it by the five marks I have just set before you. I have endeavoured to make them as broad and general as I can, for fear of causing any heart to be sad that God has not made sad. If you know anything of them, though it be but a little, I am thankful, and entreat you to go forward. But if you know nothing of them in your own experience, let me say, in all affection, I stand in doubt of you. I tremble for your soul.

Applications

1. Are you forgiven?

And now, before I conclude, let me put a home⁵⁵ question to everyone who reads this paper. It shall be short and plain, but it is all important: “Are you forgiven?”

I have told you all I can about forgiveness. Your need of forgiveness, the way of forgiveness, the encouragements to seek forgiveness, the marks of having found it, all have been placed before you. Bring the whole subject to bear upon your own heart, and ask yourself, “Am I forgiven? Either I am, or I am not. Which of the two is it?”

You believe perhaps, there is forgiveness of sins. You believe that Christ died for sinners, and that He offers a pardon to the most ungodly. But are you forgiven *yourself*? Have you yourself laid hold on Christ by faith, and found peace through His blood? What profit is there to you in forgiveness, except you get the benefit of it? Except you lay hold for your own soul, you will be as surely lost as if there was no forgiveness at all.

If ever your sins are to be forgiven, it must be now—now in this life, if ever in the life to come—now in this world, if they are to be found blotted out when Jesus comes again the second time. There must be actual business between you and Christ. Your sins must be laid on Him by faith: His righteousness must be laid on you. His blood must be ap-

⁵⁵ **home** – close, in the sense of bringing the question close to home or heart.

plied to your conscience, or else your sins will meet you in the Day of Judgment, and sink you into hell. Oh, how can you trifle when such things are at stake? How can you be content to leave it uncertain whether you are forgiven? Surely that a man can make his will, insure his life, give directions about his funeral, and yet leave his soul's affairs in uncertainty, is a wonderful⁵⁶ thing indeed.

2. Let me next give a solemn warning to every one who reads this paper, and knows in his conscience he is not forgiven.

Your soul is in awful danger. You may die this year. And if you die as you are, you are lost for ever. If you die without pardon, without pardon you will rise again at the last day. There is a sword over your head which hangs by a single hair. There is but a step between you and death. Oh, I wonder that you can sleep quietly in your bed!

You are *not yet forgiven*. Then what have you got by your religion? You go to church. You have a Bible, you have a Prayer-book, and perhaps a Hymn-book. You hear sermons. You join in services. It may be you go to the Lord's Table. But what have you really got after all? Any hope? Any peace? Any joy? Any comfort? Nothing: literally nothing! You have got nothing but mere temporal things, if you are not a pardoned soul.

You are *not yet forgiven*. But you trust God will be merciful. Yet why should He be merciful if you will not seek Him in His own appointed way? Merciful He doubtless is, wonderfully merciful to all who come to Him in the name of Jesus. But if you choose to despise His directions, and make a road to heaven of your own, you will find to your cost there is no mercy for you.

You are *not yet forgiven*. But you hope you will be some day. I cannot away with⁵⁷ that expression. It is like thrusting off the hand of conscience, and seizing it by the throat to stop its voice. Why are you more likely to seek forgiveness at a future time? Why should you not seek it now? Now is the time for gathering the bread of life. The day of the Lord is fast drawing near, and then no man can work (Joh 9:4; Rev 20:12). The Seventh trumpet will soon sound. The kingdoms of this world will soon become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev 11:15). Woe to the house which is found without the scarlet line, and without the mark of blood upon the door! (Jos 2:18; Exo 12:13).

Well, you may not feel your need of forgiveness now. But a time may come when you will want it. The Lord in mercy grant that it may not then be too late.

3. Let me next give an earnest invitation to all who read this paper and desire forgiveness.

I know not who you are, or what you have been in time past, but I say boldly, come to Christ by faith, and you shall have a pardon. High or low, rich or poor, young men and maidens, old men and children—you cannot be worse than Manasseh and Paul be-

⁵⁶ **wonderful** – strange, astonishing.

⁵⁷ **away with** – cannot bear or endure.

fore conversion, or than David and Peter after conversion—come all of you to Christ, and you shall be freely forgiven.

Think not for a moment that you have some great thing to do before you come to Christ. Such a notion is of the earth, earthy; the Gospel bids you come just as you are. Man's idea is to make his peace with God by repentance, and then come to Christ at last; the Gospel way is to receive peace from Christ first of all, and begin with Him. Man's idea is to amend, and turn over a new leaf, and so work his way up to reconciliation and friendship with God; the Gospel way is first to be friends with God through Christ, and then to work. Man's idea is to toil up the hill, and find life at the top; the Gospel way is first to live by faith in Christ, and then to do His will.

Come then, willing to receive, and not thinking how much you can bring. Come, willing to take what Christ offers, and not fancying you can give anything in return. Come with your sins, and no other qualification but a hearty desire for pardon, and, as sure as the Bible is true, you shall be saved.

You may tell me you are not worthy, you are not good enough, you are not elect. I answer, You are a sinner, and you want to be saved, and what more do you want? You are one of those whom Jesus came to save. Come to Him and you shall have life. Take with you words, and He will hear you graciously. Tell Him all your soul's necessities, and I know from the Bible He will give heed. Tell Him you have heard He receiveth sinners, and that you are such. Tell Him you have heard He has the keys of life in his hand, and entreat Him to let you in. Tell Him you come in dependence on His own promises, and ask Him to fulfil His word, and "do as [He] has said" (2Sa 7:25). Do this in simplicity and sincerity, and, my soul for yours, you shall not ask in vain. Do this and you shall find Him faithful and just to forgive your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1Jo 1:9).

4. Last of all, let me give a word of exhortation to all forgiven souls.

You are forgiven. Then know the full extent of your privileges, and learn to rejoice in the Lord. You and I are great sinners, but then we have a great Saviour. You and I have sinned sins that are past man's knowledge, but then we have "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," to rest upon (Eph 3:19). You and I feel our hearts to be a bubbling fountain of evil, but then we have another fountain of greater power in Christ's blood, to which we may daily resort. You and I have mighty enemies to contend with, but then the "Captain of our salvation" is mightier still, and is ever with us. Why should our hearts be troubled? Why should we be disquieted and cast down? O men and women of little faith that we are!—wherefore do we doubt?

Let us strive every year to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is sad to be content with a little religion. It is honourable to covet the best gifts. We ought not to be satisfied with the same kind of hearing, and reading, and praying, which satisfied us in years gone by. We ought to labour every year to throw more heart and reality into everything we do in our religion. To love Christ more intensely, to abhor evil more thoroughly, to cleave to what is good more closely, to watch even our

least ways more narrowly, to declare very plainly that we seek a country, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and be clothed with Him in every place and company—to see more, to feel more, to know more, to do more—these ought to be our aims and desires every year we begin. Truly there is room for improvement in us all.

Let us try to do good to the souls of others, more than we have done hitherto. Alas, it is poor work indeed to be swallowed up in our own spiritual concerns, and taken up with our own spiritual ailments, and never to think of others! We forget that there is such a thing as religious selfishness. Let us count it a sorrowful thing to go to heaven alone, and let us seek to draw companions with us. We ought never to forget that every man, woman, and child around us, will soon be either in heaven or hell. Let us say to others, as Moses did to Hobab, “Come with us, and we will do thee good” (Num 10:29). Oh, it is indeed a true saying, “He that watereth shall be watered also himself” (Pro 11:25). The idle, do-little, selfish Christian has little idea what he is missing.

Finally, let us say to everything in the world that interferes between ourselves and Jesus Christ, “Stand aside”; and let us dread *allowing* ourselves in the least evil habits, lest insensibly they rise up like a mist and hide Him from our eyes. In His light alone shall we see light and feel warmth, and separate from Him we shall find the world a dark and cold wilderness (Psa 36:9-12). We should call to mind the request of the Athenian philosopher, when the mightiest monarch on earth asked him what he desired most. “I have,” said he, “but one request to make; and that is that you would stand from between me and the sun.” Let this be the spirit in which you and I are found continually. Let us think lightly of the world’s gifts. Let us sit calmly under its cares. Let us care for nothing if we may only ever see the King’s face, if we may only ever abide in Christ.

If our sins are forgiven, our best things are yet to come.

Yet a little time, and we shall see “face to face,” and “know even as also” we have been known.” We shall “see the king in his beauty,” and “go no more out” (1Co 13:12; Isa 33:17; Rev 3:12). Blessed then is “he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Psa 32:1). ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

Sanctification

“This is the will of God, even your sanctification.”—1 Thessalonians 4:3

“Sanctify them through thy truth.”—John 17:17

The subject of sanctification is one which many, I fear, dislike exceedingly. Some even turn from it with scorn and disdain. The very last thing they would like is to be a “saint,” or a “sanctified” man. Yet the subject does not deserve to be treated in this way. It is not an enemy, but a friend.

It is a subject of the utmost importance to our souls. If the Bible be true, it is certain that unless we are “sanctified,” we shall not be saved. There are three things which, according to the Bible, are absolutely necessary to the salvation of every man and woman in Christendom. These three are: justification, regeneration, and sanctification. All three meet in every child of God—he is both born again, and justified, and sanctified. He that lacks any one of these three things is not a true Christian in the sight of God, and dying in that condition will not be found in heaven and glorified in the last day.

What does the Bible mean when it speaks of a “sanctified” man? Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only washes him from his sins in His own blood, but He also separates him from his natural love of sin and the world, puts a new principle in his heart, and makes him practically godly in life. The instrument by which the Spirit effects this work is generally the Word of God, though He sometimes uses afflictions and providential visitations “without the Word” (1Pe 3:1). The subject of this work of Christ by His Spirit is called in Scripture a “sanctified” man.

He who supposes that Jesus Christ only lived and died and rose again in order to provide justification and forgiveness of sins for His people, has yet much to learn. Whether he knows it or not, he is dishonoring our blessed Lord, and making Him only a half Savior. The Lord Jesus has undertaken everything that His people's souls require; not only to deliver them from the guilt of their sins by His atoning death, but from the dominion of their sins, by placing in their hearts the Holy Spirit—not only to justify, but also to sanctify them. He is, thus, not only their “righteousness,” but their “sanctification” (1Co 1:30). Let us hear what the Bible says: “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified” (Joh 17:19). “Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it” (Eph 5:25). “Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of

good works” (Tit 2:14). Christ “bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness” (1Pe 2:24). Christ hath reconciled you “in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in His sight” (Col 1:22). Let the meaning of these five texts be carefully considered. If words mean anything, they teach that Christ undertakes the sanctification, no less than the justification of His believing people. Both are alike provided for in that “everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure” (2Sa 23:5), of which the Mediator is Christ. In fact, Christ in one place is called: “He that sanctifieth,” and His People, “they who are sanctified” (Heb 2:11).

The subject before us is of such deep and vast importance, that it requires fencing, guarding, clearing up, and marking out on every side. A doctrine which is needful to salvation can never be too sharply developed or brought too fully into light. To clear away the confusion between doctrines and doctrines, which is so unhappily common among Christians, and to map out the precise relation between truths and truths in religion, is one way to attain accuracy in our theology. I shall therefore not hesitate to lay before my readers a series of connected propositions or statements, drawn from Scripture, which I think will be found useful in defining the exact nature of sanctification.

(1) Sanctification, then, is the invariable result of that vital union with Christ which true faith gives to a Christian—“He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (Joh 15:5). The branch which bears no fruit is no living branch of the vine. The union with Christ which produces no effect on heart and life is a mere formal union, which is worthless before God. The faith which has not a sanctifying influence on the character is no better than the faith of devils. It is a “dead faith,” because it is “alone.” It is not the gift of God. It is not the faith of God's elect. In short, where there is no sanctification of life, there is no real faith in Christ. True faith worketh by love. It constrains a man to live unto the Lord from a deep sense of gratitude for redemption. It makes him feel that he can never do too much for Him that died for him. Being much forgiven, he loves much. He whom the blood cleanses, walks in the light. He who has real lively hope in Christ, purifieth himself even as He is pure (Jam 2:17-20; Tit 1:1; Gal 5:6; 1Jo 1:7; 3:3).

(2) Sanctification, again, is the outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration. He that is born again and made a new creature, receives a new nature and a new principle, and always lives a new life. A regeneration which a man can have, and yet live carelessly in sin or worldliness—is a regeneration never mentioned in Scripture. He that is born of God doth not commit sin, doeth righteousness, loveth the brethren, keepeth himself, and overcometh the world (1Jo 2:29; 3:9-14; 5:4-18). In a word, where there is no sanctification there is no regeneration, and where there is no holy life there is no new birth. This is a hard saying to many minds; but, hard or not, it is Bible truth. It is written plainly, that he who is born of God is one whose “seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1Jo 3:9).

(3) Sanctification, again, is the only certain evidence of that indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is essential to salvation. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom 8:9). The Spirit never lies dormant and idle within the soul. He always makes His presence known by the fruit He causes to be borne in heart, character, and life. "The fruit of the Spirit," says St. Paul, "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," and such like (Gal 5:22). Where these things are to be found, there is the Spirit; where these things are wanting, men are dead before God. The Spirit is compared to the wind, and, like the wind, He cannot be seen by our bodily eyes. But just as we know there is a wind by the effect it produces on waves, and trees, and smoke, so we may know the Spirit is in a man by the effects He produces in the man's conduct. It is nonsense to suppose that we have the Spirit, if we do not also "walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). We may depend on it as a positive certainty, that where there is no holy living, there is no Holy Ghost. The seal that the Spirit stamps on Christ's people is sanctification. As many as are actually "led by the Spirit of God, they," and they only, "are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14).

(4) Sanctification, again, is the only sure mark of God's election. The names and number of the elect are a secret thing which God has wisely kept in His own power, and not revealed to man. It is not given to us in this world to study the pages of the book of life, and see if our names are there. But if there is one thing clearly and plainly laid down about election, it is this—that elect men and women may be known and distinguished by holy lives. It is expressly written that they are "elect through sanctification—chosen unto salvation through sanctification—predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son—and chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy." Hence, when Paul saw the working "faith" and laboring "love" and patient "hope" of the Thessalonian believers, he says, "I know your election of God" (1Pe 1:2; 2Th 2:13; Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4; 1Th 1:3-4). He that boasts of being one of God's elect, while he is willfully and habitually living in sin, is only deceiving himself, and talking wicked blasphemy. Of course, it is hard to know what people really are, and many who make a fair show outwardly in religion, may turn out at last to be rotten-hearted hypocrites. But where there is not, at least, some appearance of sanctification, we may be quite certain there is no election.

(5) Sanctification, again, is a thing that will always be seen. Like the Great Head of the church, from whom it springs, it "cannot be hid." "Every tree is known by his own fruit" (Luk 6:44). A truly sanctified person may be so clothed with humility, that he can see in himself nothing but infirmity and defects. Like Moses, when he came down from the Mount, he may not be conscious that his face shines. Like the righteous, in the mighty parable of the sheep and the goats, he may not see that he has done anything worthy of his Master's notice and commendation: "When saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee?" (Mat 25:37). But whether he sees it himself or not, others will always see in him a tone, and taste, and character, and habit of life unlike that of other men. The very idea of a man being "sanctified," while no holiness can be seen in his life, is flat nonsense

and a misuse of words. Light may be very dim; but if there is only a spark in a dark room it will be seen. Life may be very feeble; but if the pulse only beats a little, it will be felt. It is just the same with a sanctified man: his sanctification will be something felt and seen, though he himself may not understand it. A "saint" in whom nothing can be seen but worldliness or sin, is a kind of monster not recognized in the Bible.

(6) Sanctification, again, is a thing for which every believer is responsible. In saying this I would not be mistaken. I hold as strongly as anyone that every man on earth is accountable to God and that all the lost will be speechless and without excuse at the last day. Every man has power to "lose his own soul" (Mat 16:26). But while I hold this, I maintain that believers are eminently and peculiarly responsible, and under a special obligation to live holy lives. They are not as others, dead and blind and unrenewed: they are alive unto God, and have light and knowledge, and a new principle within them. Whose fault is it if they are not holy, but their own? On whom can they throw the blame if they are not sanctified, but themselves? God, who has given them grace and a new heart, and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for His praise. This is a point which is far too much forgotten. A man who professes to be a true Christian, while he sits still, content with a very low degree of sanctification (if indeed he has any at all), and coolly tells you he "can do nothing," is a very pitiable sight, and a very ignorant man. Against this delusion let us watch and be on our guard. The Word of God always addresses its precepts to believers as accountable and responsible beings. If the Savior of sinners gives us renewing grace, and calls us by His Spirit, we may be sure that He expects us to use our grace, and not to go to sleep. It is forgetfulness of this which causes many believers to "grieve the Holy Spirit," and makes them very useless and uncomfortable Christians.

(7) Sanctification, again, is a thing which grows. A man may climb from one step to another in holiness, and be far more sanctified at one period of his life than another. More pardoned and more justified than he is when he first believes, he cannot be, though he may feel it more. More sanctified he certainly may be, because every grace in his new character may be strengthened, enlarged, and deepened. This is the evident meaning of our Lord's last prayer for His disciples, when He used the words, "Sanctify them"; and of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians, "The very God of peace sanctify you" (Joh 17:17; 1Th 5:23). In both cases the expression plainly implies the possibility of increased sanctification; while such an expression as "justify them" is never once in Scripture applied to a believer, because he cannot be more justified than he is. I can find no warrant in Scripture for the doctrine of "imputed sanctification." It is a doctrine which seems to me to confuse things that differ, and to lead to very evil consequences. Not least, it is a doctrine which is flatly contradicted by the experience of all the most eminent Christians. If there is any point on which God's holiest saints agree it is this: that they see more, and know more, and feel more, and do more, and repent more, and believe more, as they get on in spiritual life, and in proportion to the closeness of their

walk with God. In short, they “grow in grace,” as Peter exhorts believers to do; and “abound more and more,” according to the words of Paul (2Pe 3:18; 1Th 4:1).

(8) Sanctification, again, is a thing which depends greatly on a diligent use of Scriptural means. When I speak of “means,” I have in view Bible-reading, private prayer, regular attendance on public worship, regular hearing of God's Word, and regular reception of the Lord's Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of any eminent saint who ever neglected them. They are the appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul, and strengthens the work which He has begun in the inward man. Let men call this legal doctrine if they please, but I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no “spiritual gains without pains.” I should as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who contented himself with sowing his fields and never looking at them till harvest, as expect a believer to attain much holiness who was not diligent about his Bible-reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sundays. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.

(9) Sanctification, again, is a thing which does not prevent a man having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict. By conflict I mean a struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, the flesh and the spirit, which are to be found together in every believer (Gal 5:17). A deep sense of that struggle, and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it, are no proof that a man is not sanctified. Nay, rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition, and prove that we are not dead, but alive. A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within. He may be known by his warfare as well as by his peace. In saying this, I do not forget that I am contradicting the views of some well-meaning Christians, who hold the doctrine called “sinless perfection.” I cannot help that. I believe that what I say is confirmed by the language of Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans. That chapter I commend to the careful study of all my readers. I am quite satisfied that it does not describe the experience of an unconverted man, or of a young and unestablished Christian; but of an old experienced saint in close communion with God. None but such a man could say, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22). I believe, furthermore, that what I say is proved by the experience of all the most eminent servants of Christ that have ever lived. The full proof is to be seen in their journals, their autobiographies, and their lives. Believing all this, I shall never hesitate to tell people that inward conflict is no proof that a man is not holy, and that they must not think they are not sanctified because they do not feel entirely free from inward struggle. Such freedom we shall doubtless have in heaven; but we shall never enjoy it in this world. The heart of the best Christian, even at his best, is a field occupied by two rival camps, and the “company of two armies” (Song 6:13).

(10) Sanctification, again, is a thing which cannot justify a man, and yet it pleases God. This may seem wonderful, and yet it is true. The holiest actions of the holiest saint

that ever lived are all more or less full of defects and imperfections. They are either wrong in their motive or defective in their performance, and in themselves are nothing better than “splendid sins,” deserving God's wrath and condemnation. To suppose that such actions can stand the severity of God's judgment, atone for sin, and merit heaven, is simply absurd. “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified...We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:20, 28). The only righteousness in which we can appear before God is the righteousness of another—even the perfect righteousness of our Substitute and Representative, Jesus Christ the Lord. His work, and not our work, is our only title to heaven. This is a truth which we should be ready to die to maintain.

For all this, however, the Bible distinctly teaches that the holy actions of a sanctified man, although imperfect, are pleasing in the sight of God. “With such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb 13:16). “Obey your parents...for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Col 3:20). “We do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1Jo 3:22). Let this never be forgotten, for it is a very comfortable doctrine. Just as a parent is pleased with the efforts of his little child to please him, though it be only by picking a daisy or walking across a room, so is our Father in heaven pleased with the poor performances of His believing children. He looks at the motive, principle, and intention of their actions, and not merely at their quantity and quality. He regards them as members of His own dear Son, and for His sake, wherever there is a single eye, He is well-pleased.

(11) Sanctification, again, is a thing which will be found absolutely necessary as a witness to our character in the great Day of Judgment. It will be utterly useless to plead that we believed in Christ, unless our faith has had some sanctifying effect, and been seen in our lives. Evidence, evidence, evidence, will be the one thing wanted when the great white throne is set, when the books are opened, when the graves give up their tenants, when the dead are arraigned before the bar of God. Without some evidence that our faith in Christ was real and genuine, we shall only rise again to be condemned. I can find no evidence that will be admitted in that day, except sanctification. The question will not be how we talked and what we professed, but how we lived and what we did. Let no man deceive himself on this point. If anything is certain about the future, it is certain that there will be a judgment; and if anything is certain about judgment, it is certain that men's “works” and “doings” will be considered and examined in it (Joh 5:29; 2Co 5:10; Rev 20:13). He that supposes works are of no importance, because they cannot justify us, is a very ignorant Christian. Unless he opens his eyes, he will find to his cost that if he comes to the bar of God without some evidence of grace, he had better never have been born.

(12) Sanctification, in the last place, is absolutely necessary, in order to train and prepare us for heaven. Most men hope to go to heaven when they die; but few, it may be feared, take the trouble to consider whether they would enjoy heaven if they got there. Heaven is essentially a holy place; its inhabitants are all holy; its occupations are all holy. To be really happy in heaven it is clear and plain that we must be somewhat trained and made ready for heaven while we are on earth. The notion of a purgatory after death,

which shall turn sinners into saints, is a lying invention of man, and is nowhere taught in the Bible. We must be saints before we die, if we are to be saints afterwards in glory. The favorite idea of many, that dying men need nothing except absolution and forgiveness of sins to fit them for their great change, is a profound delusion. We need the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the work of Christ; we need renewal of the heart as well as the atoning blood; we need to be sanctified as well as to be justified. It is common to hear people saying on their death-beds, "I only want the Lord to forgive my sins, and take me to rest." But those who say such things forget that the rest of heaven would be utterly useless if we had no heart to enjoy it! What could an unsanctified man do in heaven, if by any chance he got there? Let that question be fairly looked in the face, and fairly answered. No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element, and where all around him is not congenial to his tastes, habits, and character. When an eagle is happy in an iron cage, when a sheep is happy in the water, when an owl is happy in the blaze of noonday sun, when a fish is happy on the dry land—then, and not till then, will I admit that the unsanctified man could be happy in heaven.

I lay down these twelve propositions about sanctification with a firm persuasion that they are true, and I ask all who read these pages to ponder them well. Each of them would admit of being expanded and handled more fully, and all of them deserve private thought and consideration. Some of them may be disputed and contradicted; but I doubt whether any of them can be overthrown or proved untrue. I only ask for them a fair and impartial hearing. I believe in my conscience that they are likely to assist men in attaining clear views of sanctification. ❧

Available in print as a tract from Chapel Library.

Holiness: 1. Sin

"Sin is the transgression of the law."—1 John 3:4

Knowledge of Sin Is Fundamental

He that wishes to attain right views about Christian holiness, must begin by examining the vast and solemn subject of sin. He must dig down very low if he would build high. A mistake here is most mischievous. Wrong views about holiness are generally traceable to wrong views about human corruption. I make no apology for beginning this volume about holiness by making some plain statements about sin.

The plain truth is that a right knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are “words and names” which convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes anyone a new creature in Christ, is to send light into his heart, and show him that he is a guilty sinner. The material creation in Genesis began with “light,” and so also does the spiritual creation. God “shines into our hearts” by the work of the Holy Ghost, and then spiritual life begins (2Co 4:6). Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies, and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul’s disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of the chief wants of the church in the nineteenth century has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.

I. Definition of Sin

I shall begin the subject by supplying some *definition of sin*. We are all of course familiar with the terms “sin” and “sinners.” We talk frequently of “sin” being in the world, and of men committing “sins.” But what do we mean by these terms and phrases? Do we really know? I fear there is much mental confusion and haziness on this point. Let me try, as briefly as possible, to supply an answer.

I say, then, that “sin,” speaking generally, is, as the Ninth Article⁵⁸ of the Church of England declares, “the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone (*quam longissime* is the Latin) from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth alway against the spirit; and, therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation.” Sin, in short, is *that vast moral disease which affects the whole human race*, of every rank, and class, and name, and nation, and people, and tongue; a disease from which there never was but one born of woman that was free. Need I say that One was Christ Jesus the Lord?

I say, furthermore, that “a sin,” to speak more particularly, consists in *doing, saying, thinking, or imagining, anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God*. “Sin,” in short, as the Scripture saith, is “the transgression of the law” (1Jo 3:4). The slightest, outward or inward departure from absolute mathematical parallelism with God’s revealed will and character constitute a sin, and at once makes us guilty in God’s sight.

Of course, I need not tell any one who reads his Bible with attention, that a man may break God’s law in heart and thought, when there is no overt and visible act of wickedness. Our Lord has settled that point beyond dispute in the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 5:21-28). Even a poet of our own has said, “A man may smile and smile, and be a villain.”

Again, I need not tell a careful student of the New Testament, that there are sins of *omission* as well as *commission*, and that we sin, as our Prayer-book justly reminds us,

⁵⁸ The confession of faith of the Church of England is called the *Thirty-nine Articles*. It was derived in 1563 and reflects the teachings of the protestant Reformation.

by “leaving undone the things we ought to do,” as really as by “doing the things we ought not to do.” The solemn words of our Master in the *Gospel of Matthew* place this point also beyond dispute. It is there written, “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire: for I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink” (Mat 25:41-42). It was a deep and thoughtful saying of holy Archbishop Usher, just before he died: “Lord, forgive me all my sins, and specially my sins of omission.”

But I do think it necessary in these times to remind my readers that a man may commit sin and yet be ignorant of it, and fancy himself innocent when he is guilty. I fail to see any scriptural warrant for the modern assertion that “Sin is not sin to us until we discern it and are conscious of it.” On the contrary, in the 4th and 5th chapters of that unduly neglected book, *Leviticus*, and in the 15th of *Numbers*, I find Israel distinctly taught that there were sins of ignorance which rendered people unclean, and needed atonement (Lev 4:1-35; 5:14-19; Num 15:25-29). And I find our Lord expressly teaching that “the servant who knew not his master’s will and did it not,” was not excused on account of his ignorance, but was “beaten” or punished (Luk 12:48). We shall do well to remember, that when we make the measure of our sinfulness to be our own miserably imperfect knowledge and consciousness, we are on very dangerous ground. A deeper study of *Leviticus* might do us much good.

II. Origin and Source of Sin

Concerning the *origin and source* of this vast moral disease called “sin,” I must say something. I fear the views of many professing Christians on this point are sadly defective and unsound. I dare not pass it by. Let us, then, have it fixed down in our minds that the sinfulness of man does not begin from without, but from within. It is not the result of bad training in early years.

It is not picked up from bad companions and bad examples, as some weak Christians are too fond of saying. No! It is a family disease, which we all inherit from our first parents, Adam and Eve, and with which we are born. Created “in the image of God,” innocent and righteous at first, our parents fell from original righteousness and became sinful and corrupt. And from that day to this all men and women are born in the image of fallen Adam and Eve, and inherit a heart and nature inclined to evil. “By one man sin entered into the world.” “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” “We are by nature children of wrath.” “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” “Out of the heart [naturally, as out of a fountain] proceed evil thoughts, adulteries,” and the like (Joh 3:6; Eph 2:3; Rom 5:12; 8:7; Mar 7:21).

The fairest babe that has entered life this year, and become the sunbeam of a family, is not, as its mother perhaps fondly calls it, a little “angel,” or a little “innocent,” but a little “sinner.” Alas! as it lies smiling and crowing in its cradle, that little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness! Only watch it carefully, as it grows in stature and its mind develops, and you will soon detect in it an incessant tendency to that which is selfish and bad, and a backwardness to that which is good. You will see in it

the buds and germs of deceit, evil temper, selfishness, self-will, obstinacy, greediness, envy, jealousy, passion—which, if indulged and let alone, will shoot up with painful rapidity. Who taught the child these things? Where did he learn them? The Bible alone can answer these questions!

Of all the foolish things that parents say about their children, there is none worse than the common saying, “My son has a good heart at the bottom. He is not what he ought to be; but he has fallen into bad hands. Public schools are bad places. The tutors neglect the boys. Yet he has a good heart at the bottom.” The truth, unhappily, is diametrically the other way. The first cause of all sin lies in the natural corruption of the boy’s own heart, and not in the school.

III. Extent of Sin

Concerning the *extent* of this vast moral disease of man called sin, let us beware that we make no mistake. The only safe ground is that which is laid for us in Scripture. “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart” is by nature evil, and that continually (Gen 6:5). “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). Sin is a disease which pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, the will, are all more or less infected. Even the conscience is so blinded that it cannot be depended on as a sure guide, and is as likely to lead men wrong as right, unless it is enlightened by the Holy Ghost. In short, “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness” about us (Isa 1:6). The disease may be veiled under a thin covering of courtesy, politeness, good manners, and outward decorum; but it lies deep down in the constitution.

I admit fully that man has many grand and noble faculties left about him, and that in arts and sciences and literature he shows immense capacity. But the fact still remains that in spiritual things he is utterly “dead,” and has no natural knowledge, or love, or fear of God. His best things are so interwoven and intermingled with corruption, that the contrast only brings out into sharper relief the truth and extent of the fall. That one and the same creature should be in some things...

- so high and in others so low,
- so great and yet so little,
- so noble and yet so mean,
- so grand in his conception and execution of material things, and yet so groveling and debased in his affections,
- able to plan and erect buildings like those to Carnac and Luxor in Egypt, and the Parthenon at Athens, and yet worship vile gods and goddesses, and birds, and beasts, and creeping things,
- able to produce tragedies like those of Sophocles, and histories like that of Thucydides, and yet be a slave to abominable vices like those described in the first chapter of *Romans*—

all this is a sore puzzle to those who sneer at “God’s Word written,” and scoff at us as Bibliolaters.

But it is a knot that we can untie with the Bible in our hands. We can acknowledge that man has all the marks of a majestic temple about him, a temple in which God once dwelt, but a temple which is now in utter ruins—a temple in which a shattered window here, and a doorway there, and a column there, still give some faint idea of the magnificence of the original design, but a temple which from end to end has lost its glory and fallen from its high estate. And we say that nothing solves the complicated problem of man’s condition but the “doctrine of original or birth-sin” and the crushing effects of the fall.

Let us remember, besides this, that every part of the world bears testimony to the fact that sin is the universal disease of all mankind. Search the globe from east to west and from pole to pole, search every nation of every clime in the four quarters of the earth, search every rank and class in our own country from the highest to the lowest—and under every circumstance and condition, the report will be always the same. The remotest islands in the Pacific Ocean, completely separate from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, beyond the reach alike of Oriental luxury and Western arts and literature— islands inhabited by people ignorant of books, money, steam, and gunpowder— uncontaminated by the vices of modern civilization—in these very islands have always been found, when first discovered, the abode of the vilest forms of lust, cruelty, deceit, and superstition. If the inhabitants have known nothing else, they have always known how to sin! Everywhere the human heart is naturally “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). For my part, I know no stronger proof of the inspiration of *Genesis* and the Mosaic account of the origin of man, than the power, extent, and universality of sin. Grant that mankind have all sprung from one pair, and that this pair fell (as *Genesis* 3 tells us), and the state of human nature everywhere is easily accounted for. Deny it; as many do, and you are at once involved in inexplicable difficulties. In a word, the uniformity and universality of human corruption supply one of the most unanswerable instances of the enormous “difficulties of infidelity.”

Sin in the life of the believer

After all, I am convinced that the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin is the pertinacity with which it cleaves to man even after he is converted and has become the subject of the Holy Ghost’s operations. To use the language of the Ninth Article,⁵⁹ “this infection of nature doth remain...even in them that are regenerate.” So deeply planted are the roots of human corruption, that even after we are born again, renewed, “washed, sanctified, justified,” and made living members of Christ, these roots remain alive in the bottom of our hearts, and, like the leprosy in the walls of the house, we never get rid of them until the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved. Sin, no doubt, in the believ-

⁵⁹ The Church of England’s *Thirty-nine Articles*, a conservative confession of faith.

er's heart, has no longer dominion. It is checked, controlled, mortified, and crucified by the expulsive power of the new principle of grace.

The life of a believer is a life of victory, and not of failure. But the very struggles which go on within his bosom, the fight that he finds it needful to fight daily, the watchful jealousy which he is obliged to exercise over his inner man, the contest between the flesh and the spirit, the inward "groanings" which no one knows but he who has experienced them all—all testify to the same great truth, all show the enormous power and vitality of sin. Mighty indeed must that foe be who even when crucified is still alive! Happy is that believer who understands it, and while he rejoices in Christ Jesus has no confidence in the flesh; and while he says, "Thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory," never forgets to watch and pray lest he fall into temptation!

IV. Offensiveness of Sin

Concerning the *guilt, vileness, and offensiveness* of sin in the sight of God, my words shall be few. I say "few" advisedly. I do not think, in the nature of things, that mortal man can at all realize the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the sight of that holy and perfect One with whom we have to do. On the one hand, God is that eternal Being who "chargeth His angels with folly," and in whose sight the very "heavens are not clean." He is One who reads thoughts and motives as well as actions, and requires "truth in the inward parts" (Job 4:18; 15:15; Psa 51:6).

We, on the other hand—poor blind creatures, here today and gone tomorrow, born in sin, surrounded by sinners, living in a constant atmosphere of weakness, infirmity, and imperfection—can form none but the most inadequate conceptions of the hideousness of evil. We have no line to fathom it, and no measure by which to gauge it. The blind man can see no difference between a masterpiece of Titian or Raphael, and the Queen's Head on a village signboard. The deaf man cannot distinguish between a penny whistle and a cathedral organ. The very animals whose smell is most offensive to us have no idea that they are offensive, and are not offensive to one another. And man, fallen man, I believe, can have no just idea what a vile thing sin is in the sight of that God whose handiwork is absolutely perfect—perfect whether we look through telescope or microscope—perfect in the formation of a mighty planet like Jupiter, with his satellites, keeping time to a second as he rolls round the sun—perfect in the formation of the smallest insect that crawls over a foot of ground.

But let us nevertheless settle it firmly in our minds...

- that sin is "the abominable thing that God hateth,"
- that God "is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon that which is evil,"
- that the least transgression of God's law makes us "guilty of all,"
- that "the soul that sinneth shall die,"
- that "the wages of sin is death,"
- that God shall "judge the secrets of men,"

- that there is a worm that never dies, and a fire that is not quenched,
- that “the wicked shall be turned into hell” and “shall go away into everlasting punishment,” and
- that “nothing that defiles shall in any wise enter heaven.”

(Jer 44:4; Hab 1:13; Jam 2:10; Eze 18:4; Rom 6:23; Rom 2:16; Mar 9:44; Psa 9:17; Mat 25:46; Rev 21:27.) These are indeed tremendous words, when we consider that they are written in the Book of a most merciful God!

No proof of the fulness of sin, after all, is so overwhelming and unanswerable as the cross and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the whole doctrine of His substitution and atonement. Terribly black must that guilt be for which nothing but the blood of the Son of God could make satisfaction. Heavy must that weight of human sin be which made Jesus groan and sweat drops of blood in agony at Gethsemane, and cry at Golgotha, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46). Nothing, I am convinced, will astonish us so much, when we awake in the resurrection day, as the view we shall have of sin, and the retrospect we shall take of our own countless shortcomings and defects. Never till the hour when Christ comes the second time shall we fully realize the “sinfulness of sin.” Well might George Whitefield say, “The anthem in heaven will be, ‘What hath God wrought!’”

V. Deceitfulness of Sin

One point only remains to be considered on the subject of sin, which I dare not pass over. That point is its *deceitfulness*. It is a point of most serious importance, and I venture to think it does not receive the attention which it deserves. You may see this deceitfulness in the incredible proneness of men to regard sin as less sinful and dangerous than it is in the sight of God; and in their readiness to extenuate⁶⁰ it, make excuses for it, and minimize its guilt. “It is but a little one! God is merciful! God is not extreme to mark what is done amiss! We mean well! One cannot be so particular! Where is the mighty harm? We only do as others!” Who is not familiar with this kind of language?

You may see it in the long string of smooth words and phrases which men have coined in order to designate things which God calls downright wicked and ruinous to the soul. What do such expressions as “fast,” “gay,” “wild,” “unsteady,” “thoughtless,” “loose” mean? They show that men try to cheat themselves into the belief that sin is not quite so sinful as God says it is, and that they are not so bad as they really are. You may see it in the tendency even of believers to indulge their children in questionable practices, and to bind their own eyes to the inevitable result of the love of money, of tampering with temptation, and sanctioning a low standard of family religion.

I fear we do not sufficiently realize the extreme subtlety of our soul’s disease. We are too apt to forget that temptation to sin will rarely present itself to us in its true colours, saying, “I am your deadly enemy, and I want to ruin you for ever in hell.” Oh, no! Sin comes to us, like Judas, with a kiss; and like Joab, with an outstretched hand and flatter-

⁶⁰ **extenuate** – to attempt to lessen magnitude or seriousness by providing partial excuses; to belittle.

ing words. The forbidden fruit seemed good and desirable to Eve; yet it cast her out of Eden. The walking idly on his palace roof seemed harmless enough to David; yet it ended in adultery and murder. Sin rarely seems sin at first beginnings. Let us then watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. We may give wickedness smooth names, but we cannot alter its nature and character in the sight of God. Let us remember St. Paul's words: "Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb 3:13). It is a wise prayer in our Litany, "From the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, good Lord, deliver us."

Self-abasement

And now, before I go further, let me briefly mention two thoughts which appear to me to rise with irresistible force out of the subject. On the one hand, I ask my readers to observe what deep reasons we all have for *humiliation* and *self-abasement*. Let us sit down before the picture of sin displayed to us in the Bible, and consider what guilty, vile, corrupt creatures we all are in the sight of God. What need we all have of that entire change of heart called regeneration, new birth, or conversion! What a mass of infirmity and imperfection cleaves to the very best of us at our very best! What a solemn thought it is, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord!" (Heb 12:14). What cause we have to cry with the publican, every night in our lives, when we think of our sins of omission as well as commission, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luk 18:13). How admirably suited are the general and Communion Confessions of the Prayer-book to the actual condition of all professing Christians! How well that language suits God's children which the Prayer-book puts in the mouth of every churchman before he goes up to the communion table, "The remembrance of our misdoings is grievous unto us; the burden is intolerable: Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past." How true it is that the holiest saint is in himself a miserable sinner, and a debtor to mercy and grace to the last moment of his existence!

With my whole heart I subscribe to that passage in Hooker's Sermon on Justification, which begins, "Let the holiest and best things we do be considered. We are never better affected unto God than when we pray; yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! How little reverence do we show unto the grand majesty of God unto whom we speak! How little remorse of our own miseries! How little taste of the sweet influence of His tender mercies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in saying, 'call upon me' (Psa 50:15), He had set us a very burdensome task? What I say may seem somewhat extreme; therefore, let every one judge, even as his own heart shall tell him, and not otherwise; I will but only make a demand! If God should yield unto us, not as unto Abraham (if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yea, or if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes this city should not be destroyed), but rather if He should make us an offer thus large: 1) search all the generations of men since the fall of our father Adam, 2) find one man that hath done one action which hath passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all, and 3) for that

one man's only action neither man nor angel should feel the torments which are prepared for both. Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men, the best things which we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned?"⁶¹

That witness is true. For my part I am persuaded the more light we have, the more we see our own sinfulness: the nearer we get to heaven, the more we are clothed with humility. In every age of the Church you will find it true, if you will study biographies, that the most eminent saints—men like Bradford, Rutherford, and McCheyne—have always been the humblest men.

Be thankful for grace

On the other hand, I ask my readers to observe how *deeply thankful* we ought to be for the glorious gospel of the grace of God. There is a remedy revealed for man's need, as wide and broad and deep as man's disease. We need not be afraid to look at sin, and study its nature; origin, power, extent, and vileness, if we only look at the same time at the almighty medicine provided for us in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. Yes...

- in the everlasting covenant of redemption, and in the Mediator of that covenant, Jesus Christ the righteous, perfect God and perfect Man in one Person,
- in the work that He did by dying for our sins and rising again for our justification, and in the offices that He fills as our Priest, Substitute, Physician, Shepherd, and Advocate,
- in the precious blood He shed which can cleanse from all sin in the everlasting righteousness that He brought in,
- in the perpetual intercession that He carries on as our Representative at God's right hand,
- in His power to save to the uttermost the chief of sinners, His willingness to receive and pardon the vilest, His readiness to bear with the weakest,
- in the grace of the Holy Spirit which He plants in the hearts of all His people, renewing, sanctifying and causing old things to pass away and all things to become new...

—in all this, and oh what a brief sketch it is!—in all this, I say, there is a full, perfect, and complete medicine for the hideous disease of sin. Awful as the right view of sin undoubtedly is, no one need faint and despair, if he will take a right view of Jesus Christ at the same time. No wonder that old Flavel ends many a chapter of his admirable "Fountain of Life" with the touching words, "Blessed be God for Jesus Christ."

Applications

In bringing this mighty subject to a close, I feel that I have only touched the surface of it. It is one which cannot be thoroughly handled in a paper like this. He that would

⁶¹ Thomas Hooker (1586-1647): "Learned Discourse of Justification."

see it treated fully and exhaustively must turn to such masters of experimental theology as Owen, Burgess, Manton, Charnock, and the other giants of the Puritan school. On subjects like this there are no writers to be compared to the Puritans. It only remains for me to point out some practical issues to which the whole doctrine of sin may be profitably turned in the present day.

(a) I say, then, in the first place, that a scriptural view of sin is one of the ***best antidotes to that vague, dim, misty, hazy kind of theology*** which is so painfully current in the present age. It is vain to shut our eyes to the fact that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity now-a-days which you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nevertheless, is not full measure, good weight, and sixteen ounces to the pound. It is a Christianity in which there is undeniably “something about Christ, and something about grace, and something about faith, and something about repentance, and something about holiness;” but it is not the real “thing as it is” in the Bible. Things are out of place, and out of proportion.

As old Latimer would have said, it is a kind of “mingle-mangle,” and does no good. It neither exercises influence on daily conduct, nor comforts in life, nor gives peace in death. Those who hold it often awake too late to find that they have got nothing solid under their feet. Now I believe the likeliest way to cure this defective kind of religion is to bring forward more prominently the old scriptural truth about the sinfulness of sin. People will never set their faces decidedly towards heaven, and live like pilgrims, until they really feel that they are in danger of hell. Let us all try to revive the old teaching about sin, in nurseries, in schools, in training colleges, in Universities. Let us not forget that “the law is good if we use it lawfully,” and that “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (1Ti 1:8; Rom 3:20; 7:7). Let us bring the law to the front and press it on men’s attention. Let us expound and beat out the Ten Commandments, and show the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of their requirements. This is the way of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. We cannot do better than follow His plan. We may depend upon it, men will never come to Jesus, and stay with Jesus, and live for Jesus, unless they really know why they are to come, and what is their need!

Those whom the Spirit draws to Jesus are those whom the Spirit has convinced of sin. Without thorough conviction of sin, men may seem to come to Jesus and follow Him for a season, but they will soon fall away and return to the world.

(b) Next, a scriptural view of sin is one of the ***best tests of the extravagantly broad and liberal theology*** which is so much in vogue today. The tendency of modern thought is to reject creeds and every kind of bounds in religion. It is thought grand and wise to condemn no opinion whatsoever, and to pronounce all earnest and clever teachers to be trustworthy, however heterogeneous and mutually destructive their opinions may be. Everything forsooth is true, and nothing is false! Everybody is right, and nobody is wrong! Everybody is likely to be saved, and nobody is to be lost! The atonement and substitution of Christ, the personality of the devil, the miraculous element in Scripture, the reality and eternity of future punishment, all these mighty foundation-stones are coolly

tossed overboard, like lumber, in order to lighten the ship of Christianity, and enable it to keep pace with modern science. Stand up for these great verities, and you are called narrow, old-fashioned, and a theological fossil! Quote a text, and you are told that all truth is not confined to the pages of an ancient Jewish book, and that free inquiry has found out many things since the book was completed.

Now, I know nothing so likely to counteract this modern plague as constant statements about the nature, reality, vileness, power, and guilt of sin. We must charge home into the consciences of these men of broad views, and demand a plain answer to some plain questions. We must ask them to lay their hands on their hearts, and tell us whether their favourite opinions comfort them in the day of sickness, in the hour of death, by the bedside of dying parents, by the grave of beloved wife or child. We must ask them whether a vague *earnestness*, without definite doctrine, gives them peace at seasons like these. We must challenge them to tell us whether they do not sometimes feel a gnawing “something” within, which all the free inquiry and philosophy and science in the world cannot satisfy. And then we must tell them that this gnawing “something” is the sense of sin, guilt, and corruption, which they are leaving out in their calculations. And, above all, we must tell them that nothing will ever make them feel rest, but submission to the old doctrines of man’s ruin and Christ’s redemption, and simple child-like faith in Jesus.

(c) In the next place, a right view of sin is the ***best antidote to that sensuous, ceremonial, formal kind of Christianity***, which has swept over us like a flood in the last twenty-five years, and carried away so many before it. I can well believe that there is much that is attractive in this system of religion, to a certain mind-set, so long as the conscience is not fully enlightened. But when that wonderful part of our constitution called conscience is really awake and alive, I find it hard to believe that a sensuous ceremonial Christianity will thoroughly satisfy us. A little child is easily quieted and amused with gaudy toys and rattles, so long as it is not hungry; but once let it feel the cravings of nature within, and we know that nothing will satisfy it but *food*. Just so it is with man in the matter of his soul. Music, flowers, candles, incense, banners, processions, beautiful vestments, confessionals, and man-made ceremonies of a semi-Romish character, may do well enough for him under certain conditions. But once let him “awake and arise from the dead,” and he will not rest content with these things. They will seem to him mere solemn triflings, and a waste of time. Once let him see his *sin*, and he must see his *Saviour*. He feels stricken with a deadly disease, and nothing will satisfy him but the great Physician. He hungers and thirsts, and he must have nothing less than the bread of life. I may seem bold in what I am about to say; but I fearlessly venture the assertion, that four-fifths of the semi-Romanism of the last quarter of a century would never have existed if English people had been taught more fully and dearly the nature, vileness, and sinfulness of sin.

(d) In the next place, a right view of sin is one of the ***best antidotes to the overstrained theories of Perfection***, of which we hear so much in these times. I shall say but little about this, and in saying it I trust I shall not give offense. If those who press on us

perfection mean nothing more than an all-round consistency, and a careful attention to all the graces which make up the Christian character, reason would that we should not only bear with them, but agree with them entirely. By all means let us aim high. But if men really mean to tell us that here in this world a believer can attain to entire freedom from sin, live for years in unbroken and uninterrupted communion with God, and feel for months together not so much as one evil thought, I must honestly say that such an opinion appears to me very unscriptural.

I go even further. I say that the opinion is very dangerous to him that holds it, and very likely to depress, discourage, and keep back inquirers after salvation. I cannot find the slightest warrant in God's Word for expecting such perfection as this while we are in the body. I believe the words of our Fifteenth Article are strictly true—that "Christ alone is without sin; and that all we, the rest, though baptized and born again in Christ, offend in many things; and if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." To use the language of our first homily, "There be imperfections in our best works: we do not love God so much as we are bound to do, with all our hearts, mind, and power; we do not fear God so much as we ought to do; we do not pray to God but with many and great imperfections. We give, forgive, believe, live, and hope imperfectly; we speak, think, and do imperfectly; we fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh imperfectly. Let us, therefore, not be ashamed to confess plainly our state of imperfections." Once more I repeat what I have said, the best preservative against this temporary delusion about perfection which clouds some minds—for such I hope I may call it—is a clear, full, distinct understanding of the nature, sinfulness, and deceitfulness of sin.

(e) In the last place, a scriptural view of sin will prove an admirable ***antidote to the low views of personal holiness*** which are so painfully prevalent in these last days of the Church. This is a very painful and delicate subject. I know; but I dare not turn away from it. It has long been my sorrowful conviction that the standard of daily life among professing Christians in this country has been gradually falling. I am afraid that Christ-like charity, kindness, good-temper, unselfishness, meekness, gentleness, good-nature, self-denial, zeal to do good, and separation from the world, are far less appreciated than they ought to be, and than they used to be in the days of our fathers.

Into the causes of this state of things I cannot pretend to enter fully, and can only suggest conjectures for consideration. It may be that a certain profession of religion has become so fashionable and comparatively easy in the present age, that the streams which were once narrow and deep have become wide and shallow, and what we have gained in outward show we have lost in quality. It may be that the vast increase of wealth in the last twenty-five years has insensibly introduced a plague of worldliness, and self-indulgence, and love of ease into social life. What were once called luxuries are now comforts and necessities, and self-denial and "enduring hardness" are consequently little known. It may be that the enormous amount of controversy which marks this age has insensibly dried up our spiritual life. We have too often been content with zeal for orthodoxy, and have neglected the sober realities of daily practical godliness. Be the causes

what they may, I must declare my own belief that the result remains. There has been of late years a lower standard of personal holiness among believers than there used to be in the days of our fathers. The whole result is that *the Spirit is grieved!* The matter calls for much humiliation and searching of heart.

Remedies

As to the best remedy for the state of things I have mentioned, I shall venture to give an opinion. Other schools of thought in the Churches must judge for themselves. The cure for evangelical churchmen, I am convinced, is to be found in a clearer apprehension of the *nature and sinfulness of sin*. We need not go back to Egypt, and borrow semi-Romish practices in order to revive our spiritual life. We need not restore the confessional, or return to monasticism or asceticism. Nothing of the kind! We must simply repent and do our first works. We must return to first principles. We must go back to “the old paths.” We must sit down humbly in the presence of God, look the whole subject in the face, examine clearly what the Lord Jesus calls sin, and what the Lord Jesus calls “doing His will.”

We must then try to realize that it is *terribly possible* to live a careless, easy-going, half-worldly life, and yet at the same time to maintain evangelical principles and call ourselves evangelical people! Once let us see that sin is far viler, and far nearer to us, and sticks more closely to us than we supposed, and we shall be led, I trust and believe, to get nearer to Christ. Once drawn nearer to Christ, we shall drink more deeply out of His fullness, and learn more thoroughly to “live the life of faith” in Him, as St. Paul did. Once taught to live the life of faith in Jesus, and abiding in Him, we shall bear more fruit, shall find ourselves more strong for duty, more patient in trial, more watchful over our poor weak hearts, and more like our Master in all our little daily ways. Just in proportion as we realize how much Christ has done for us, shall we labour to do much for Christ. Much forgiven, we shall love much. In short, as the Apostle says, “with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image...even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Co 3:18).

Whatever some may lease⁶² to think or say, there can be no doubt that an increased feeling about holiness is one of the signs of the times. Conferences for the promotion of “spiritual life” are becoming common in the present day. The subject of “spiritual life” finds a place on Congress platforms almost every year. It has awakened an amount of interest throughout the land, for which we ought to be thankful. Any movement, based on sound principles, which helps to deepen our spiritual life and increase our personal holiness, will be a real blessing to the church. It will do much to draw us together and heal our unhappy divisions. It may bring down some fresh out-pouring of the grace of the Spirit, and be “life from the dead” in these later times. But sure I am, as I said in the beginning of this paper, we must begin low, if we would build high. I am convinced that

⁶² **lease** – give or allow.

the first step towards attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the amazing sinfulness of sin. ✎

From Holiness; available in print as a paperback from Chapel Library.

Holiness: 2. Sanctification

“Sanctify them through thy truth.”—John 17:17

“This is the will of God, even your sanctification.”—1 Thessalonians 4:3

The subject of sanctification is one which many, I fear, dislike exceedingly. Some even turn from it with scorn and disdain. The very last thing they would like is to be a “saint,” or a “sanctified” man. Yet the subject does not deserve to be treated in this way. It is not an enemy, but a friend.

It is a subject of the utmost importance to our souls. If the Bible be true, it is certain that unless we are “sanctified,” we shall not be saved. There are three things which, according to the Bible, are absolutely necessary to the salvation of every man and woman in Christendom. These three are: justification, regeneration, and sanctification. All three meet in every child of God: he is both born again, and justified, and sanctified. He that lacks any one of these three things is not a true Christian in the sight of God, and dying in that condition will not be found in heaven and glorified in the last day.

It is a subject which is peculiarly seasonable in the present day. Strange doctrines have risen up of late upon the whole subject of sanctification. Some appear to confound it with justification. Others fritter it away to nothing, under the pretence of zeal for free grace, and practically neglect it altogether. Others are so much afraid of “works” being made a part of justification, that they can hardly find any place at all for “works” in their religion. Others set up a wrong standard of sanctification before their eyes, and failing to attain it, waste their lives in repeated secessions from church to church, chapel to chapel, and sect to sect, in the vain hope that they will find what they want. In a day like this, a calm examination of the subject, as a great leading doctrine of the gospel, may be of great use to our souls.

- I. Let us consider, firstly, the *true nature* of sanctification.
- II. Let us consider, secondly, the *visible marks* of sanctification.
- III. Let us consider, lastly, wherein *justification and sanctification* agree and are like one another, and wherein they differ.

If, unhappily, the reader of these pages is one of those who care for nothing but this world, and make no profession of religion, I cannot expect him to take much interest in what I am writing. You will probably think it an affair of “words, and names,” and nice questions, about which it matters nothing what you hold and believe. But if you are a thoughtful, reasonable, sensible Christian, I venture to say that you will find it worth while to have some clear ideas about sanctification.

I. The Nature of Sanctification

In the first place, we have to consider *the nature of sanctification*. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of a “sanctified” man?

Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only 1) washes him from his sins in His own blood, but He also 2) separates him from his natural love of sin and the world, 3) puts a new principle in his heart, and 4) makes him practically godly in life. The instrument by which the Spirit effects this work is generally the Word of God, though He sometimes uses afflictions and providential visitations “without the word” (1Pe 3:1). The subject of this work of Christ by His Spirit is called in Scripture a “sanctified” man.⁶³

He who supposes that Jesus Christ only lived and died and rose again in order to provide justification and forgiveness of sins for His people, has yet much to learn. Whether he knows it or not, he is dishonouring our blessed Lord, and making Him only a half Saviour.

The Lord Jesus has undertaken everything that His people’s souls require; not only to deliver them from the *guilt* of their sins by His atoning death, but from the *dominion* of their sins, by placing in their hearts the Holy Spirit; not only to justify them, but also to sanctify them. He is, thus, not only their “righteousness,” but their “sanctification” (1Co 1:30). Let us hear what the Bible says: “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified.” “Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it.” “Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

⁶³ There is mention in the Scripture of a twofold sanctification, and consequently there is a twofold holiness. The first is common unto persons and things, consisting of the peculiar dedication, consecration, or separation of them unto the service of God, His own appointment, whereby they become holy. Thus the priests and Levites of old, the ark, the altar, the tabernacle, and the temple, were sanctified and made holy; and, indeed, in all holiness whatever, there is a peculiar dedication and separation unto God. But in the sense mentioned, his was solitary and alone. No more belonged unto it but this sacred separation, nor was there any other effect of this sanctification. But, secondly, there is another kind of sanctification and holiness, wherein this separation to God is not the first thing done or intended, but a consequent and effect thereof. This is real and internal, by the communicating of a principle of holiness unto our natures, attended with its exercise in acts and duties of holy obedience unto God. This is that which we inquire after.” — *John Owen* (1616-1683) *on the Holy Spirit*, *Works*, Vol. 3 p.370, Goold’s edition.

“Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.” “Christ hath reconciled (you) in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight” (Joh 17:19; Eph 5:25-26; Tit 2:14; 1Pe 2:24; Col 1:21-22). Let the meaning of these five texts be carefully considered. If words mean anything, they teach that Christ undertakes the sanctification, no less than the justification of His believing people. *Both* are alike provided for in that “everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure,” of which the Mediator is Christ. In fact, Christ in one place is called “He that sanctifieth,” and His People, “they who are sanctified” (Heb 2:11).

The subject before us is of such deep and vast importance, that it requires fencing, guarding, clearing up, and marking out on every side. A doctrine which is needful to salvation can never be too sharply developed, or brought too fully into light. To clear away the confusion between doctrines and doctrines, which is so unhappily common among Christians, and to map out the precise relation between truths and truths in religion, is one way to attain accuracy in our theology. I shall therefore not hesitate to lay before my readers a series of connected propositions or statements, drawn from Scripture, which I think will be found useful in defining the exact nature of sanctification.

(1) Sanctification, then, is the invariable ***result of that vital union with Christ*** which true faith gives to a Christian. “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (Joh 15:5). The branch which bears no fruit is no living branch of the vine. The union with Christ which produces no effect on heart and life is a mere formal union, which is worthless before God. The faith which has not a sanctifying influence on the character is no better than the faith of devils. It is a “dead faith, because it is alone.” It is not the gift of God. It is not the faith of God’s elect. In short, where there is no sanctification of life, there is no real faith in Christ. True faith worketh by love. It constrains a man to live unto the Lord from a deep sense of gratitude for redemption. It makes him feel that he can never do too much for Him that died for him. Being much forgiven, he loves much. He whom the blood cleanses, walks in the light. He who has real lively hope in Christ, purifieth himself even as He is pure. (Jam 2:17-20; Tit 1:1; Gal 5:6; 1Jo 1:7; 3:3.)

(2) Sanctification, again, is the ***outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration***. He that is born again and made a new creature, receives a new nature and a new principle, and always lives a new life. A regeneration which a man can have, and yet live carelessly in sin or worldliness, is a regeneration invented by uninspired theologians, but never mentioned in Scripture. On the contrary, John expressly says, that “He that is born of God doth not commit sin—doeth righteousness—loveth the brethren—keepeth himself—and overcometh the world” (1Jo 2:29; 3:9-14; 5:4, 18). In a word, where there is no sanctification there is no regeneration, and where there is no holy life there is no new birth.

This is, no doubt, a hard saying to many minds; but, hard or not, it is simple Bible truth. It is written plainly, that he who is born of God is one whose “seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1Jo 3:9).

(3) Sanctification, again, is the only certain **evidence of that indwelling of the Holy Spirit** which is essential to salvation. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:9). The Spirit never lies dormant and idle within the soul: He always makes His presence known by the fruit He causes to be born in heart, character, and life. “The fruit of the Spirit,” says St. Paul, “is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” and such like (Gal 5:22-23). Where these things are to be found, there is the Spirit: where these things are wanting, men are dead before God. The Spirit is compared to the wind, and, like the wind, He cannot be seen by our bodily eyes. But just as we know there is a wind by the effect it produces on waves, and trees, and smoke, so we may know the Spirit is in a man by the effects He produces in the man’s conduct. It is nonsense to suppose that we have the Spirit, if we do not also “walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). We may depend on it as a positive certainty, that where there is no holy living, there is no Holy Ghost. The seal that the Spirit stamps on Christ’s people is sanctification. As many as are actually “led by the Spirit of God, they,” and they only, “are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14).

(4) Sanctification, again, is the **only sure mark of God’s election**. The names and number of the elect are a secret thing, no doubt, which God has wisely kept in His own power, and not revealed to man. It is not given to us in this world to study the pages of the book of life, and see if our names are there. But if there is one thing clearly and plainly laid down about election, it is this—that elect men and women may be known and distinguished by holy lives. It is expressly written that they are...

- “elect through sanctification,”
- “chosen unto salvation through sanctification,”
- “predestinated to be conformed to the image of God’s Son,” and
- “chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world”—

that “they should be holy.” Hence, when Paul saw the working “faith” and labouring “love” and patient “hope” of the Thessalonian believers, he says, “I know your election of God.” (1Pe 1:2; 2Th 2:13; Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4; 1Th 1:3-4.)

He that boasts of being one of God’s elect, while he is willfully and habitually living in sin, is only deceiving himself, and talking wicked blasphemy. Of course it is hard to know what people *really* are, and many who make a fair show outwardly in religion, may turn out at last to be rotten-hearted hypocrites. But where there is not, at least, some appearance of sanctification, we may be quite certain there is no election. The Church of England Catechism correctly and wisely teaches that the Holy Ghost “*sanctifieth* all the elect people of God.”

(5) Sanctification, again, is **a thing that will always be seen**. Like the Great Head of the Church, from whom it springs, it “cannot be hid.” “Every tree is known by his own fruit” (Luk 6:44). A truly sanctified person may be so clothed with humility, that he can

see in himself nothing but infirmity and defects. Like Moses, when he came down from Mount Sinai, he may not be conscious that his face shines. Like the righteous, in the mighty parable of the sheep and the goats, he may not see that he has done anything worthy of his Master's notice and commendation: "When saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?" (Mat 25:37). But whether he sees it himself or not, others will always see in him a tone, and taste, and character, and habit of life unlike that of other men. The very idea of a man being "sanctified," while no holiness can be seen in his life, is flat nonsense and a misuse of words. Light may be very dim; but if there is only a spark in a dark room it will be seen. Life may be very feeble; but if the pulse only beats a little, it will be felt. It is just the same with a sanctified man: his sanctification will be something felt and seen, though he himself may not understand it. A "saint" in whom nothing can be seen but worldliness or sin, is a kind of monster not recognised in the Bible!

(6) Sanctification, again, is a ***thing for which every believer is responsible***. In saying this I would not be mistaken. I hold as strongly as anyone that every man on earth is accountable to God, and that all the lost will be speechless and without excuse at the last day. Every man has power to "lose his own soul" (Mat 16:26). But while I hold this, I maintain that believers are eminently and peculiarly responsible, and under a special obligation to live holy lives. They are not as others, dead and blind and unrenewed: they are alive unto God, and have light and knowledge, and a new principle within them. Whose fault is it if they are not holy, but their own? On whom can they throw the blame if they are not sanctified, but themselves? God, who has given them grace and a new heart, and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for His praise.

This is a point which is far too much forgotten. A man who professes to be a true Christian, while he sits still, content with a very low degree of sanctification (if indeed he has any at all), and coolly tells you he "can do nothing," is a very pitiable sight, and a very ignorant man. Against this delusion let us watch and be on our guard. The Word of God always addresses its precepts to believers as accountable and responsible beings. If the Saviour of sinners gives us renewing grace, and calls us by His Spirit, we may be sure that He expects us to use our grace, and not to go to sleep. It is forgetfulness of this which causes many believers to "grieve the Holy Spirit," and makes them very useless and uncomfortable Christians.

(7) Sanctification, again, is a ***thing which admits of growth and degrees***. A man may climb from one step to another in holiness, and be far more sanctified at one period of his life than another.

(a) More pardoned and more *justified* than he is when he first believes, he cannot be, though he may feel it more.

(b) More *sanctified* he certainly may be, because every grace in his new character may be strengthened, enlarged, and deepened. This is the evident meaning of our Lord's last prayer for His disciples, when He used the words, "Sanctify them;" and of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians; "The very God of peace sanctify you" (Joh 17:17; 1Th 5:23). In both cases the expression plainly implies the possibility of increased sanctification;

while such an expression as “justify them” is never once in Scripture applied to a believer, because he cannot be more justified than he is. I can find no warrant in Scripture for the doctrine of “imputed sanctification.” It is a doctrine which seems to me to confuse things that differ, and to lead to very evil consequences. Not least, it is a doctrine which is flatly contradicted by the experience of all the most eminent Christians. If there is any point on which God’s holiest saints agree it is this: that they see more, and know more, and feel more, and do more, and repent more, and believe more, as they get on in spiritual life, and in proportion to the closeness of their walk with God. In short, they “grow in grace,” as Peter exhorts believers to do; and “abound more and more,” according to the words of Paul (2Pe 3:18; 1Th 4:1).

(8) Sanctification, again, is a ***thing which depends greatly on a diligent use of scriptural means***. When I speak of “means,” I have in view Bible-reading, private prayer, regular attendance on public worship, regular hearing of God’s Word, and regular reception of the Lord’s Supper. I lay it down as a simple matter of fact, that no one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of any eminent saint who ever neglected them. They are appointed channels through which the Holy Spirit conveys fresh supplies of grace to the soul, and strengthens the work which He began in the inward man. Let men call this legal doctrine if they please, but I will never shrink from declaring my belief that there are no “spiritual gains without pains.” I should as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who contented himself with sowing his fields and never looking at them till harvest, as expect a believer to attain much holiness who was not diligent about his Bible reading, his prayers, and the use of his Sundays. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.

(9) Sanctification, again, is a ***thing which does not prevent a man having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict***. By conflict I mean a struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, the flesh and the spirit, which are to be found together in every believer (Gal 5:17). A deep sense of that struggle, and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it, are no proof that a man is not sanctified. Nay, rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition, and prove that we are not dead, but alive. A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within. He may be known by his warfare as well as by his peace.

In saying this, I do not forget that I am contradicting the views of some well-meaning Christians, who hold the doctrine called “sinless perfection.” I cannot help that. I believe that what I say is confirmed by the language of St. Paul in the seventh chapter of *Romans*. That chapter I commend to the careful study of all my readers. I am quite satisfied that it does not describe the experience of an unconverted man, or of a young and unestablished Christian; but of an old experienced saint in close communion with God. None but such a man could say, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom 7:22).

I believe, furthermore, that what I say is proved by the experience of all the most eminent servants of Christ that have ever lived. The full proof is to be seen in their journals, their autobiographies, and their lives.

Believing all this, I shall never hesitate to tell people that inward conflict is no proof that a man is not holy, and that they must not think they are not sanctified because they do not feel entirely free from inward struggle. Such freedom we shall doubtless have in heaven; but we shall never enjoy it in this world. The heart of the best Christian, even at his best, is a field occupied by two rival camps, and the “company of two armies” (Song 6:13). Let the words of the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Articles be well considered by all churchmen: “The infection of nature doth remain in them that are regenerated.” “Although baptized and born again in Christ, we offend in many things; and if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”⁶⁴

(10) Sanctification, again, is a ***thing which cannot justify a man, and yet it pleases God***. This may seem incredible, and yet it is true. The holiest actions of the holiest saint that ever lived are all more or less full of defects and imperfections. They are either wrong in their motive or defective in their performance, and in themselves are nothing better than “splendid sins,” deserving God’s wrath and condemnation. To suppose that such actions can stand the severity of God’s judgment, atone for sin, and merit heaven, is simply absurd. “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.” “We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:20-28). The only righteousness in which we can appear before God is the righteousness of another, even the perfect righteousness of our Substitute and Representative, Jesus Christ the Lord. His work, and not our work, is our only title to heaven. This is a truth which we should be ready to die to maintain.

For all this, however, the Bible distinctly teaches that the holy actions of a sanctified man, although imperfect, are pleasing in the sight of God. “With such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb 13:16). “Obey your parents, for this is well pleasing to the Lord” (Col 3:20). “We do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1Jo 3:22). Let this never be forgotten, for it is a very comfortable doctrine. Just as a parent is pleased with the efforts of his little child to please him, though it be only by picking a daisy or walking across a room, so is our Father in heaven pleased with the poor performances of His believing children. He looks at the motive, principle, and intention of their actions, and not merely at their quantity and quality. He regards them as members of His own dear Son, and for His sake, wherever there is a single eye, He is well-pleased. Those churchmen who dispute this would do well to study the Twelfth Article of the Church of England.

⁶⁴ “The devil’s war is better than the devil’s peace. Suspect dumb holiness. When the dog is kept out of doors he howls to be let in again.” “Contraries meeting, such as fire and water, conflict one with another. When Satan findeth a sanctified heart, he tempteth with much importunity. Where there is much of God and of Christ, there are strong injections and firebrands cast in at the windows, so that some of much faith have been tempted to doubt.” – *Rutherford’s Trial of Faith*, p.403 (1600-1661).

(11) Sanctification, again, is a ***thing which will be found absolutely necessary as a witness to our character in the great day of judgment.*** It will be utterly useless to plead that we believed in Christ, unless our faith has had some sanctifying effect, and been seen in our lives. Evidence, evidence, evidence, will be the one thing wanted when the great white throne is set, when the books are opened, when the graves give up their tenants, when the dead are arraigned before the bar of God. Without some evidence that our faith in Christ was real and genuine, we shall only rise again to be condemned. I can find no evidence that will be admitted in that day, except sanctification. The question will not be how we talked and what we professed, but how we lived and what we did. Let no man deceive himself on this point. If anything is certain about the future, it is certain that there will be a judgment; and if anything is certain about judgment, it is certain that men's "works" and "doings" will be considered and examined in it (Joh 5:29; 2Co 5:10; Rev 20:13). He that supposes works are of no importance, because they cannot justify us, is a very ignorant Christian. Unless he opens his eyes, he will find to his cost that if he comes to the bar of God without some evidence of grace, he had better never have been born.

(12) Sanctification, in the last place, is ***absolutely necessary, in order to train and prepare us for heaven.*** Most men hope to go to heaven when they die; but few, it may be feared take the trouble to consider whether they would enjoy heaven if they got there. Heaven is essentially a holy place; its inhabitants are all holy; its occupations are all holy. To be really happy in heaven, it is clear and plain that we must be somewhat trained and made ready for heaven while we are on earth. The notion of a purgatory after death, which shall turn sinners into saints, is a lying invention of man, and is nowhere taught in the Bible. We must be saints before we die, if we are to be saints afterwards in glory.

The favourite idea of many, that dying men need nothing except absolution and forgiveness of sins to fit them for their great change, is a profound delusion. We need the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the work of Christ; we need renewal of the heart as well as the atoning blood; we need to be sanctified as well as to be justified. It is common to hear people saying on their death-beds, "I only want the Lord to forgive me my sins, and take me to rest." But those who say such things forget that the rest of heaven would be utterly useless if we had no heart to enjoy it! What could an unsanctified man do in heaven, if by any chance he got there? Let that question be fairly looked in the face, and fairly answered. No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element, and where all around him is not congenial to his tastes, habits, and character. When an eagle is happy in an iron cage, when a sheep is happy in the water, when an owl is happy in the blaze of noonday sun, when a fish is happy on the dry land—then, and not till then, will I admit that the unsanctified man could be happy in heaven.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ "There is no imagination wherewith man is besotted, more foolish, none so pernicious as this—that persons not purified, not sanctified, not made holy in their life, should afterwards be taken into that state of blessedness which consists in the enjoyment of God. Neither can such persons enjoy God, nor would God be a reward to them. Holiness indeed is perfected in heaven: but the beginning of it is invariably confined to this world." - *Owen on Holy Spirit*, p.575. Goold's edition. John Owen (1616-1683): chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell and vice-chancellor of Oxford University, but most of

I lay down these twelve propositions about sanctification with a firm persuasion that they are true, and I ask all who read these pages to ponder them well. Each of them would admit of being expanded and handled more fully, and all of them deserve private thought and consideration. Some of them may be disputed and contradicted; but I doubt whether any of them can be overthrown or proved untrue. I only ask for them a fair and impartial hearing. I believe in my conscience that they are likely to assist men in attaining clear views of sanctification.

II. The Visible Evidence of Sanctification

I now proceed to take up the second point which I proposed to consider. That point is the visible evidence of sanctification. In a word, what are the visible marks of a sanctified man? What may we expect to see in him? This is a very wide and difficult department of our subject. It is wide, because it necessitates the mention of many details which cannot be handled fully in the limits of a paper like this. It is difficult, because it cannot possibly be treated without giving offense. But at any risk truth ought to be spoken; and there is some kind of truth which especially requires to be spoken in the present day.

(1) True sanctification then does not consist in *talk about religion*. This is a point which ought never to be forgotten. The vast increase of education and preaching in these latter days makes it absolutely necessary to raise a warning voice. People hear so much of gospel truth that they contract an unholy familiarity with its words and phrases, and sometimes talk so fluently about its doctrines that you might think them true Christians. In fact it is sickening and disgusting to hear the cool and flippant language which many pour out about “conversion—the Saviour—the gospel—finding peace—free grace,” and the like, while they are notoriously serving sin or living for the world. Can we doubt that such talk is abominable in God’s sight, and is little better than cursing, swearing, and taking God’s name in vain? The tongue is not the only member that Christ bids us give to His service. God does not want His people to be mere empty tubs, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. We must be sanctified, not only “in word and in tongue, but in deed and truth” (1Jo 3:18).

(2) True sanctification does not consist in temporary *religious feelings*. This again is a point about which a warning is greatly needed. Mission services and revival meetings are attracting great attention in every part of the land, and producing a great sensation. The Church of England seems to have taken a new lease of life, and exhibits a new activity; and we ought to thank God for it. But these things have their attendant dangers as well as their advantages. Wherever wheat is sown the devil is sure to sow tares. Many, it may be feared, appear moved and touched and roused under the preaching of the gospel, while in reality their hearts are not changed at all. A kind of animal excitement from the contagion of seeing others weeping, rejoicing, or affected, is the true account of their

his life served as a minister in congregational churches. His written works span forty years and run to twenty-four volumes representing among the best resources for theology in the English language. Born to Puritan parents in the Oxfordshire village of Stadham.

case. Their wounds are only skin deep, and the peace they profess to feel is skin deep also. Like the stony-ground hearers, they “receive the word with joy” (Mat 13:20); but after a little they fall away, go back to the world, and are harder and worse than before. Like Jonah’s gourd, they come up suddenly in a night and perish in a night.

Let these things not be forgotten. Let us beware in this day of healing wounds slightly, and crying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. Let us urge on every one who exhibits new interest in religion to be content with nothing short of the deep, solid, sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost. Reaction, after false religious excitement, is a most deadly disease of soul. When the devil is only temporarily cast out of a man in the heat of a revival, and by and by returns to his house, the last state becomes worse than the first. Better a thousand times begin more slowly, and then “continue in the word” steadfastly, than begin in a hurry, without counting the cost, and by and by look back, with Lot’s wife, and return to the world. I declare I know no state of soul more dangerous than to imagine we are born-again and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, because we have picked up a few religious feelings.

(3) True sanctification does not consist in ***outward formalism*** and external devoutness. This is an enormous delusion, but unhappily a very common one. Thousands appear to imagine that true holiness is to be seen in an excessive quantity of bodily religion—in constant attendance on church services, reception of the Lord’s Supper, and observance of fasts and saints’ days, in multiplied bowings and turnings and gestures and postures during public worship, in self-imposed austerities and petty self-denials, in wearing peculiar dresses, and the use of pictures and crosses. I freely admit that some people take up these things from conscientious motives, and actually believe that they help their souls. But I am afraid that in many cases this external religiousness is made a substitute for inward holiness; and I am quite certain that it falls utterly short of sanctification of heart. Above all, when I see that many followers of this outward, sensuous, and formal style of Christianity are absorbed in worldliness, and plunge headlong into its pomps and vanities, without shame, I feel that there is need of very plain speaking on the subject. There may be an immense amount of “bodily service,” while there is not a jot of real sanctification.

(4) Sanctification does not consist ***in retirement from our place in life***, and the renunciation of our social duties. In every age it has been a snare with many to take up this line in the pursuit of holiness. Hundreds of hermits have buried themselves in some wilderness, and thousands of men and women have shut themselves up within the walls of monasteries and convents, under the vain idea that by so doing they would escape sin and become eminently holy. They have forgotten that no bolts and bars can keep out the devil, and that, wherever we go, we carry that root of all evil, our own hearts. To become a monk, or a nun, or to join a House of Mercy, is not the high road to sanctification.

True holiness does not make a Christian evade difficulties, but face and overcome them. Christ would have His people show that His grace is not a mere hot-house plant, which can only thrive under shelter, but a strong, hardy thing which can flourish in every relation of life. It is doing our duty in that state to which God has called us—like salt

in the midst of corruption and light in the midst of darkness—which is a primary element in sanctification. It is not the man who hides self in a cave, but the man who glorifies God as master or servant, parent or child, in the family and in the street, in business and in trade, who is the scriptural type of a sanctified man. Our Master Himself said in His last prayer, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (Joh 17:15).

(5) Sanctification does not consist in the ***occasional performance of right actions***. It is the habitual working of a new heavenly principle within, which runs through all a man’s daily conduct, both in great things and in small. Its seat is in the heart, and like the heart in the body, it has a regular influence on every part of the character. It is not like a pump, which only sends forth water when worked upon from without, but like a perpetual fountain, from which a stream is ever flowing spontaneously and naturally. Even Herod, when he heard John the Baptist, “did many things,” while his heart was utterly wrong in the sight of God (Mar 6:20). Just so there are scores of people in the present day who seem to have spasmodical fits of “goodness,” as it is called, and do many right things under the influence of sickness, affliction, death in the family, public calamities, or a sudden qualm of conscience. Yet all the time any intelligent observer can see plainly that they are not converted, and that they know nothing of “sanctification.” A true saint, like Hezekiah, will be whole-hearted. He will “count God’s commandments concerning all things to be right, and hate every false way” (2Ch 31:21; Psalms 119:104).

(6) Genuine sanctification will show itself in ***habitual respect to God’s law***, and habitual effort to live in obedience to it as the rule of life. There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and the Ten Commandments, because he cannot be justified by keeping them. The same Holy Ghost who convinces the believer of sin by the law, and leads him to Christ for justification, will always lead him to a spiritual use of the law, as a friendly guide, in the pursuit of sanctification.

Our Lord Jesus Christ never made light of the Ten Commandments; on the contrary, in His first public discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, He expounded them, and showed the searching nature of their requirements. Paul never made light of the law; on the contrary, he says, “The law is good, if a man use it lawfully,” and, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (1Ti 1:8; Romans 7:22). He that pretends to be a saint, while he sneers at the Ten Commandments, and thinks nothing of lying, hypocrisy, swindling, ill-temper, slander, drunkenness, and breach of the seventh commandment, is under a fearful delusion. He will find it hard to prove that he is a “saint” in the last day!

(7) Genuine sanctification will show itself in an ***habitual endeavour*** to do Christ’s will, and to live by His practical precepts. These precepts are to be found scattered everywhere throughout the four *Gospels*, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount. He that supposes they were spoken without the intention of promoting holiness, and that a Christian need not attend to them in his daily life, is really little better than a lunatic, and at any rate is a grossly ignorant person. To hear some men talk, and read some

men's writings, one might imagine that our blessed Lord, when He was on earth, never taught anything but doctrine, and left practical duties to be taught by others! The slightest knowledge of the four Gospels ought to tell us that this is a complete mistake. What His disciples ought to be and to do is continually brought forward in our Lord's teaching. A truly sanctified man will never forget this. He serves a Master who said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Joh 15:14).

(8) Genuine sanctification will show itself in an *habitual desire to live up to the standard which Paul sets before the churches* in his writings. That standard is to be found in the closing chapters of nearly all his *Epistles*. The common idea of many persons that Paul's writings are full of nothing but doctrinal statements and controversial subjects—justification, election, predestination, prophecy, and the like—is an entire delusion, and a melancholy proof of the ignorance of Scripture which prevails in these latter days. I defy anyone to read Paul's writings carefully without finding in them a large quantity of plain, practical directions about the Christian's duty in every relation of life, and about our daily habits, temper, and behaviour to one another. These directions were written down by inspiration of God for the perpetual guidance of professing Christians. He who does not attend to them may possibly pass muster as a member of a church or a chapel, but he certainly is not what the Bible calls a "sanctified" man.

(9) Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual *attention to the active graces* which our Lord so beautifully exemplified, and especially to the grace of charity. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (Joh 13:34-35.) A sanctified man will try to do good in the world, and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will aim to be like his Master, full of kindness and love to every one; and this not in word only, by calling people "dear," but by deeds and actions and self-denying work, according as he has opportunity. The selfish Christian professor, who wraps himself up in his own conceit of superior knowledge, and seems to care nothing whether others sink or swim, go to heaven or hell, so long as he walks to church or chapel in his Sunday best, and is called a "sound member"—such a man knows nothing of sanctification. He may think himself a saint on earth, but he will not be a saint in heaven. Christ will never be found the Saviour of those who know nothing of following His example. Saving faith and real converting grace will always produce some conformity to the image of Jesus⁶⁶ (Col 3:10).

(10) Genuine sanctification, in the last place, will show itself in *habitual attention to the passive graces* of Christianity. When I speak of passive graces, I mean those graces

⁶⁶ "Christ in the Gospel is proposed to us as our pattern and example of holiness; and as it is a cursed imagination that this was the whole end of his life and death namely, to exemplify and confirm the doctrine of holiness which He taught—so to neglect His being our example, in considering Him by faith to that end, and labouring after conformity to Him, is evil and pernicious. Wherefore let us be much in the contemplation of what He was, and what He did, and how in all duties and trials He carved Himself, until an image or idea of His perfect holiness is implanted in our minds, and we are made like unto Him thereby." – *Owen on the Holy Ghost*, p.513; Goold's edition.

which are especially sown in submission to the will of God, and in bearing and forbearing towards one another. Few people, perhaps, unless they have examined the point, have an idea how much is said about these graces in the New Testament, and how important a place they seem to fill. This is the special point which Peter dwells upon in commending our Lord Jesus Christ's example to our notice: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1Pe 2:21-23). This is the one piece of profession which the Lord's prayer requires us to make: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and the one point that is commented upon at the end of the prayer. This is the point which occupies one-third of the list of the fruits of the Spirit, supplied by St. Paul. Nine are named, and three of these, "longsuffering, gentleness, and meekness," are unquestionably passive graces (Gal 5:22-23). I must plainly say that I do not think this subject is sufficiently considered by Christians. The passive graces are no doubt harder to attain than the active ones, but they are precisely the graces which have the greatest influence on the world. Of one thing I feel very sure—it is nonsense to pretend to sanctification unless we follow after the meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, and forgiveness of which the Bible makes so much. People who are habitually giving way to peevish and cross tempers in daily life, and are constantly sharp with their tongues, and disagreeable to all around them—spiteful people, vindictive people, revengeful people, malicious people of whom, alas, the world is only too full! All such know little, as they should know, about sanctification.

Such are the visible marks of a sanctified man. I do not say that they are all to be seen equally in all God's people. I freely admit that in the best they are not fully and perfectly exhibited. But I do say confidently, that the things of which I have been speaking are the scriptural marks of sanctification, and that they who know nothing of them may well doubt whether they have any grace at all. Whatever others may please to say, I will never shrink from saying that genuine sanctification is a thing that can be seen, and that the marks I have endeavoured to sketch out are more or less the marks of a sanctified man.

III. The Distinction Between Justification and Sanctification

I now propose to consider, in the last place, the *distinction between justification and sanctification*. Wherein do they agree, and wherein do they differ?

This branch of our subject is one of great importance, though I fear it will not seem so to all my readers. I shall handle it briefly, but I dare not pass it over altogether. Too many are apt to look at nothing but the surface of things in religion, and regard nice distinctions in theology as questions of "words and names," which are of little real value. But I warn all who are in earnest about their souls, that the discomfort which arises from not "distinguishing things that differ" in Christian doctrine is very great indeed; and I especially advise them, if they love peace, to seek clear views about the matter before us. Justifica-

tion and sanctification are two distinct things we must always remember. Yet there are points in which they agree and points in which they differ. Let us try to find out what they are.

In what, then, are justification and sanctification alike?

(a) Both proceed originally from the free grace of God. It is of His gift alone that believers are justified or sanctified at all.

(b) Both are part of that great work of salvation which Christ, in the eternal covenant, has undertaken on behalf of His people. Christ is the fountain of life, from which pardon and holiness both flow. The root of each is Christ.

(c) Both are to be found in the same persons. Those who are justified are always sanctified, and those who are sanctified are always justified. God has joined them together, and they cannot be put asunder.

(d) Both begin at the same time. The moment a person begins to be a justified person, he also begins to be a sanctified person. He may not feel it, but it is a fact.

(e) Both are alike necessary to salvation. No one ever reached heaven without a renewed heart as well as forgiveness, without the Spirit's grace as well as the blood of Christ, without a meetness for eternal glory as well as a title. The one is just as necessary as the other.

Such are the points on which justification and sanctification agree.

Let us now reverse the picture, and see wherein they differ.

(a) Justification is the *reckoning* and counting a man to be righteous for the sake of another, even Jesus Christ the Lord. Sanctification is the actual *making* a man inwardly righteous, though it may be in a very feeble degree.

(b) The righteousness we have by our justification is *not our own*, but the everlasting perfect righteousness of our great Mediator Christ, imputed to us, and made our own by faith. The righteousness we have by sanctification is *our own* righteousness, imparted, inherent, and wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, but mingled with much infirmity and imperfection.

(c) In justification our own works have no place at all, and simple faith in Christ is the one thing needful. In sanctification our own works are of vast importance and God bids us fight, and watch, and pray, and strive, and take pains, and labour.

(d) Justification is a finished and complete work, and a man is perfectly justified the moment he believes. Sanctification is an imperfect work, comparatively, and will never be perfected until we reach heaven.

(e) Justification admits of no growth or increase: a man is as much justified the hour he first comes to Christ by faith as he will be to all eternity. Sanctification is eminently a progressive work, and admits of continual growth and enlargement so long as a man lives.

(f) Justification has special reference to our *persons*, our standing in God's sight, and our deliverance from guilt. Sanctification has special reference to our *natures*, and the moral renewal of our hearts.

(g) Justification gives us our title to heaven, and boldness to enter in. Sanctification gives us our meetness for heaven, and prepares us to enjoy it when we dwell there.

(h) Justification is the act of God *about* us, and is not easily discerned by others. Sanctification is the work of God *within* us, and cannot be hid in its outward manifestation from the eyes of men.

I commend these distinctions to the attention of all my readers, and I ask them to ponder them well. I am persuaded that one great cause of the darkness and uncomfortable feelings of many well-meaning people in the matter of religion, is their habit of confounding, and not distinguishing, justification and sanctification. It can never be too strongly impressed on our minds that they are two separate things. No doubt they cannot be divided, and everyone that is a partaker of either is a partaker of both. But never, never ought they to be confounded, and never ought the distinction between them to be forgotten.

Applications

It only remains for me now to bring this subject to a conclusion by a few plain words of application. The nature and visible marks of sanctification have been brought before us. What practical reflections ought the whole matter to raise in our minds?

(1) For one thing, let us all awake to a sense of ***the perilous state of many professing Christians***. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord," without sanctification there is no salvation (Heb 12:14). Then what an enormous amount of so-called religion there is which is perfectly useless! What an immense proportion of church-goers and chapel-goers are in the broad road that leadeth to destruction! The thought is awful, crushing, and overwhelming. Oh, that preachers and teachers would open their eyes and realize the condition of souls around them! Oh, that men could be persuaded to "flee from the wrath to come!" If unsanctified souls can be saved and go to heaven, the Bible is not true. Yet the Bible is true and cannot lie! What must the end be!

(2) For another thing, let us ***make sure work of our own condition***, and never rest till we feel and know that we are "sanctified" ourselves. What are our tastes, and choices, and likings, and inclinations? This is the great testing question. It matters little what we wish, and what we hope, and what we desire to be before we die. Where are we now? What are we doing? Are we sanctified or not? If not, the fault is all our own.

(3) For another thing, if we would be sanctified, our course is clear and plain—we must ***begin with Christ***. We must go to Him as sinners, with no plea but that of utter need, and cast our souls on Him by faith, for peace and reconciliation with God. We must place ourselves in His hands, as in the hands of a good physician, and cry to Him for mercy and grace. We must wait for nothing to bring with us as a recommendation.

The very first step towards sanctification, no less than justification, is to come with faith to Christ. We must first live and then work.

(4) For another thing, if we would grow in holiness and become more sanctified, we must ***continually go on as we began***, and be ever making fresh applications to Christ. He is the Head from which every member must be supplied (Eph 4:16). To live the life of daily faith in the Son of God, and to be daily drawing out of His fulness the promised grace and strength which He has laid up for His people—this is the grand secret of progressive sanctification. Believers who seem at a standstill are generally neglecting close communion with Jesus, and so grieving the Spirit. He that prayed, “Sanctify them,” the last night before His crucifixion, is infinitely willing to help everyone who by faith applies to Him for help, and desires to be made more holy.

(5) For another thing, let us ***not expect too much*** from our own hearts here below. At our best we shall find in ourselves daily cause for humiliation, and discover that we are needy debtors to mercy and grace every hour. The more light we have, the more we shall see our own imperfection. Sinners we were when we began, sinners we shall find ourselves as we go on; renewed, pardoned, justified—yet sinners to the very last. Our absolute perfection is yet to come, and the expectation of it is one reason why we should long for heaven.

(6) Finally, let us never be ashamed of ***making much of sanctification***, and contending for a high standard of holiness. While some are satisfied with a miserably low degree of attainment, and others are not ashamed to live on without any holiness at all—content with a mere round of church-going and chapel-going, but never getting on, like a horse in a mill—let us stand fast in the old paths, follow after eminent holiness ourselves, and recommend it boldly to others. This is the only way to be really happy.

Let us feel convinced, whatever others may say, that holiness is happiness, and that the man who gets through life most comfortably is the *sanctified* man. No doubt there are some true Christians who from ill-health, or family trials, or other secret causes, enjoy little sensible comfort, and go mourning all their days on the way to heaven. But these are exceptional cases. As a general rule, in the long run of life, it will be found true that “sanctified” people are the happiest people on earth. They have solid comforts which the world can neither give nor take away. “The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness.” “Great peace have they that love thy law.” It was said by One who cannot lie, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” But it is also written, “There is no peace unto the wicked” (Pro 3:17; Psa 119:165; Mat 11:30; Isa 48:22).

Post Script: The subject of sanctification is of such deep importance, and the mistakes made about it so many and great, that I make no apology for strongly recommending “Owen on the Holy Spirit” to all who want to study more thoroughly the whole doctrine of sanctification. No single paper like this can embrace it all. I am quite aware that Owen’s⁶⁷ writings are not fashionable in the present day, and that many think fit to neglect and sneer at him as a Puritan! Yet the great divine who in Commonwealth times was Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, does not deserve to be

⁶⁷ Owen authored *The Mortification of Sin, Temptation, and Indwelling Sin*—each of which offers sound insight into this subject of holiness.

treated in this way. He had more learning and sound knowledge of Scripture in his little finger than many who depreciate him have in their whole bodies. I assert unhesitatingly that the man who wants to study experimental theology will find no books equal to those of Owen and some of his contemporaries, for complete, scriptural, and exhaustive treatment of the subjects they handle.

From Holiness; available in print as a paperback from Chapel Library.

Holiness: 3. Holiness

“Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”—Hebrews 12:14

Are We Holy?

The text which heads this page opens up a subject of deep importance. That subject is practical holiness. It suggests a question which demands the attention of all professing Christians—Are we holy? Shall we see the Lord?

That question can never be out of season. The wise man tells us, “There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh—a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Ecc 3:4,7); but there is no time, no, not a day, in which a man ought not to be holy. Are we holy?

That question concerns all ranks and conditions of men. Some are rich and some are poor—some learned and some unlearned—some masters, and some servants; but there is no rank or condition in life in which a man ought not to be holy. Are we holy?

I ask to be heard today about this question. How stands the account between our souls and God? In this hurrying, bustling world, let us stand still for a few minutes and consider the matter of holiness. I believe I might have chosen a subject more popular and pleasant. I am sure I might have found one more easy to handle. But I feel deeply I could not have chosen one more seasonable and more profitable to our souls. It is a solemn thing to hear the Word of God saying, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:12-15).

I shall endeavour, by God’s help...

- I. to examine what true holiness is,
- II. the reason why holiness is so important, and
- III. in conclusion, I shall try to point out *the only way in which holiness can be attained.*

I have already, in the second chapter of this volume, approached this subject from a doctrinal side. Let me now try to present it to my readers in a more plain and practical point of view.

I. The Definition of True, Practical Holiness

First, then, let me try to show *what true practical holiness is and what sort of persons are those whom God calls holy*.

A man may go great lengths, and yet never reach true holiness. It is...

- not knowledge, Balaam had that;
- nor great profession, Judas Iscariot had that;
- nor doing many things, Herod had that nor zeal for certain matters in religion, and Jehu had that;
- nor morality and outward respectability of conduct, the young ruler had that;
- nor taking pleasure in hearing preachers, the Jews in Ezekiel's time had that;
- nor keeping company with godly people; Joab and Gehazi and Demas had that.

Yet none of these was holy! These things alone are not holiness. A man may have any one of them, and yet never see the Lord.

What then is true practical holiness? It is a hard question to answer. I do not mean that there is any want of scriptural matter on the subject. But I fear lest I should give a defective view of holiness, and not say all that ought to be said; or lest I should say things about it that ought not to be said, and so do harm. Let me, however, try to draw a picture of holiness, that we may see it clearly before the eyes of our minds. Only let it never be forgotten, when I have said all, that my account is but a poor imperfect outline at the best.

(a) Holiness is ***the habit of being of one mind with God***, according as we find His mind described in Scripture. It is the habit of agreeing in God's judgment—hating what He hates, loving what He loves—and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. He who most entirely agrees with God, he is the most holy man.

(b) A holy man will ***endeavour to shun every known sin, and to keep every known commandment***. He will have a decided bent of mind toward God, a hearty desire to do His will, a greater fear of displeasing Him than of displeasing the world, and a love to all His ways. He will feel what Paul felt when he said, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom 7:21-23), and what David felt when he said, "I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way" (Psa 119:128).

(c) A holy man will ***strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ***. He will not only live the life of faith in Him, and draw from Him all his daily peace and strength, but he will also labour to have the mind that was in Him, and to be "conformed to his image." (Rom 12:2) It will be his aim to bear with and forgive others, even as Christ forgave us—to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself—to walk in love, even as Christ loved us—to be lowly-minded and humble, even as Christ made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself.

He will remember...

- that Christ was a faithful witness for the truth,
- that He came not to do His own will,
- that it was His meat and drink to do His Father's will,

- that He would continually deny Himself in order to minister to others,
- that He was meek and patient under undeserved insults,
- that He thought more of godly poor men than of kings,
- that He was full of love and compassion to sinners,
- that He was bold and uncompromising in denouncing sin,
- that He sought not the praise of men, when He might have had it,
- that He went about doing good,
- that He was separate from worldly people,
- that He continued instant in prayer,
- that He would not let even His nearest relations stand in His way when God's work was to be done.

These things a holy man will try to remember. By them he will endeavour to shape his course in life. He will lay to heart the saying of John, "He that saith he abideth in Christ ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked" (1Jo 2:6); and the saying of Peter, that "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps" (1Pe 2:21). Happy is he who has learned to make Christ his "all," both for salvation and example! Much time would be saved, and much sin prevented, if men would oftener ask themselves the question, "What would Christ have said and done, if He were in my place?"

(d) A holy man will follow after **meekness**, longsuffering, gentleness, patience, kind tempers, government of his tongue. He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much, and be slow to talk of standing on his rights. We see a bright example of this in the behaviour of David when Shimei cursed him, and of Moses when Aaron and Miriam spake against him (2Sa 16:7; Num 12:1).

(e) A holy man will follow after **temperance and self-denial**. He will labour to mortify the desires of his body, to crucify his flesh with his affections and lusts, to curb his passions, to restrain his carnal inclinations, lest at any time they break loose. Oh, what a word is that of the Lord Jesus to the Apostles, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life" (Luk 21:34); and that of the Apostle Paul, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1Co 9:27).

(f) A holy man will follow after **charity and brotherly kindness**. He will endeavour to observe the golden rule of doing as he would have men do to him, and speaking as he would have men speak to him (Joh 13:34). He will be full of affection towards his brethren, towards their bodies, their property, their characters, their feelings, their souls. "He that loveth another," says Paul, "hath fulfilled the law" (Rom 13:8). He will abhor all lying, slandering, backbiting, cheating, dishonesty, and unfair dealing, even in the least things. The shekel and cubit of the sanctuary were larger than those in common use. He will strive to adorn his religion by all his outward demeanour, and to make it lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all around him. Alas, what condemning words are the 13th chap-

ter of *1 Corinthians*, and the Sermon on the Mount, when laid alongside the conduct of many professing Christians!

(g) A holy man will follow after a spirit of ***mercy and benevolence towards others***. He will not stand all the day idle. He will not be content with doing no harm. He will try to do good. He will strive to be useful in his day and generation, and to lessen the spiritual wants and misery around him, as far as he can. Such was Dorcas, “full of good works and almsdeeds, which she did,” not merely purposed and talked about, *but did* (Act 9:36). Such an one was Paul: “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you,” he says, “though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved” (2Co 12:15).

(h) A holy man will follow after ***purity of heart***. He will dread all filthiness and uncleanness of spirit, and seek to avoid all things that might draw him into it. He knows his own heart is like tinder, and will diligently keep clear of the sparks of temptation. Who shall dare to talk of strength when David can fall? There is many a hint to be gleaned from the ceremonial law. Under it the man who only *touched* a bone, or a dead body, or a grave, or a diseased person, became at once unclean in the sight of God. And these things were emblems and figures. Few Christians are ever too watchful and too particular about this point.

(i) A holy man will follow after the ***fear of God***. I do not mean the fear of a slave, who only works because he is afraid of punishment, and would be idle if he did not dread discovery. I mean rather the fear of a child, who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father’s face, because he loves him. What a noble example Nehemiah gives us of this! When he became Governor at Jerusalem he might have been chargeable to the Jews and required of them money for his support. The former Governors had done so. There was none to blame him if he did. But he says, “So did not I, because of the fear of God” (Neh 5:15).

(j) A holy man will follow after ***humility***. He will desire, in lowliness of mind, to esteem all others better than himself. He will see more evil in his own heart than in any other in the world. He will understand something of Abraham’s feeling, when he says, “I am dust and ashes;” and Jacob’s, when he says, “I am less than the least of all Thy mercies;” and Job’s, when he says, “I am vile;” and Paul’s, when he says, “I am chief of sinners.” Holy Bradford, that faithful martyr of Christ, would sometimes finish his letters with these words, “A most miserable sinner, John Bradford.” Good old Mr. Grimshaw’s last words, when he lay on his death-bed, were these, “Here goes an unprofitable servant.”

(k) A holy man will follow after ***faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life***. He will try, not merely to fill his place as well as others who take no thought for their souls, but even better, because he has higher motives, and more help than they. Those words of Paul should never be forgotten, “Whatever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord,” “Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord” (Col 3:23; Rom 12:11). Holy persons should aim at doing everything well, and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything ill if they can help it. Like Daniel, they should seek to give no “occasion”

against themselves, except “concerning the law of their God” (Dan 6:5). They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants, good neighbours, good friends, good subjects, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good by their firesides. Holiness is worth little indeed, if it does not bear this kind of fruit. The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to His people, when He says, “What do ye more than others?” (Mat 5:47).

(1) Last, but not least, a holy man will follow after *spiritual mindedness*. He will endeavour to set his affections entirely on things above, and to hold things on earth with a very loose hand. He will not neglect the business of the life that now is; but the first place in his mind and thoughts will be given to the life to come. He will aim to live like one whose treasure is in heaven, and to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim travelling to his home. To commune with God in prayer, in the Bible, and in the assembly of His people—these things will be the holy man’s chiefest enjoyments. He will value every thing and place and company, just in proportion as it draws him nearer to God. He will enter into something of David’s feeling, when he says, “My soul followeth hard after thee.” “Thou art my portion” (Psa 63:8; 119:57).

Such is the outline of holiness which I venture to sketch out. Such is the character which those who are called “holy” follow after. Such are the main features of a holy man.

But here let me say, I trust no man will misunderstand me, I am not without fear that my meaning will be mistaken, and the description I have given of holiness will discourage some tender conscience. I would not willingly make one righteous heart sad, or throw a stumbling-block in any believer’s way.

Holiness and Sin

I do not say for a moment that holiness shuts out the presence of *indwelling* sin. No, far from it. It is the greatest misery of a holy man that he carries about with him a “body of death,” that often when he would do good “evil is present with him,” that the old man is clogging all his movements, and, as it were, trying to draw him back at every step he takes (Rom 7:21). But it is the excellence of a holy man that he is not at peace with indwelling sin, as others are. He hates it, mourns over it, and longs to be free from its company. The work of sanctification within him is like the wall of Jerusalem, the building goes forward “even in troublous times” (Dan 9:25).

Neither do I say that holiness comes to ripeness and *perfection all at once*, or that these graces I have touched on must be found in full bloom and vigour before you can call a man holy. No, far from it.

Sanctification is always a *progressive work*. Some men’s graces are in the blade, some in the ear, and some are like full corn in the ear. All must have a beginning. We must never despise “the day of small things.”

And sanctification in the very best is an *imperfect work*. The history of the brightest saints that ever lived will contain many a “but,” and “howbeit,” and “notwithstanding,” before you reach the end. The gold will never be without some dross, and the light will never shine without some clouds, until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem. The sun him-

self has spots upon his face. The holiest men have many a blemish and defect when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. Their life is a continual warfare with sin, the world, and the devil; and sometimes you will see them not overcoming, but overcome. The flesh is ever lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and “in many things they offend all” (Gal 5:17; Jam 3:2).

But still, for all this, I am sure that to have such a character as I have faintly drawn, is the heart’s desire and prayer of all true Christians. They press towards it, if they do not reach it. They may not attain to it, but they always aim at it. It is what they strive and labor to be, if it is not what they are.

And this I do boldly and confidently say, that true holiness is a great *reality*. It is something in a man that can be seen, and known, and marked, and felt by all around him. It is light: if it exists, it will show itself. It is salt: if it exists, its savor will be perceived. It is a precious ointment: if it exists, its presence cannot be hid.

I am sure we should all be ready to make allowance for much backsliding, for much occasional deadness in professing Christians. I know a road may lead from one point to another, and yet have many a winding and turn; and a man may be truly holy, and yet be drawn aside by many an infirmity. Gold is not the less gold because mingled with alloy, nor light the less light because faint and dim, nor grace the less grace because young and weak. But after every allowance, I cannot see how any man deserves to be called “holy,” who willfully allows himself in sins, and is not humbled and ashamed because of them. I dare not call anyone “holy” who makes a habit of willfully neglecting known duties, and willfully doing what he knows God has commanded him not to do. Well says Owen, “I do not understand how a man can be a true believer unto whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble.”

Such are the leading characteristics of practical holiness. Let us examine ourselves and see whether we are acquainted with it. Let us prove our own selves.

II. Why True, Practical Holiness Is So Important

Let me try, in the next place to show *some reasons why practical holiness is so important*.

Can holiness save us? Can holiness put away sin, cover iniquities, make satisfaction for transgressions, pay our debt to God? No, not a whit. God forbid that I should ever say so. Holiness can do none of these things. The brightest saints are all “unprofitable servants.” Our purest works are no better than filthy rags, when tried by the light of God’s holy law. The white robe which Jesus offers, and faith puts on, must be our only righteousness, the name of Christ our only confidence, and the Lamb’s book of life our only title to heaven. With all our holiness we are no better than *sinners*. Our best things are stained and tainted with imperfection. They are all more or less incomplete, wrong in the motive or defective in the performance. By the deeds of the law shall no child of Adam ever be justified. “By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

Why then is holiness so important? Why does the Apostle say, “Without it no man shall see the Lord?” Let me set out in order a few reasons.

(a) For one thing, we must be holy, because ***the voice of God in Scripture plainly commands it***. The Lord Jesus says to His people, “Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mat 5:20). “Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Mat 5:48). Paul tells the Thessalonians, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1Th 4:3). And Peter says, “As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy’” (1Pe 1:15-16). “In this,” says Leighton, “law and gospel agree.”

(b) We must be holy, because this is ***the one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world***. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again” (2Co 5:15). And to the Ephesians, “Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it” (Eph 5:25-26). And to Titus, “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit 2:14). In short, to talk of men being saved from the guilt of sin, without being at the same time saved from its dominion in their hearts, is to contradict the witness of all Scripture. Are believers said to be elect? It is “through sanctification of the Spirit.” Are they predestinated? It is “to be conformed to the image of God’s Son.” Are they chosen? It is “that they may be holy.” Are they called? It is “with a holy calling.” Are they afflicted? It is that they may be “partakers of holiness.” Jesus is a complete Saviour. He does not merely take away the guilt of a believer’s sin, He does more—He breaks its power (1Pe 1:2; Rom 8:29; Eph 1:4; Heb 12:10).

(c) We must be holy, because this is the ***only sound evidence that we have a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ***. The Twelfth Article of the Church of England says truly, that “Although good works cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God’s judgment, yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively faith; insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by its fruits.” James warns us there is such a thing as a dead faith—a faith which goes no further than the profession of the lips, and has no influence on a man’s character (Jam 2:17). True saving faith is a very different kind of thing. True faith will always show itself by its fruits—it will sanctify, it will work by love, it will overcome the world, it will purify the heart. I know that people are fond of talking about death bed evidences. They will rest on words spoken in the hours of fear, and pain, and weakness, as if they might take comfort in them about the friends they lose. But I am afraid in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred such evidences are not to be depended on. I suspect that, with rare exceptions, men die just as they have lived. The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is holy life. They that live unto the Lord are generally the only people who die in the Lord. If we would die the death of the righteous, let us not rest in slothful desires only; let us seek to live His life. It is a true saying

of Traill's, "That man's state is naught, and his faith unsound, that find not his hopes of glory purifying to his heart and life."

(d) We must be holy, because this is the ***only proof that we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity***. This is a point on which He has spoken most plainly, in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of *John*. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." "If a man love me he will keep my words." "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." (Joh 14:15, 21, 23; 15:14.) Plainer words than these it would be difficult to find, and woe to those who neglect them! Surely that man must be in an unhealthy state of soul who can think of all that Jesus suffered, and yet cling to those sins for which that suffering was undergone. It was sin that wove the crown of thorns. It was sin that pierced our Lord's hands, and feet, and side. It was sin that brought Him to Gethsemane and Calvary, to the cross and to the grave. Cold must our hearts be if we do not hate sin and labour to get rid of it, though we may have to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye in doing it.

(e) We must be holy, because this is the ***only sound evidence that we are true children of God***. Children in this world are generally like their parents. Some, doubtless, are more so, and some less, but it is seldom indeed that you cannot trace a kind of family likeness. And it is much the same with the children of God. The Lord Jesus says, "If ye were Abraham's children ye would do the works of Abraham." "If God were your Father ye would love me" (Joh 8:39, 42). If men have no likeness to the Father in heaven, it is vain to talk of their being His "sons." If we know nothing of holiness we may flatter ourselves as we please, but we have not got the Holy Spirit dwelling in us: we are dead, and must be brought to life again. We are lost, and must be found. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they," and they only, "are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14). We must show by our lives the family we belong to. We must let men see by our good conversation that we are indeed the children of the Holy One, or our son-ship is but an empty name. "Say not," says Gurnall, "that thou hast royal blood in thy veins, and art born of God, except thou canst prove thy pedigree by daring to be holy."

(f) We must be holy, because this is the ***most likely way to do good to others***. We cannot live to ourselves only in this world. Our lives will always be doing either good or harm to those who see them. They are a silent sermon which all can read. It is sad indeed when they are a sermon for the devil's cause, and not for God's. I believe that far more is done for Christ's kingdom by the holy living of believers than we are at all aware of. There is a reality about such living which makes men feel, and obliges them to think. It carries a weight and influence with it which nothing else can give. It makes religion beautiful, and draws men to consider it, like a lighthouse seen afar off. The day of judgment will prove that many besides husbands have been won "*without the word*" by a holy life (1Pe 3:1). You may talk to persons about the doctrines of the *Gospels*, and few will listen, and still fewer understand. But your life is an argument that none can escape.

There is a meaning about holiness which not even the most unlearned can help taking in. They may not understand justification, but they can understand charity.

I believe there is far more harm done by unholy and inconsistent Christians than we are aware of. Such men are among Satan's best allies. They pull down by their lives what ministers build with their lips. They cause the chariot wheels of the gospel to drive heavily. They supply the children of this world with a never ending excuse for remaining as they are. "I cannot see the use of so much religion," said an irreligious tradesman not long ago; "I observe that some of my customers are always talking about the gospel, and faith, and election, and the blessed promises, and so forth; and yet these very people think nothing of cheating me of pence and half-pence, when they have an opportunity. Now, if religious persons can do such things, I do not see what good there is in religion." I grieve to be obliged to write such things, but I fear that Christ's name is too often blasphemed because of the lives of Christians. Let us take heed lest the blood of souls should be required at our hands. From murder of souls by inconsistency and loose walking, good Lord, deliver us! Oh, for the sake of others, if for no other reason, let us strive to be holy!

(g) We must be holy, because ***our present comfort depends much upon it***. We cannot be too often reminded of this. We are sadly apt to forget that there is a close connection between sin and sorrow, holiness and happiness, sanctification and consolation. God has so wisely ordered it, that our well-being and our well-doing are linked together. He has mercifully provided that even in this world it shall be man's *interest* to be holy. Our justification is not by works—our calling and election are not according to our works—but it is vain for anyone to suppose that he will have a lively sense of his justification, or an assurance of his calling, so long as he neglects good works, or does not strive to live a holy life. "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments;" "hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts" (1Jo 2:3; 3:19). A believer may as soon expect to feel the sun's rays upon a dark and cloudy day, as to feel strong consolation in Christ while he does not follow Him fully. When the disciples forsook the Lord and fled, they escaped danger, but they were miserable and sad. When, shortly after, they confessed Him boldly before men, they were cast into prison and beaten; but we are told "they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Act 5:41). Oh, for our own sakes, if there were no other reason, let us strive to be holy! He that follows Jesus most fully will always follow Him most comfortably.

(h) Lastly, we must be holy, because ***without holiness on earth we shall never be prepared to enjoy heaven***. Heaven is a holy place. The Lord of heaven is a holy Being. The angels are holy creatures. Holiness is written on everything in heaven. The book of Revelation says expressly, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie" (Rev 21:27).

I appeal solemnly to everyone who reads these pages: how shall we ever be at home and happy in heaven, if we die unholy? Death works no change. The grave makes no al-

teration. Each will rise again with the same character in which he breathed his last. Where will our place be if we are strangers to holiness now?

Suppose for a moment that you were allowed to enter heaven without holiness. What would you do? What possible enjoyment could you feel there? To which of all the saints would you join yourself, and by whose side would you sit down? Their pleasures are not your pleasures, their tastes not your tastes, their character not your character. How could you possibly be happy, if you had not been holy on earth?

Now perhaps you love the company of the light and the careless, the worldly-minded and the covetous, the reveller and the pleasureseeker, the ungodly and the profane. There will be none such in heaven.

Now perhaps you think the saints of God too strict and particular, and serious. You rather avoid them. You have no delight in their society. There will be no other company in heaven.

Now perhaps you think praying, and Scripture-reading, and hymn singing, dull and melancholy, and stupid work—a thing to be tolerated now and then, but not enjoyed. You reckon the Sabbath a burden and a weariness; you could not possibly spend more than a small part of it in worshipping God. But remember, heaven is a never-ending Sabbath. The inhabitants thereof rest not day or night, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,” and singing the praise of the Lamb. How could an unholy man find pleasure in occupation such as this?

Think you that such an one would delight to meet David, and Paul, and John, after a life spent in doing the very things they spoke against? Would he take sweet counsel with them, and find that he and they had much in common? Think you, above all, that he would rejoice to meet Jesus, the Crucified One, face to face, after cleaving to the sins for which He died, after loving His enemies and despising His friends? Would he stand before Him with confidence, and join in the cry, “This is our God; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation?” (Isa 25:9). Think you not rather that the tongue of an unholy man would cleave to the roof of his mouth with shame, and his only desire would be to be cast out! He would feel a stranger in a land he knew not, a black sheep amidst Christ’s holy flock. The voice of Cherubim and Seraphim, the song of Angels and Archangels and, all the company of heaven, would be a language he could not understand. The very air would seem an air he could not breathe.

I know not what others may think, but to me it does seem clear that heaven would be a miserable place to an unholy man. It cannot be otherwise. People may say, in a vague way, “they hope to go to heaven;” but they do not consider what they say. There must be a certain “meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.” Our hearts must be somewhat in tune. To reach the holiday of glory, we must pass through the training school of grace. We must be heavenly-minded, and have heavenly tastes, in the life that now is, or else we shall never find ourselves in heaven, in the life to come.

Applications

And now, let me say a few words by way of application.

1. *Are you holy?*

For one thing, let me ask everyone who may read these pages, ***Are you holy?*** Listen, I pray you, to the question I put to you this day. Do you know anything of the holiness of which I have been speaking?

I do not ask whether you attend your church regularly, whether you have been baptized and received the Lord's Supper, or whether you have the name of Christian. I ask something more than all this: *Are you holy, or are you not?*

I do not ask whether you approve of holiness in others, whether you like to read the lives of holy people, and to talk of holy things, and to have on your table holy books, or whether you mean to be holy and hope you will be holy some day. I ask something further: *Are you yourself holy this very day, or are you not?*

And why do I ask so straitly, and press the question so strongly? I do it because the Scripture says, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is written, it is not my fancy; it is the Bible, not my private opinion; it is the word of God, not of man—"Without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14).

Alas, what searching, sifting words are these! What thoughts come across my mind, as I write them down! I look at the world, and see the greater part of it lying in wickedness. I look at professing Christians, and see the vast majority having nothing of Christianity but the name. I turn to the Bible, and I hear the Spirit saying, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Surely it is a text that ought to make us consider our ways, and search our hearts. Surely it should raise within us solemn thoughts, and send us to prayer.

You may try to put me off by saying you "feel much, and think much about these things: far more than many suppose." I answer, "This is not the point. The poor lost souls in hell do as much as this." The great question is not what you *think*, or what you *feel*, but what you **DO**.

You may say, "It was never meant that all Christians should be holy, and that holiness, such as I have described, is only for great saints, and people of uncommon gifts." I answer, "I cannot see that in Scripture. I read that *every man* who hath hope in Christ purifieth himself" (1Jo 3:3). "Without holiness *no man* shall see the Lord."

You may say, "It is impossible to be so holy and to do our duty in this life at the same time: the thing cannot be done." I answer, "You are mistaken. It *can* be done. With Christ on your side nothing is impossible. It *has* been done by many. David, Obadiah, Daniel, and the servants of Nero's household, are all examples that go to prove it."

You may say, "If I were so holy I would be unlike other people." I answer, "I know it well. It is just what you ought to be. Christ's true servants always were unlike the world around them—a separate nation, a peculiar people—and you must be so too, if you would be saved!"

You may say, "At this rate very few will be saved." I answer, "I know it. It is precisely what we are told in the Sermon on the Mount." The Lord Jesus said so 1,900 years ago. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:14). Few will be saved, because few will take the trouble to seek salvation. Men will not deny themselves the pleasures of sin and their own way for a little season. They turn their backs on an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." "Ye *will* not come unto me," says Jesus, "that ye might have life" (Joh 5:40).

You may say, "These are hard sayings: the way is very narrow." I answer, "I know it. So says the Sermon on the Mount." The Lord Jesus said so 1,900 years ago. He always said that men must take up the cross daily, and that they must be ready to cut off hand or foot, if they would be His disciples. It is in religion as it is in other things, "there are no gains without pains." That which costs nothing is worth nothing.

Whatever we may think fit to say, *we must be holy, if we would see the Lord*. Where is our Christianity if we are not? We must not merely have a Christian name, and Christian knowledge, we must have a Christian *character* also. We must be saints on earth, if ever we mean to be saints in heaven. God has said it, and He will not go back: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." "The Pope's calendar," says Jenkyn, "only makes saints of the *dead*, but Scripture requires sanctity in the *living*." "Let not men deceive themselves," says Owen; "sanctification is a qualification indispensably necessary unto those who will be under the conduct of the Lord Christ unto salvation. He leads none to heaven but whom He sanctifies on the earth. This living Head will not admit of dead members."

Surely we need not wonder that Scripture says, "Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7). Surely it is clear as noon-day that many professing Christians need a complete change—new hearts, new natures—if ever they are to be saved. Old things must pass away; they must become new creatures. "Without holiness no man," be he who he may, "shall see the Lord."

2. Is holiness as important to you as it should be?

(2) Let me, for another thing, speak a little to believers. I ask you this question, "***Do you think you feel the importance of holiness as much as you should?***"

I own I fear the temper of the times about this subject. I doubt exceedingly whether it holds that place which it deserves in the thoughts and attention of some of the Lord's people. I would humbly suggest that we are apt to overlook the doctrine of growth in grace, and that we do not sufficiently consider how very far a person may go in a profession of religion, and yet have no grace, and be dead in God's sight after all. I believe that Judas Iscariot seemed very like the other Apostles. When the Lord warned them that one would betray Him, no one said, "Is it Judas?" We had better think more about the churches of Sardis and Laodicea than we do.

I have no desire to make an idol of holiness. I do not wish to dethrone Christ, and put holiness in His place. But I must candidly say, I wish sanctification was more thought of in this day than it seems to be, and I therefore take occasion to press the sub-

ject on all believers into whose hands these pages may fall. I fear it is sometimes forgotten that God has married together justification and sanctification. They are distinct and different things, beyond question, but one is never found without the other. All justified people are sanctified, and all sanctified are justified. What God has joined together let no man dare to put asunder. Tell me not of your justification, unless you have also some marks of sanctification. Boast not of Christ's work *for you*, unless you can show us the Spirit's work *in you*. Think not that Christ and the Spirit can ever be divided. I doubt not that many believers know these things, but I think it good for us to be put in remembrance of them. Let us prove that we know them by our lives. Let us try to keep in view this text more continually: "Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

I must frankly say I wish there was not such an excessive *sensitiveness* on the subject of holiness as I sometimes perceive in the minds of believers. A man might really think it was a dangerous subject to handle, so cautiously is it touched! Yet surely when we have exalted Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life," we cannot err in speaking strongly about what should be the character of His people. Well says Rutherford, "The way that crieth down duties and sanctification, is not the way of grace. Believing and doing are blood-friends."

I would say it with all reverence, but say it I must. I sometimes fear if Christ were on earth now, there are not a few who would think His preaching *legal*; and if Paul were writing his Epistles, there are those who would think he had better not write the latter part of most of them as he did. But let us remember that the Lord Jesus *did* speak the Sermon on the Mount, and that the *Epistle to the Ephesians* contains six chapters and not four. I grieve to feel obliged to speak in this way, but I am sure there is a cause.

That great divine, John Owen, the Dean of Christ Church, used to say, more than two hundred years ago, that there were people whose whole religion seemed to consist in going about complaining of their own corruptions, and telling everyone that they could do nothing of themselves. I am afraid that after two centuries the same thing might be said with truth of some of Christ's professing people in this day. I know there are texts in Scripture which warrant such complaints. I do not object to them when they come from men who walk in the steps of the Apostle Paul, and fight a good fight, as he did, against sin, the devil, and the world. But I never like such complaints when I see ground for suspecting, as I often do, that they are only a cloak to cover spiritual laziness, and an excuse for spiritual sloth. If we say with Paul, "O wretched man that I am," let us also be able to say with him, "I press toward the mark." Let us not quote his example in one thing, while we do not follow him in another (Rom 7:24; Phi 3:14).

I do not set up myself to be better than other people, and if anyone asks, "What are you, that you write in this way." I answer, "I am a very poor creature indeed." But I say that I cannot read the Bible without desiring to see many believers more spiritual, more holy, more single-eyed, more heavenly-minded, more whole-hearted than they are in the nineteenth century. I want to see among believers more of a pilgrim spirit, a more de-

cided separation from the world, a conversation more evidently in heaven, a closer walk with God, and therefore I have written as I have.

Is it not true that we need a higher standard of personal holiness in this day? Where is our patience? Where is our zeal? Where is our love? Where are our works? Where is the power of religion to be seen, as it was in times gone by? Where is that unmistakable tone which used to distinguish the saints of old, and shake the world? Verily our silver has become dross, our wine mixed with water, and our salt has very little savour. We are all more than half asleep. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us awake, and sleep no more. Let us open our eyes more widely than we have done hitherto. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us." "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God" (Heb 12:1; 2Co 7:1). "Did Christ die," says Owen, "and shall sin live? Was He crucified in the world, and shall our affections to the world be quick and lively? Oh, where is the spirit of him, who by the cross of Christ was crucified to the world, and the world to him!" (Gal 6:14).

III. Advice to All Who Desire to Be Holy

Let me, in the last place, offer a *word of advice to all who desire to be holy*. Would you be holy? Would you become a new creature? Then you must *begin with Christ*. You will do just nothing at all, and make no progress till you feel your sin and weakness, and flee to Him. He is the root and beginning of all holiness, and the way to be holy is to come to Him by faith and be joined to Him. Christ is not wisdom and righteousness only to His people, but sanctification also. Men sometimes try to make themselves holy first of all, and sad work they make of it. They toil and labour, and turn over new leaves, and make many changes; and yet, like the woman with the issue of blood, before she came to Christ, they feel "nothing bettered, but rather worse" (Mar 5:26). They run in vain, and labour in vain; and little wonder, for they are beginning at the wrong end. They are building up a wall of sand; their work runs down as fast as they throw it up. They are baling water out of a leaky vessel: the leak gains on them, not they on the leak. Other foundation of "holiness" can no man lay than that which Paul laid, even Christ Jesus. "Without Christ we can do nothing" (Joh 15:5). It is a strong but true saying of Traill's, "Wisdom out of Christ is damning folly; righteousness out of Christ is guilt and condemnation; sanctification out of Christ is filth and sin; redemption out of Christ is bondage and slavery."

Do you want to attain holiness? Do you feel this day a real hearty desire to be holy? Would you be a partaker of the Divine nature? Then *go to Christ*. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Linger not. Think not to make yourself ready. Go and say to Him, in the words of that beautiful hymn...

*"Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, flee to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace."*

There is not a brick nor a stone laid in the work of our sanctification till we go to Christ. Holiness is His special gift to His believing people. Holiness is the work He carries on in their hearts, by the Spirit whom He puts within them. He is appointed a “Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance” as well as remission of sins. “To as many as receive Him, He gives power to become sons of God” (Act 5:31; Joh 1:12-13). Holiness comes...

- not of blood, parents cannot give it to their children;
- nor yet of the will of the flesh, man cannot produce it in himself;
- nor yet of the will of man, ministers cannot give it by baptism.

Holiness comes from Christ. It is the result of vital union with Him. It is the fruit of being a living branch of the True Vine. Go then to Christ and say, “Lord, not only save me from the guilt of sin, but send the Spirit, whom Thou didst promise, and save me from its power. Make me holy. Teach me to do Thy will.”

Would you continue holy? Then *abide in Christ*. He says Himself, “Abide in me and I in you. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit” (Joh 15:4-5). It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, a full supply for all a believer’s wants. He is the Physician to whom you must daily go, if you would keep well. He is the Manna which you must daily eat, and the Rock of which you must daily drink. His arm is the arm on which you must daily lean, as you come up out of the wilderness of this world. You must not only be rooted, you must also be *built up* in Him. Paul was a man of God indeed, a holy man, a growing, thriving Christian—and what was the secret of it all? He was one to whom Christ was “all in all.” He was ever “looking unto Jesus.” “I can do all things,” he says, “through Christ which strengtheneth me.” “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God.” (Heb 12:2; Phi 4:13; Gal 2:20.) Let us go and do likewise.

May all who read these pages know these things by experience, and not by hearsay only. May we all feel the importance of holiness, far more than we have ever done yet! May our years be *holy years* with our souls, and then they will be happy ones! Whether we live, may we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, may we die unto the Lord; if He comes for us, may we be found in peace, without spot, and blameless! ✨

From Holiness; available in print as a paperback from Chapel Library.

A Call to Prayer

“I will that men pray everywhere”—1 Timothy 2:1

1. Prayer is Needful to a Man’s Salvation

Do you pray?

I have a question to offer you. It is contained in three words, Do you pray?

The question is one that none but you can answer. Whether you attend public worship or not, your minister knows. Whether you have family prayers in your house or not, your relations know. But whether you pray in private or not, is a matter between yourself and God.

I beseech you in all affection to attend to the subject I bring before you. Do not say that my question is too close. If your heart is right in the sight of God, there is nothing in it to make you afraid. Do not turn off my question by replying that you say your prayers. It is one thing to say your prayers and another to pray. Do not tell me that my question is unnecessary. Listen to me for a few minutes, and I will show you good reasons for asking it.

Needful for salvation

I ask whether you pray, because prayer is absolutely needful to a man’s salvation.

I say, absolutely needful, and I say so advisedly. I am not speaking now of infants or idiots. I am not settling the state of the heathen. I know that where little is given, there little will be required. I speak especially of those who call themselves Christians, in a land like our own. And of such I say, no man or woman can expect to be saved who does not pray.

I hold salvation by grace as strongly as any one. I would gladly offer a free and full pardon to the greatest sinner that ever lived. I would not hesitate to stand by his dying bed, and say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ even now, and you shall be saved.” But that a man can have salvation without asking for it, I cannot see in the Bible. That a man will receive pardon of his sins, who will not so much as lift up his heart inwardly, and say, “Lord Jesus, give it to me,” this I cannot find. I can find that nobody will be saved by his prayers, but I cannot find that without prayer anybody will be saved.

It is not absolutely needful to salvation that a man should read the Bible. A man may have no learning, or be blind, and yet have Christ in his heart. It is not absolutely need-

ful that a man should hear public preaching of the gospel. He may live where the gospel is not preached, or he may be bedridden, or deaf. But the same thing cannot be said about prayer. It is absolutely needful to salvation that a man should pray.

Personal responsibility

There is no royal road either to health or learning. Princes and kings, poor men and peasants, all alike must attend to the wants of their own bodies and their own minds. No man can eat, drink, or sleep by proxy. No man can get the alphabet learned for him by another. All these are things which a person must do for himself, or they will not be done at all.

Just as it is with the mind and body, so it is with the soul. There are certain things absolutely needful to the soul's health and well-being. Each must attend to these things for himself. Each must repent for himself. Each must apply to Christ for himself. And for himself each must speak to God and pray. You must do it for yourself, for by nobody else can it be done.

To be prayerless is to be without God, without Christ, without grace, without hope, and without heaven. It is to be on the road to hell. Now can you wonder that I ask the question, *Do you pray?*

2. The Habit of Prayer: Mark of a True Christian

Those who pray

I ask again whether you pray, because a habit of prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian.

All the children of God on earth are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life and reality about their religion, they pray. Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again is praying.

This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God, "They cry unto him day and night" (Luk 18:1). The Holy Spirit, who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption, and makes them cry, "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15). The Lord Jesus, when he quickens them, gives them a voice and a tongue, and says to them, "Be dumb no more." God has no dumb children. It is as much a part of their new nature to pray, as it is of a child to cry. They see their need of mercy and grace. They feel their emptiness and weakness. They cannot do otherwise than they do. They must pray.

I have looked carefully over the lives of God's saints in the Bible. I cannot find one of whose history much is told us, from Genesis to Revelation, who was not a man of prayer. I find it mentioned as a characteristic of the godly, that "they call on the Father" (1Pe 1:17), or "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1Co 1:2). Recorded as a characteristic of the wicked is the fact that "they call not upon the Lord" (Psa 14:4).

I have read the lives of many eminent Christians who have been on earth since the Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were learned, and some

unlearned. Some of them were Episcopalians, and some Christians of other names. Some were Calvinists, and some were Arminians. Some have loved to use a liturgy, and some to use none. But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They have all been men of prayer.

I study the reports of missionary societies in our own times. I see with joy that heathen men and women are receiving the gospel in various parts of the globe. There are conversions in Africa, in New Zealand, in Hindustan, in China. The people converted are naturally unlike one another in every respect. But one striking thing I observe at all the missionary stations: the converted people always pray.

Not praying

I do not deny that a man may pray without heart and without sincerity. I do not for a moment pretend to say that the mere fact of a person's praying proves everything about his soul. As in every other part of religion, so also in this, there may be deception and hypocrisy.

But this I do say, that not praying is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian. He cannot really feel his sins. He cannot love God. He cannot feel himself a debtor to Christ. He cannot long after holiness. He cannot desire heaven. He has yet to be born again. He has yet to be made a new creature. He may boast confidently of election, grace, faith, hope, and knowledge, and deceive ignorant people. But you may rest assured it is all vain talk *if he does not pray*.

Real evidence

And I say, furthermore, that of all the evidences of the real work of the Spirit, a habit of hearty private prayer is one of the most satisfactory that can be named. A man may preach from false motives. A man may write books and make fine speeches and seem diligent in good works, and yet be a Judas Iscariot. But a man seldom goes into his closet, and pours out his soul before God in secret, unless he is in earnest. The Lord himself has set his stamp on prayer as the best proof of a true conversion. When he sent Ananias to Saul in Damascus, he gave him no other evidence of his change of heart than this, "*Behold, he prayeth*" (Act 9:11).

I know that much may go on in a man's mind before he is brought to pray. He may have many convictions, desires, wishes, feelings, intentions, resolutions, hopes, and fears. But all these things are very uncertain evidences. They are to be found in ungodly people, and often come to nothing. In many a case they are not more lasting than the morning cloud, and the dew that passeth away. A real, hearty prayer, coming from a broken and contrite spirit, is worth all these things put together.

I know that the Holy Spirit, who calls sinners from their evil ways, does in many instances lead them by very slow degrees to acquaintance with Christ. But the eye of man can only judge by what it sees. I cannot call any one justified until he believes. I dare not say that any one believes until he prays. I cannot understand a dumb faith. The first act of faith will be to speak to God. Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to

faith what breath is to life. How a man can live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a man can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too.

Never be surprised if you hear ministers of the gospel dwelling much on the importance of prayer. This is the point we want to bring you to; we want to know that you pray. Your views of doctrine may be correct. Your love of Protestantism may be warm and unmistakable. But still this may be nothing more than head knowledge and party spirit. We want to know whether you are actually acquainted with the throne of grace, and whether you can speak *to* God as well as speak *about* God.

Do you wish to find out whether you are a true Christian? Then rest assured that my question is of the very first importance—Do you pray?

3. Prayer: The Most Neglected Duty

Some never pray

I ask whether you pray, because there is no duty in religion so neglected as private prayer.

We live in days of abounding religious profession. There are more places of public worship now than there ever were before. There are more persons attending them than there ever were before. And yet in spite of all this public religion, I believe there is a vast neglect of private prayer. It is one of those private transactions between God and our souls which no eye sees, and therefore one which men are tempted to pass over and leave undone. I believe that thousands never utter a word of prayer at all. They eat. They drink. They sleep. They rise. They go forth to their labor. They return to their homes. They breathe God's air. They see God's sun. They walk on God's earth. They enjoy God's mercies. They have dying bodies. They have judgment and eternity before them. But they never speak to God. They live like the beasts that perish. They behave like creatures without souls. They have not one word to say to Him in whose hand are their life and breath, and all things, and from whose mouth they must one day receive their everlasting sentence. How dreadful this seems but if the secrets of men were only known, how common.

Some use form only

I believe there are tens of thousands *whose prayers are nothing but a mere form*, a set of words repeated by rote, without a thought about their meaning. Some say over a few hasty sentences picked up in the nursery when they were children. Some content themselves with repeating the Creed, forgetting that there is not a request in it. Some add the Lord's Prayer, but without the slightest desire that its solemn petitions may be granted.

Many, even of those who use good forms, mutter their prayers after they have gotten into bed, or while they wash or dress in the morning. Men may think what they please, but they may depend upon it that in the sight of God *this is not praying*. Words said without heart are as utterly useless to our souls as the drum beating of the poor heathen

before their idols. Where there is *no heart*, there may be lip work and tongue work, but there is nothing that God listens to; there is *no prayer*. Saul, I have no doubt, said many a long prayer before the Lord met him on the way to Damascus. But it was not till his heart was broken that the Lord said, "He prayeth."

Does this surprise you? Listen to me, and I will show you that I am not speaking as I do without reason. Do you think that my assertions are extravagant and unwarrantable? Give me your attention, and I will soon show you that I am only telling you the truth.

Why men do not pray

Have you forgotten that it is *not natural* to anyone to pray? "The carnal mind is enmity against God." The desire of man's heart is to get far away from God, and have nothing to do with him. His feeling towards him is not love, but fear. Why then should a man pray when he has no real sense of sin, no real feeling of spiritual wants, no thorough belief in unseen things, no desire after holiness and heaven? Of all these things the vast majority of men know and feel nothing. The multitude walk in the broad way. I cannot forget this. Therefore I say boldly, I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten that it is *not fashionable* to pray? It is one of the things that many would be rather ashamed to own. There are hundreds who would sooner storm a breach, or lead a forlorn hope, than confess publicly that they make a habit of prayer. There are thousands who, if obliged to sleep in the same room with a stranger, would lie down in bed without a prayer. To dress well, to go to theaters, to be thought clever and agreeable, all this is fashionable, but not to pray. I cannot forget this. I cannot think a habit is common which so many seem ashamed to own. I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten *the lives that many live*? Can we really believe that people are praying against sin night and day, when we see them plunging into it? Can we suppose they pray against the world, when they are entirely absorbed and taken up with its pursuits? Can we think they really ask God for grace to serve him, when they do not show the slightest desire to serve him at all? Oh, no, it is plain as daylight that the great majority of men either ask nothing of God or *do not mean what they say* when they do ask, which is just the same thing. Praying and sinning will never live together in the same heart. Prayer will consume sin, or sin will choke prayer. I cannot forget this. I look at men's lives. I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten *the deaths that many die*? How many, when they draw near death, seem entirely strangers to God. Not only are they sadly ignorant of his gospel, but sadly wanting in the power of speaking to him. There is a terrible awkwardness and shyness in their endeavors to approach him. They seem to be taking up a fresh thing. They appear as if they wanted an introduction to God, and as if they had never talked with him before. I remember having heard of a lady who was anxious to have a minister to visit her in her last illness. She desired that he would pray with her. He asked her what he should pray for. She did not know, and could not tell. She was utterly unable to name any one thing which she wished him to ask God for her soul. All she seemed to want was the form of a minister's prayers. I can quite understand this. Death beds are great reveal-

ers of secrets. I cannot forget what I have seen of sick and dying people. This also leads me to believe that few pray.

I cannot see your heart. I do not know your private history in spiritual things. But from what I see in the Bible and in the world I am certain I cannot ask you a more necessary question than that before you—*Do you pray?*

4. Prayer Produces Great Encouragement

God is ready

I ask whether you pray, because prayer is an act in religion to which there is great encouragement.

There is everything on God's part to make prayer easy, if men will only attempt it. All things are ready on his side. Every objection is anticipated. Every difficulty is provided for. The crooked places are made straight and the rough places are made smooth. There is no excuse left for the prayerless man.

There is *a way* by which any man, however sinful and unworthy, may draw near to God the Father. Jesus Christ has opened that way by the sacrifice he made for us upon the cross. The holiness and justice of God need not frighten sinners and keep them back. Only let them cry to God in the name of Jesus, only let them plead the atoning blood of Jesus, and they shall find God upon a throne of grace, willing and ready to hear. The name of Jesus is a never-failing passport for our prayers. In that name a man may draw near to God with boldness, and ask with confidence. God has engaged to hear him. Think of this. Is not this encouragement?

There is *an Advocate* and Intercessor always waiting to present the prayers of those who come to God through him. That advocate is Jesus Christ. He mingles our prayers with the incense of his own almighty intercession. So mingled, they go up as a sweet savor before the throne of God. Poor as they are in themselves, they are mighty and powerful in the hand of our High Priest and Elder Brother. The bank note without a signature at the bottom is nothing but a worthless piece of paper. The stroke of a pen confers on it all its value. The prayer of a poor child of Adam is a feeble thing in itself, but once endorsed by the hand of the Lord Jesus it availeth much. There was an officer in the city of Rome who was appointed to have his doors always open, in order to receive any Roman citizen who applied to him for help. Just so the ear of the Lord Jesus is ever open to the cry of all who want mercy and grace. It is his office to help them. Their prayer is his delight. Think of this. Is not this encouragement?

There is *the Holy Spirit* ever ready to help our infirmities in prayer. It is one part of his special office to assist us in our endeavors to speak with God. We need not be cast down and distressed by the fear of not knowing what to say. The Spirit will give us words if we seek his aid. The prayers of the Lord's people are the inspiration of the Lord's Spirit, the work of the Holy Ghost who dwells within them as the Spirit of grace and supplication. Surely the Lord's people may well hope to be heard. It is not them merely that

pray, but the Holy Ghost pleading in them. Reader, think of this. Is not this encouragement?

Promises

There are exceeding great and precious *promises* to those who pray. What did the Lord Jesus mean when he spoke such words as these: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened” (Mat 7:7-8). “All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive” (Mat 21:22). “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it” (Joh 14:13-14). What did the Lord mean when he spoke the parables of the friend at midnight and the importunate widow (Luk 11:5; 18:1)? Think over these passages. If this is not encouragement to pray, words have no meaning.

Examples

There are wonderful *examples* in Scripture of the power of prayer. Nothing seems to be too great, too hard, or too difficult for prayer to do. It has obtained things that seemed impossible and out of reach. It has won victories over fire, air, earth, and water. Prayer opened the Red Sea. Prayer brought water from the rock and bread from heaven. Prayer made the sun stand still. Prayer brought fire from the sky on Elijah’s sacrifice. Prayer turned the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. Prayer overthrew the army of Sennacherib. Well might Mary Queen of Scots say, “I fear John Knox’s prayers more than an army of ten thousand men.” Prayer has healed the sick. Prayer has raised the dead. Prayer has procured the conversion of souls. “The child of many prayers,” said an old Christian to Augustine’s mother, “shall never perish.” Prayer, pains, and faith can do anything. Nothing seems impossible when a man has the spirit of adoption. “Let me alone,” is the remarkable saying of God to Moses when Moses was about to intercede for the children of Israel—the Chaldee version has, “Leave off praying”—(Exo 32:10). So long as Abraham asked mercy for Sodom, the Lord went on giving. He never ceased to give till Abraham ceased to pray. Think of this. Is not this encouragement?

What more can a man want to lead him to take any step in religion, than the things I have just told him about prayer? What more could be done to make the path to the mercy seat easy, and to remove all occasions of stumbling from the sinner’s way? Surely if the devils in hell had such a door set open before them, they would leap for gladness, and make the very pit ring with joy.

But where will the man hide his head at last who neglects such glorious encouragements? What can possibly be said for the man who, after all, dies without prayer? Surely I may feel anxious that you should not be that man. Surely I may well ask—*Do you pray?*

5. Diligence in Prayer: The Secret of Holiness

Vast difference

I ask whether you pray, because diligence in prayer is the secret of eminent holiness.

Without controversy there is a vast difference among true Christians. There is an immense interval between the foremost and the hindermost in the army of God.

They are all fighting the same good fight but how much more valiantly some fight than others. They are all doing the Lord's work but how much more some do than others. They are all light in the Lord; but how much more brightly some shine than others. They are all running the same race; but how much faster some get on than others. They all love the same Lord and Savior; but how much more some love him than others. I ask any true Christian whether this is not the case. Are not these things so?

There are some of the Lord's people who seem never able to get on from the time of their conversion. They are born again, but they remain babes all their lives. You hear from them the same old experience. You observe in them the same want of spiritual appetite, the same want of interest in anything beyond their own little circle, which you observed ten years ago. They are pilgrims, indeed, but pilgrims like the Gibeonites of old; their bread is always dry and moldy, their shoes always old, and their garments always rent and torn. I say this with sorrow and grief; but I ask any real Christian, Is it not true?

There are others of the Lord's people who seem to be always advancing. They grow like the grass after rain; they increase like Israel in Egypt; they press on like Gideon, though sometimes faint, yet always pursuing. They are ever adding grace to grace, and faith to faith, and strength to strength. Every time you meet them their hearts seem larger, and their spiritual stature taller and stronger. Every year they appear to see more, and know more, and believe more, and feel more in their religion. They not only have good works to prove the reality of their faith, but they are zealous of them. They not only do well, but they are unwearied in well-doing. They attempt great things, and they do great things. When they fail they try again, and when they fall they are soon up again. And all this time they think themselves poor, unprofitable servants, and fancy they do nothing at all. These are those who make religion lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all. They wrest praise even from the unconverted and win golden opinions even from the selfish men of the world.

It does one good to see, to be with, and to hear them. When you meet them, you could believe that like Moses, they had just come out from the presence of God. When you part with them you feel warmed by their company, as if your soul had been near a fire. I know such people are rare. I only ask, Are there not many such?

The reason for the difference

Now how can we account for the difference which I have just described? What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe the difference, in nineteen cases out of twenty, arises from different habits about private

prayer. I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray *little*, and those who are eminently holy pray *much*.

I dare say this opinion will startle some readers. I have little doubt that many look on eminent holiness as a kind of special gift, which none but a few must pretend to aim at. They admire it at a distance in books. They think it beautiful when they see an example near themselves. But as to its being a thing within the reach of any but a very few, such a notion never seems to enter their minds. In short, they consider it a kind of monopoly granted to a few favored believers, but certainly not to all.

Now I believe that this is a most dangerous mistake. I believe that spiritual as well as natural greatness depends in a high degree on the faithful use of means within everybody's reach. Of course I do not say we have a right to expect a miraculous grant of intellectual gifts; but this I do say, that when a man is once converted to God, his progress in holiness will be much in accordance with his own diligence in the use of God's appointed means. And I assert confidently that the principal means by which most believers have become great in the church of Christ is the habit of *diligent private prayer*.

Prayer is power

Look through the lives of the brightest and best of God's servants, whether in the Bible or not. See what is written of Moses and David and Daniel and Paul. Mark what is recorded of Luther and Bradford the Reformers. Observe what is related of the private devotions of Whitefield and Cecil and Venn and Bickersteth and M'Cheyne. Tell me one of all the goodly fellowship of saints and martyrs, who has not had this mark most prominently—he was a man of prayer. Depend upon it, prayer is power.

Prayer obtains fresh and continued outpourings of the Spirit. He alone begins the work of grace in a man's heart. He alone can carry it forward and make it prosper. But the good Spirit loves to be entreated. And those who ask most will have most of his influence.

Prayer is the surest remedy against the devil and besetting sins. That sin will never stand firm which is heartily prayed against. That devil will never long keep dominion over us which we beseech the Lord to cast forth. But then we must spread out all our case before our heavenly Physician, if he is to give us daily relief.

6. Prayer and Backsliding

Backsliding really happens

Do you wish to grow in grace and be a devoted Christian? Be very sure, if you wish it, you could not have a more important question than this—Do you pray? I ask whether you pray, because *neglect of prayer is one great cause of backsliding*.

There is such a thing as going back in religion after making a good profession. Men may run well for a season, like the Galatians, and then turn aside after false teachers. Men may profess loudly while their feelings are warm, as Peter did, and then in the hour of trial deny their Lord. Men may lose their first love as the Ephesians did. Men may cool

down in their zeal to do good, like Mark the companion of Paul. Men may follow an apostle for a season, and like Demas go back to the world. All these things men may do.

It is a miserable thing to be a backslider. Of all unhappy things that can befall a man, I suppose it is the worst. A stranded ship, a broken-winged eagle, a garden overrun with weeds, a harp without strings, a church in ruins, all these are sad sights, but a backslider is a sadder sight still. A wounded conscience—a mind sick of itself—a memory full of self-reproach—a heart pierced through with the Lord's arrows—a spirit broken with a load of inward accusation—all this is *a taste of hell*. It is a hell on earth. Truly that saying of the wise man is solemn and weighty, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Pro 14:14).

The cause of backsliding

Now what is the cause of most backslidings? I believe, as a general rule, one of the chief causes is neglect of private prayer. Of course the secret history of falls will not be known till the last day. I can only give my opinion as a minister of Christ and a student of the heart. That opinion is, I repeat distinctly, that backsliding generally first begins with *neglect of private prayer*.

Bibles read without prayer; sermons heard without prayer; marriages contracted without prayer; journeys undertaken without prayer; residences chosen without prayer; friendships formed without prayer; the daily act of private prayer itself hurried over, or gone through without heart: these are the kind of downward steps by which many a Christian descends to a condition of spiritual palsy, or reaches the point where God allows him to have a tremendous fall. This is the process which forms the lingering Lots, the unstable Samsons, the wife-idolizing Solomons, the inconsistent Asas, the pliable Jehoshaphats, the over-careful Marthas, of whom so many are to be found in the church of Christ. Often the simple history of such cases is this: they became *careless about private prayer*.

It is hidden at first

You may be very sure men fall in private long before they fall in public. They are backsliders on their knees long before they backslide openly in the eyes of the world. Like Peter, they first disregard the Lord's warning to watch and pray, and then like Peter, their strength is gone, and in the hour of temptation they deny their Lord.

The world takes notice of their fall, and scoffs loudly. But the world knows nothing of the real reason. The heathen succeeded in making a well-known Christian offer incense to an idol, by threatening him with a punishment worse than death. They then triumphed greatly at the sight of his cowardice and apostasy. But the heathen did not know the fact of which history informs us, that on that very morning he had left his bed chamber hastily, and without finishing his usual prayers.

If you are a Christian indeed, I trust you will never be a backslider. But if you do not wish to be a backsliding Christian, remember the question I ask you: *Do you pray?*

7. Prayer and Contentment

Sorrow abounds

I ask, lastly, whether you pray because prayer is one of the best means of happiness and contentment.

We live in a world where sorrow abounds. This has always been its state since sin came in. There cannot be sin without sorrow. And until sin is driven out from the world, it is vain for anyone to suppose he can escape sorrow.

Some without doubt have a larger cup of sorrow to drink than others. But few are to be found who live long without sorrows or cares of one sort or another. Our bodies, our property, our families, our children, our relations, our servants, our friends, our neighbors, our worldly callings, each and all of these are fountains of care. Sickesses, deaths, losses, disappointments, partings, separations, ingratitude, slander, all these are common things. We cannot get through life without them. Some day or other they find us out. The greater are our affections the deeper are our afflictions, and the more we love the more we have to weep.

The answer to sorrow

And what is the best means of cheerfulness in such a world as this? How shall we get through this valley of tears with least pain? I know no better means than the regular, habitual practice of *taking everything to God in prayer*.

This is the plain advice that the Bible gives, both in the Old Testament and the New. What says the psalmist? "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psa 50:15). "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psa 55:22). What says the apostle Paul? "Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phi 4:6-7). What says the apostle James? "Is any afflicted among you? let him pray" (Jam 5:13).

This was the practice of all the saints whose history we have recorded in the Scriptures. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. This is what Moses did when the people were ready to stone him in the wilderness. This is what Joshua did when Israel was defeated before the men of Ai. This is what David did when he was in danger at Keilah. This is what Hezekiah did when he received the letter from Sennacherib. This is what the church did when Peter was put in prison. This is what Paul did when he was cast into the dungeon at Philippi.

Our friend is Jesus

The only way to be really happy in such a world as this, is to be ever casting all our cares on God. It is trying to carry their own burdens which so often makes believers sad. If they will tell their troubles to God, he will enable them to bear them as easily as Samson did the gates of Gaza. If they are resolved to keep them to themselves, they will find one day that the very grasshopper is a burden.

There is a friend ever waiting to help us, if we will unbosom to him our sorrow—a friend who pitied the poor and sick and sorrowful, when he was upon earth—a friend who knows the heart of man, for he lived thirty-three years as a man among us—a friend who can weep with the weepers, for he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief—a friend who is able to help us, for there never was earthly pain he could not cure. That friend is Jesus Christ. The way to be happy is to be always opening our hearts to him. Oh that we were all like that poor Christian who only answered, when threatened and punished, *“I must tell the Lord.”*

Jesus can make those happy who trust him and call on him, whatever be their outward condition. He can give them peace of heart in a prison, contentment in the midst of poverty, comfort in the midst of bereavements, joy on the brink of the grave. There is a mighty fullness in him for all his believing members—a fullness that is ready to be poured out on every one that will ask in prayer. Oh that men would understand that happiness does not depend on outward circumstances, but on the state of the heart.

Results of prayer

Prayer can lighten crosses for us, however heavy. It can bring down to our side One who will help us to bear them. Prayer can open a door for us when our way seems hedged up. It can bring down One who will say, “This is the way, walk in it.” Prayer can let in a ray of hope when all our earthly prospects seem darkened. It can bring down One who will say, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” Prayer can obtain relief for us when those we love most are taken away, and the world feels empty. It can bring down One who can fill the gap in our hearts with himself, and say to the waves within, “Peace; be still.” Oh that men were not so like Hagar in the wilderness, blind to the well of living waters close beside them.

I want you to be happy. I know I cannot ask you a more useful question than this: *Do you pray?*

I trust I have brought before you things that will be seriously considered. I heartily pray God that this consideration may be blessed to your soul.

8. Advice to the Unsaved

There is no excuse

Let me speak a parting word to those who do not pray. I dare not suppose that all who read these pages are praying people. If you are a prayerless person, suffer me to speak to you this day on God’s behalf.

Prayerless reader, I can only warn you, but I do warn you most solemnly. I warn you that you are in a position of fearful danger. If you die in your present state, you are a lost soul. You will only rise again to be eternally miserable. I warn you that of all professing Christians you are most utterly without excuse. There is not a single good reason that you can show for living without prayer.

It is useless to say you *know not how to pray*. Prayer is the simplest act in all religion. It is simply speaking to God. It needs neither learning nor wisdom nor book knowledge to begin it. It needs nothing but heart and will. The weakest infant can cry when he is hungry. The poorest beggar can hold out his hand for alms, and does not wait to find fine words. The most ignorant man will find something to say to God, if he has only a mind.

It is useless to say you have *no convenient place* to pray in. Any man can find a place private enough, if he is disposed. Our Lord prayed on a mountain; Peter on the housetop; Isaac in the field; Nathaniel under the fig tree; Jonah in the whale's belly. Any place may become a closet, an oratory, and a Bethel, and be to us the presence of God.

It is useless to say you *have no time*. There is plenty of time, if men will employ it. Time may be short, but time is always long enough for prayer. Daniel had the affairs of a kingdom on his hands, and yet he prayed three times a day. David was ruler over a mighty nation, and yet he says, "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray" (Psa 55:17). When time is really wanted, time can always be found.

It is useless to say you *cannot pray till you have faith and a new heart*, and that you must sit still and wait for them. This is to add sin to sin. It is bad enough to be unconverted and going to hell. It is even worse to say, "I know it, but will not cry for mercy." This is a kind of argument for which there is no warrant in Scripture. "Call ye upon the Lord," saith Isaiah, "while he is near" (Isa 55:6). "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord," says Hosea (Hos 14:1). "Repent and pray," says Peter to Simon Magus (Act 8:22). If you want faith and a new heart, go and cry to the Lord for them. The very attempt to pray has often been the quickening of a dead soul.

Oh, prayerless reader, who and what are you that you will not ask anything of God? Have you made a covenant with death and hell? Are you at peace with the worm and the fire? Have you no sins to be pardoned? Have you no fear of eternal torment? Have you no desire after heaven? Oh that you would awake from your present folly. Oh that you would consider your latter end. Oh that you would arise and call upon God. Alas, there is a day coming when many shall pray loudly, "Lord, Lord, open to us," but all too late; when many shall cry to the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them, who would never cry to God. In all affection, I warn you, beware lest this be the end of your soul. Salvation is very near you. Do not lose heaven for want of asking.

Do you desire salvation?

Let me speak to those who have real desires for salvation, but know not what steps to take, or where to begin. I cannot but hope that some readers may be in this state of mind, and if there be but one such I must offer him affectionate counsel.

In every journey there must be a first step. There must be a change from sitting still to moving forward. The journeying's of Israel from Egypt to Canaan were long and wearisome. Forty years pass away before they crossed Jordan. Yet there was someone who moved first when they marched from Ramah to Succoth. When does a man really take

his first step in coming out from sin and the world? He does it in the day when he first prays with his heart.

In every building the first stone must be laid, and the first blow must be struck. The ark was one hundred and twenty years in building. Yet there was a day when Noah laid his axe to the first tree he cut down to form it. The temple of Solomon was a glorious building. But there was a day when the first huge stone was laid deep in mount Moriah. When does the building of the Spirit really begin to appear in a man's heart? It begins, so far as we can judge, when he first pours out his heart to God in prayer.

What to do

If you desire salvation, and want to know what to do, I advise you to go this very day to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the first private place you can find, and earnestly and heartily entreat him in prayer to save your soul.

Tell him that you have heard that he receives sinners, and has said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Tell him that you are a poor vile sinner, and that you come to him on the faith of his own invitation. Tell him you put yourself wholly and entirely in his hands; that you feel vile and helpless, and hopeless in yourself: and that except he saves you, you have no hope of being saved at all. Beseech him to deliver you from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin. Beseech him to pardon you, and wash you in his own blood. Beseech him to give you a new heart, and plant the Holy Spirit in your soul. Beseech him to give you grace and faith and will and power to be his disciple and servant from this day for ever. Oh, reader, go this very day, and tell these things to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you really are sincere about your soul.

Tell him in your own way, and your own words. If a doctor came to see you when sick you could tell him where you felt pain. If your soul feels its disease indeed, you can surely find something to tell Christ.

Doubt not

Doubt not his willingness to save you, because you are a sinner. It is Christ's office to save sinners. He says himself, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luk 5:32).

Wait not because you feel unworthy. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Waiting comes from the devil. Just as you are, go to Christ. The worse you are, the more need you have to apply to him. You will never mend yourself by staying away.

Fear not because your prayer is stammering, your words feeble, and your language poor. Jesus can understand you. Just as a mother understands the first lisps of her infant, so does the blessed Savior understand sinners. He can read a sigh, and see a meaning in a groan.

Despair not because you do not get an answer immediately. While you are speaking, Jesus is listening. If he delays an answer, it is only for wise reasons, and to try if you are in earnest. The answer will surely come. Though it tarry, wait for it. It will surely come.

Oh, reader, if you have any desire to be saved, remember the advice I have given you this day. Act upon it honestly and heartily, and you shall be saved.

9. Counsel to the Saints

The Struggle

Let me speak, lastly, to those who do pray. I trust that some who read this tract know well what prayer is, and have the Spirit of adoption. To all such, I offer a few words of brotherly counsel and exhortation. The incense offered in the tabernacle was ordered to be made in a particular way. Not every kind of incense would do. Let us remember this, and be careful about the matter and manner of our prayers.

Brethren who pray, if I know anything of a Christian's heart, you are often sick of your own prayers. You never enter into the apostle's words, "When I would do good, evil is present with me," so thoroughly as you sometimes do upon your knees. You can understand David's words, "I hate vain thoughts." You can sympathize with that poor converted Hottentot who was overheard praying, "Lord, deliver me from all my enemies, and above all, from that bad man—myself." There are few children of God who do not often find the season of prayer a season of conflict. The devil has special wrath against us when he sees us on our knees. Yet, I believe that prayers which cost us no trouble should be regarded with great suspicion. I believe we are very poor judges of the goodness of our prayers, and that the prayer which pleases us *least*, often pleases God *most*. Suffer me then, as a companion in the Christian warfare, to offer you a few words of exhortation. One thing, at least, we all feel: we must pray. We cannot give it up. We must go on.

Position

I commend then to your attention, the importance of *reverence and humility* in prayer. Let us never forget what we are, and what a solemn thing it is to speak with God. Let us beware of rushing into his presence with carelessness and levity. Let us say to ourselves: "I am on holy ground. This is no other than the gate of heaven. If I do not mean what I say, I am trifling with God. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Let us keep in mind the words of Solomon, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou on earth" (Ecc 5:2). When Abraham spoke to God, he said, "I am dust and ashes." When Job spoke to God, he said, "I am vile." Let us do likewise.

I commend to you the importance of praying *spiritually*. I mean by that, that we should labor always to have the direct help of the Spirit in our prayers, and beware above all things of formality. There is nothing so spiritual but that it may become a form, and this is specially true of private prayer. We may insensibly get into the habit of using the fittest possible words, and offering the most scriptural petitions, and yet do it all by rote without feeling it, and walk daily round an old beaten path. I desire to touch this point with caution and delicacy. I know that there are certain great things we daily want, and that there is nothing necessarily formal in asking for these things in the same words. The world, the devil, and our hearts, are daily the same. Of necessity we must daily go

over old ground. But this I say, we must be very careful on this point. If the skeleton and outline of our prayers be by habit almost a form, let us strive that the clothing and filling up of our prayers be as far as possible of the Spirit. As to praying out of a book in our *private* devotions, it is a habit I cannot praise. If we can tell our doctors the state of our bodies without a book, we ought to be able to tell the state of our souls to God. I have no objection to a man using crutches when he is first recovering from a broken limb. It is better to use crutches, than not to walk at all. But if I saw him all his life on crutches, I should not think it matter for congratulation. I should like to see him strong enough to throw his crutches away.

Practice

I commend to you the importance of making prayer *a regular business of life*. I might say something of the value of regular times in the day for prayer. God is a God of order. The hours for morning and evening sacrifice in the Jewish temple were not fixed as they were without a meaning. Disorder is eminently one of the fruits of sin. But I would not bring any under bondage. This only I say, that it is essential to your soul's health to make praying a part of the business of every twenty-four hours in your life. Just as you allot time to eating, sleeping, and business, so also allot time to prayer. Choose your own hours and seasons. At the very least, speak with God in the morning, before you speak with the world: and speak with God at night, after you have done with the world. But settle it in your minds, that prayer is one of the great things of every day. Do not drive it into a corner. Do not give it the scraps and parings of your duty. Whatever else you make a business of, make a business of prayer.

I commend to you the importance of *perseverance* in prayer. Once having begun the habit, never give it up. Your heart will sometimes say, "You have had family prayers: what mighty harm if you leave private prayer undone?" Your body will sometimes say, "You are unwell, or sleepy, or weary; you need not pray." Your mind will sometimes say, "You have important business to attend to today; cut short your prayers." Look on all such suggestions as coming direct from Satan. They are all as good as saying, "Neglect your soul." I do not maintain that prayers should always be of the same length; but I do say; let no excuse make you give up prayer.

Paul said, "Continue in prayer," and, "Pray without ceasing." He did not mean that men should be always on their knees, but he did mean that our prayers should be, like the continual burnt offering, steadily persevered in every day; that it should be like seed time and harvest, and summer and winter, unceasingly coming round at regular seasons; that it should be like the fire on the altar, not always consuming sacrifices, but never completely going out. Never forget that you may tie together morning and evening devotions, by an endless chain of short ejaculatory prayers throughout the day. Even in company, or business, or in the very streets, you may be silently sending up little winged messengers to God, as Nehemiah did in the very presence of Artaxerxes. And never think that time is wasted which is given to God. A nation does not become poorer

because it loses one year of working days in seven, by keeping the Sabbath. A Christian never finds he is a loser, in the long run, by persevering in prayer.

Attitude

I commend to you the importance of *earnestness* in prayer. It is not necessary that a man should shout, or scream, or be very loud, in order to prove that he is in earnest. But it is desirable that we should be hearty and fervent and warm, and ask as if we were really interested in what we were doing. It is the “effectual fervent” prayer that “availeth much.” This is the lesson that is taught us by the expressions used in Scripture about prayer: it is called, “crying, knocking, wrestling, laboring, and striving.”

This is the lesson taught us by scripture examples. Jacob is one. He said to the angel at Penuel, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen 32:26). Daniel is another. Hear how he pleaded with God: “O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God” (Dan 9:19). Our Lord Jesus Christ is another. It is written of him, “In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears” (Heb 5:7). Alas, how unlike is this to many of our supplications! How tame and lukewarm they seem by comparison. How truly might God say to many of us, “You do not really want what you pray for.”

Let us try to amend this fault. Let us knock loudly at the door of grace, Like Mercy in *Pilgrim's Progress*, as if we must perish unless heard. Let us settle it in our minds, that cold prayers are a sacrifice without fire. Let us remember the story of Demosthenes the great orator, when one came to him, and wanted him to plead his cause. He heard him without attention, while he told his story without earnestness. The man saw this, and cried out with anxiety that it was all true. “Ah,” said Demosthenes, “I believe you *now*.”

I commend to you the importance of *praying with faith*. We should endeavor to believe that our prayers are heard, and that if we ask things according to God's will, we shall be answered. This is the plain command of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mar 11:24). Faith is to prayer what the feather is to the arrow: without it prayer will not hit the mark. We should cultivate the habit of pleading promises in our prayers.

We should take with us some promise, and say, “Lord, here is thine own word pledged. Do for us as thou hast said.” This was the habit of Jacob and Moses and David. The 119th Psalm is full of things asked, “according to thy word.” Above all, we should cultivate the habit of expecting answers to our prayers. We should do like the merchant who sends his ships to sea. We should not be satisfied, unless we see some return. Alas, there are few points on which Christians come short so much as this. The church at Jerusalem made prayer without ceasing for Peter in prison; but when the prayer was answered, they would hardly believe it (Act 12:15). It is a solemn saying of Traill, “There is no surer mark of trifling in prayer, than when men are careless what they get by prayer.”

I commend to you the importance of *boldness* in prayer. There is an unseemly familiarity in some men's prayers which I cannot praise. But there is such a thing as a holy

boldness, which is exceedingly to be desired. I mean such boldness as that of Moses, when he pleads with God not to destroy Israel “Wherefore,” says he, “should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains? Turn from thy fierce anger” (Exo 32:12). I mean such boldness as that of Joshua, when the children of Israel were defeated before men of Ai: “What,” says he, “wilt thou do unto thy great name?” (Jos 7:9). This is the boldness for which Luther was remarkable. One who heard him praying said, “What a spirit, what a confidence was in his very expressions. With such a reverence he sued, as one begging of God, and yet with such hope and assurance, as if he spoke with a loving father or friend.” This is the boldness which distinguished Bruce, a great Scotch divine of the seventeenth century. His prayers were said to be “like bolts shot up into heaven.” Here also I fear we sadly come short. We do not sufficiently realize the believer’s privileges. We do not plead as often as we might, “Lord, are we not thine own people? Is it not for thy glory that we should be sanctified? Is it not for thy honor that thy gospel should increase?”

Asking

I commend to you the importance of *fullness* in prayer. I do not forget that our Lord warns us against the example of the Pharisees, who, for pretense, made long prayers; and commands us when we pray not to use vain repetitions. But I cannot forget, on the other hand, that he has given his own sanction to large and long devotions by continuing all night in prayer to God. At all events, we are not likely in this day to err on the side of praying *too much*. Might it not rather be feared that many believers in this generation pray *too little*? Is not the actual amount of time that many Christians give to prayer, in the aggregate, very small? I am afraid these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily. I am afraid the private devotions of many are most painfully scanty and limited; just enough to prove they are alive and no more. They really seem to want little from God. They seem to have little to confess, little to ask for, and little to thank him for. Alas, this is altogether wrong. Nothing is more common than to hear believers complaining that they do not get on. They tell us that they do not grow in grace as they could desire. Is it not rather to be suspected that many have quite as much grace as they ask for? Is it not the true account of many, that they have little, because they ask little? The cause of their weakness is to be found in their own stunted, dwarfish, clipped, contracted, hurried, narrow, diminutive prayers. *They have not, because they ask not*. Oh, we are not straitened in Christ, but in ourselves. The Lord says, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” But we are like the King of Israel who smote on the ground thrice and stayed, when he ought to have smitten five or six times.

I commend to you the importance of *particularity* in prayer. We ought not to be content with great general petitions. We ought to specify our wants before the throne of grace. It should not be enough to confess we are sinners: we should name the sins of which our conscience tells us we are most guilty. It should not be enough to ask for holiness; we should name the graces in which we feel most deficient. It should not be enough to tell the Lord we are in trouble; we should describe our trouble and all its pe-

culiarities. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. He tells God exactly what it is that he fears (Gen 32:11). This is what Eliezer did, when he sought a wife for his master's son. He spreads before God precisely what he wants (Gen 24:12). This is what Paul did when he had a thorn in the flesh. He besought the Lord (2Co 12:8).

This is true faith and confidence. We should believe that nothing is too small to be named before God. What should we think of the patient who told his doctor he was ill, but never went into particulars? What should we think of the wife who told her husband she was unhappy, but did not specify the cause? What should we think of the child who told his father he was in trouble, but nothing more? Christ is the true bridegroom of the soul, the true physician of the heart, the real father of all his people. Let us show that we feel this by being unreserved in our communications with him. Let us hide no secrets from him. Let us tell him all our hearts.

I commend to you the importance of *intercession* in our prayers. We are all selfish by nature, and our selfishness is very apt to stick to us, even when we are converted. There is a tendency in us to think only of our own souls, our own spiritual conflicts, our own progress in religion, and to forget others. Against this tendency we all have need to watch and strive, and not least in our prayers. We should study to be of a public spirit. We should stir ourselves up to name other names besides our own before the throne of grace. We should try to bear in our hearts the whole world, the heathen, the Jews, the Roman Catholics, the body of true believers, the professing Protestant churches, the country in which we live, the congregation to which we belong, the household in which we sojourn, the friends and relations we are connected with. For each and all of these we should plead.

This is the highest charity. He loves me best who loves me in his prayers. This is for our soul's health. It enlarges our sympathies and expands our hearts. This is for the benefit of the church. The wheels of all machinery for extending the gospel are moved by prayer. They do as much for the Lord's cause who intercede like Moses on the mount, as they do who fight like Joshua in the thick of the battle. This is to be like Christ. He bears the names of his people, as their High Priest, before the Father. Oh, the privilege of being like Jesus! This is to be a true helper to ministers. If I must choose a congregation, give me a people that pray.

Thanksgiving

I commend to you the importance of *thankfulness* in prayer. I know well that asking God is one thing and praising God is another. But I see so close a connection between prayer and praise in the Bible, that I dare not call that true prayer in which thankfulness has no part. It is not for nothing that Paul says, "By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6). "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Col 4:2). It is of mercy that we are not in hell. It is of mercy that we have the hope of heaven. It is of mercy that we live in a land of spiritual light. It is of mercy that we have been called by the Spirit, and not left to reap the fruit of our own ways. It is of mercy that we still live and have opportunities of glori-

fyng God actively or passively. Surely these thoughts should crowd on our minds whenever we speak with God. Surely we should never open our lips in prayer without blessing God for that free grace by which we live, and for that loving kindness which endureth forever.

Never was there an eminent saint who was not full of thankfulness. St. Paul hardly ever writes an epistle without beginning with thankfulness. Men like Whitefield in the last century, and Bickersteth in our time, abounded in thankfulness. Oh, reader, if we would be bright and shining lights in our day, we must cherish a spirit of praise. Let our prayers be thankful prayers.

On guard

I commend to you the importance of *watchfulness* over your prayers. Prayer is that point in religion at which you must be most of all on your guard. Here it is that true religion begins; here it flourishes, and here it decays. Tell me what a man's prayers are, and I will soon tell you the state of his soul. Prayer is the spiritual pulse. By this the spiritual health may be tested. Prayer is the spiritual weather-glass. By this we may know whether it is fair or foul with our hearts. Oh, let us keep an eye continually upon our private devotions. Here is the pith and marrow of our practical Christianity. Sermons and books and tracts, and committee meetings and the company of good men, are all good in their way, but they will never make up for the neglect of private prayer. Mark well the places and society and companions that unhinge your hearts for communion with God and make your prayers drive heavily.

There be *on your guard*. Observe narrowly what friends and what employments leave your soul in the most spiritual frame, and most ready to speak with God. To these cleave and stick fast. If you will take care of your prayers, nothing shall go very wrong with your soul.

I offer these points for your private consideration. I do it in all humility. I know no one who needs to be reminded of them more than I do myself. But I believe them to be God's own truth, and I desire myself and all I love to feel them more.

I want the times we live in to be praying times. I want the Christians of our day to be praying Christians. I want the church to be a praying church. My heart's desire and prayer in sending forth this tract is to promote a spirit of prayerfulness. I want those who never prayed yet, to arise and call upon God, and I want those who do pray, to see that they are not praying amiss.

"Men ought always to pray"! ❧

Available in print as a booklet from Chapel Library.

Family

The Duties of Parents

“Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”—Proverbs 22:6

I suppose that most professing Christians are acquainted with the text at the head of this page. The sound of it is probably familiar to your ears, like an old tune. It is likely you have heard it, or read it, talked of it, or quoted it, many a time. Is it not so?

But, after all, how little is the substance of this text regarded! The doctrine it contains appears scarcely known, the duty it puts before us seems fearfully seldom practised. Reader, do I not speak the truth?

It cannot be said that the subject is a new one. The world is old, and we have the experience of nearly six thousand years to help us. We live in days when there is a mighty zeal for education in every quarter. We hear of new schools rising on all sides. We are told of new systems, and new books for the young, of every sort and description. And still for all this, the vast majority of children are manifestly not trained in the way they should go, for when they grow up to man's estate, they do not walk with God.

Now how shall we account for this state of things? The plain truth is, the Lord's commandment in our text is not regarded; and therefore the Lord's promise in our text is not fulfilled.

Reader, these things may well give rise to great searchings of heart. Suffer then a word of exhortation from a minister, about the right training of children. Believe me, the subject is one that should come home to every conscience, and make every one ask himself the question, “Am I in this matter doing what I can?”

It is a subject that concerns almost all. There is hardly a household that it does not touch. Parents, nurses, teachers, godfathers, godmothers, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters—all have an interest in it. Few can be found, I think, who might not influence some parent in the management of his family, or affect the training of some child by suggestion or advice. All of us, I suspect, can do something here, either directly or indirectly, and I wish to stir up all to bear this in remembrance.

It is a subject, too, on which all concerned are in great danger of coming short of their duty. This is preeminently a point in which men can see the faults of their neigh-

bours more clearly than their own. They will often bring up their children in the very path which they have denounced to their friends as unsafe. They will see motes in other men's families, and overlook beams in their own. They will be quick sighted as eagles in detecting mistakes abroad, and yet blind as bats to fatal errors which are daily going on at home. They will be wise about their brother's house, but foolish about their own flesh and blood. Here, if anywhere, we have need to suspect our own judgment. This, too, you will do well to bear in mind.⁶⁸

Come now, and let me place before you a few hints about right training. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost bless them, and make them words in season to you all. Reject them not because they are blunt and simple; despise them not because they contain nothing new. Be very sure, if you would train children for heaven, they are hints that ought not to be lightly set aside.

1. First, then, if you would train your children rightly, train them in the way they should go, and not in the way that they would.

Remember children are born with a decided bias towards evil, and therefore if you let them choose for themselves, they are certain to choose wrong.

The mother cannot tell what her tender infant may grow up to be—tall or short, weak or strong, wise or foolish he may be any of these things or not—it is all uncertain. But one thing the mother can say with certainty: he will have a corrupt and sinful heart. It is natural to us to do wrong. "Foolishness," says Solomon, "is bound in the heart of a child" (Pro 22:15). "A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Pro 29:15). Our hearts are like the earth on which we tread; let it alone, and it is sure to bear weeds.

If, then, you would deal wisely with your child, you must not leave him to the guidance of his own will. Think for him, judge for him, act for him, just as you would for one weak and blind; but for pity's sake, give him not up to his own wayward tastes and inclinations. It must not be his likings and wishes that are consulted. He knows not yet what is good for his mind and soul, any more than what is good for his body. You do not let him decide what he shall eat, and what he shall drink, and how he shall be clothed. Be consistent, and deal with his mind in like manner. Train him in the way that is scriptural and right, and not in the way that he fancies.

If you cannot make up your mind to this first principle of Christian training, it is useless for you to read any further. Self-will is almost the first thing that appears in a child's mind; and it must be your first step to resist it.

⁶⁸ As a minister, I cannot help remarking that there is hardly any subject about which people seem so tenacious as they are about their children. I have sometimes been perfectly astonished at the slowness of sensible Christian parents to allow that their own children are in fault, or deserve blame. There are not a few persons to whom I would far rather speak about their own sins, than tell them their children had done anything wrong.

2. Train up your child with all tenderness, affection, and patience.

I do not mean that you are to spoil him, but I do mean that you should let him see that you love him.

Love should be the silver thread that runs through all your conduct. Kindness, gentleness, long-suffering, forbearance, patience, sympathy, a willingness to enter into childish troubles, a readiness to take part in childish joys—these are the cords by which a child may be led most easily—these are the clues you must follow if you would find the way to his heart.

Few are to be found, even among grown-up people, who are not more easy to draw than to drive. There is that in all our minds which rises in arms against compulsion; we set up our backs and stiffen our necks at the very idea of a forced obedience. We are like young horses in the hand of a breaker: handle them kindly, and make much of them, and by and by you may guide them with thread; use them roughly and violently, and it will be many a month before you get the mastery of them at all.

Now children's minds are cast in much the same mould as our own. Sternness and severity of manner chill them and throw them back. It shuts up their hearts, and you will weary yourself to find the door. But let them only see that you have an affectionate feeling towards them—that you are really desirous to make them happy, and do them good—that if you punish them, it is intended for their profit, and that, like the pelican, you would give your heart's blood to nourish their souls; let them see this, I say, and they will soon be all your own. But they must be wooed with kindness, if their attention is ever to be won.

And surely reason itself might teach us this lesson. Children are weak and tender creatures, and, as such, they need patient and considerate treatment. We must handle them delicately, like frail machines, lest by rough fingering we do more harm than good. They are like young plants, and need gentle watering—often, but little at a time.

We must not expect all things at once. We must remember what children are, and teach them as they are able to bear. Their minds are like a lump of metal—not to be forged and made useful at once, but only by a succession of little blows. Their understandings are like narrow-necked vessels: we must pour in the wine of knowledge gradually, or much of it will be spilled and lost. “Line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little,” must be our rule. The whetstone does its work slowly, but frequent rubbing will bring the scythe to a fine edge. Truly there is need of patience in training a child, but without it nothing can be done.

Nothing will compensate for the absence of this tenderness and love. A minister may speak the truth as it is in Jesus, clearly, forcibly, unanswerably; but if he does not speak it in love, few souls will be won. Just so you must set before your children their duty—command, threaten, punish, reason—but if affection be wanting in your treatment, your labour will be all in vain.

Love is one grand secret of successful training. Anger and harshness may frighten, but they will not persuade the child that you are right; and if he sees you often out of temper, you will soon cease to have his respect. A father who speaks to his son as Saul did to Jonathan (1Sa 20:30), need not expect to retain his influence over that son's mind.

Try hard to keep up a hold on your child's affections. It is a dangerous thing to make your children afraid of you. Anything is almost better than reserve and constraint between your child and yourself; and this will come in with fear. Fear puts an end to openness of manner; —fear leads to concealment; —fear sows the seed of much hypocrisy, and leads to many a lie. There is a mine of truth in the Apostle's words to the Colossians: "Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged" (Col 3:21). Let not the advice it contains be overlooked.

3. Train your children with an abiding persuasion on your mind that much depends upon you.

Grace is the strongest of all principles. See what a revolution grace effects when it comes into the heart of an old sinner—how it overturns the strongholds of Satan—how it casts down mountains, fills up valleys—makes crooked things straight—and new creates the whole man. Truly nothing is impossible to grace.

Nature, too, is very strong. See how it struggles against the things of the kingdom of God—how it fights against every attempt to be more holy—how it keeps up an unceasing warfare within us to the last hour of life. Nature indeed is strong.

But after nature and grace, undoubtedly, there is nothing more powerful than education. Early habits (if I may so speak) are everything with us, under God. We are made what we are by training. Our character takes the form of that mould into which our first years are cast.⁶⁹

We depend, in a vast measure, on those who bring us up. We get from them a colour, a taste, a bias which cling to us more or less all our lives. We catch the language of our nurses and mothers, and learn to speak it almost insensibly, and unquestionably we catch something of their manners, ways, and mind at the same time. Time only will show, I suspect, how much we all owe to early impressions, and how many things in us may be traced up to seeds sown in the days of our very infancy, by those who were about us. A very learned Englishman, Mr. Locke, has gone so far as to say: "That of all the men we meet with, nine parts out of ten are what they are, good or bad, useful or not, according to their education."

And all this is one of God's merciful arrangements. He gives your children a mind that will receive impressions like moist clay. He gives them a disposition at the starting-point of life to believe what you tell them, and to take for granted what you advise them,

⁶⁹ "He has seen but little of life who does not discern everywhere the effect of education on men's opinions and habits of thinking. The children bring out of the nursery that which displays itself throughout their lives"—*Cecil*.

and to trust your word rather than a stranger's. He gives you, in short, a golden opportunity of doing them good. See that the opportunity be not neglected, and thrown away. Once let slip, it is gone for ever.

Beware of that miserable delusion into which some have fallen—that parents can do nothing for their children, that you must leave them alone, wait for grace, and sit still. These persons have wishes for their children in Balaam's fashion—they would like them to die the death of the righteous man, but they do nothing to make them live his life. They desire much, and have nothing. And the devil rejoices to see such reasoning, just as he always does over anything which seems to excuse indolence, or to encourage neglect of means.

I know that you cannot convert your child. I know well that they who are born again are born, not of the will of man, but of God. But I know also that God says expressly, "Train up a child in the way he should go," and that He never laid a command on man which He would not give man grace to perform. And I know, too, that our duty is not to stand still and dispute, but to go forward and obey. It is just in the going forward that God will meet us. The path of obedience is the way in which He gives the blessing. We have only to do as the servants were commanded at the marriage feast in Cana, to fill the water-pots with water, and we may safely leave it to the Lord to turn that water into wine.

4. Train with this thought continually before your eyes—that the soul of your child is the first thing to be considered.

Precious, no doubt, are these little ones in your eyes; but if you love them, think often of their souls. No interest should weigh with you so much as their eternal interests. No part of them should be so dear to you as that part which will never die. The world, with all its glory, shall pass away; the hills shall melt; the heavens shall be wrapped together as a scroll; the sun shall cease to shine. But the spirit which dwells in those little creatures, whom you love so well, shall outlive them all, and whether in happiness or misery (to speak as a man) will depend on you.

This is the thought that should be uppermost on your mind in all you do for your children. In every step you take about them, in every plan, and scheme, and arrangement that concerns them, do not leave out that mighty question, "How will this affect their souls?"

Soul love is the soul of all love. To pet and pamper and indulge your child, as if this world was all he had to look to, and this life the only season for happiness—to do this is not true love, but cruelty. It is treating him like some beast of the earth, which has but one world to look to, and nothing after death. It is hiding from him that grand truth, which he ought to be made to learn from his very infancy—that the chief end of his life is the salvation of his soul.

A true Christian must be no slave to fashion, if he would train his child for heaven. He must not be content to do things merely because they are the custom of the world; to

teach them and instruct them in certain ways, merely because it is usual; to allow them to read books of a questionable sort, merely because everybody else reads them; to let them form habits of a doubtful tendency, merely because they are the habits of the day. He must train with an eye to his children's souls. He must not be ashamed to hear his training called singular and strange. What if it is? The time is short—the fashion of this world passeth away. He that has trained his children for heaven, rather than for earth—for God, rather than for man—he is the parent that will be called wise at last.

5. Train your child to a knowledge of the Bible.

You cannot make your children love the Bible, I allow. None but the Holy Ghost can give us a heart to delight in the Word. But you can make your children acquainted with the Bible; and be sure they cannot be acquainted with that blessed book too soon, or too well.

A thorough knowledge of the Bible is the foundation of all clear views of religion. He that is well-grounded in it will not generally be found a waverer, and carried about by every wind of new doctrine. Any system of training which does not make a knowledge of Scripture the first thing is unsafe and unsound.

You have need to be careful on this point just now, for the devil is abroad, and error abounds. Some are to be found amongst us who give the Church the honour due to Jesus Christ. Some are to be found who make the sacraments saviours and passports to eternal life. And some are to be found in like manner who honour a catechism more than the Bible, or fill the minds of their children with miserable little story-books, instead of the Scripture of truth. But if you love your children, let the simple Bible be everything in the training of their souls; and let all other books go down and take the second place.

Care not so much for their being mighty in the catechism, as for their being mighty in the Scriptures. This is the training, believe me, that God will honour. The Psalmist says of Him, "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psa 138:2); and I think that He gives an especial blessing to all who try to magnify it among men.

See that your children read the Bible reverently. Train them to look on it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, written by the Holy Ghost Himself—all true, all profitable, and able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

See that they read it regularly. Train them to regard it as their soul's daily food—as a thing essential to their soul's daily health. I know well you can not make this anything more than a form; but there is no telling the amount of sin which a mere form may indirectly restrain.

See that they read it all. You need not shrink from bringing any doctrine before them. You need not fancy that the leading doctrines of Christianity are things which children cannot understand. Children understand far more of the Bible than we are apt to suppose.

Tell them of sin, its guilt, its consequences, its power, its vileness: you will find they can comprehend something of this.

Tell them of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His work for our salvation—the atonement, the cross, the blood, the sacrifice, the intercession: you will discover there is something not beyond them in all this.

Tell them of the work of the Holy Spirit in man's heart, how He changes, and renews, and sanctifies, and purifies: you will soon see they can go along with you in some measure in this. In short, I suspect we have no idea how much a little child can take in of the length and breadth of the glorious gospel. They see far more of these things than we suppose.⁷⁰

Fill their minds with Scripture. Let the Word dwell in them richly. Give them the Bible, the whole Bible, even while they are young.

6. Train them to a habit of prayer.

Prayer is the very life-breath of true religion. It is one of the first evidences that a man is born again. "Behold," said the Lord of Saul, in the day he sent Ananias to him, "Behold, he prayeth" (Act 9:11). He had begun to pray, and that was proof enough.

Prayer was the distinguishing mark of the Lord's people in the day that there began to be a separation between them and the world. "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26).

Prayer is the peculiarity of all real Christians now. They pray—for they tell God their wants, their feelings, their desires, their fears; and mean what they say. The nominal Christian may repeat prayers, and good prayers too, but he goes no further.

Prayer is the turning-point in a man's soul. Our ministry is unprofitable, and our labour is vain, till you are brought to your knees. Till then, we have no hope about you.

Prayer is one great secret of spiritual prosperity. When there is much private communion with God, your soul will grow like the grass after rain; when there is little, all will be at a standstill, you will barely keep your soul alive. Show me a growing Christian, a going forward Christian, a strong Christian, a flourishing Christian, and sure am I, he is one that speaks often with his Lord. He asks much, and he has much. He tells Jesus everything, and so he always knows how to act.

Prayer is the mightiest engine God has placed in our hands. It is the best weapon to use in every difficulty, and the surest remedy in every trouble. It is the key that unlocks the treasury of promises, and the hand that draws forth grace and help in time of need. It is the silver trumpet God commands us to sound in all our necessity, and it is the cry He has promised always to attend to, even as a loving mother to the voice of her child.

⁷⁰ As to the age when the religious instruction of a child should begin, no general rule can be laid down. The mind seems to open in some children much more quickly than in others. We seldom begin too early. There are wonderful examples on record of what a child can attain to, even at three years old.

Prayer is the simplest means that man can use in coming to God. It is within reach of all—the sick, the aged, the infirm, the paralytic, the blind, the poor, the unlearned—all can pray. It avails you nothing to plead want of memory, and want of learning, and want of books, and want of scholarship in this matter. So long as you have a tongue to tell your soul's state, you may and ought to pray. Those words, "Ye have not, because ye ask not" (Jam 4:2), will be a fearful condemnation to many in the day of judgment.

Parents, if you love your children, do all that lies in your power to train them up to a habit of prayer. Show them how to begin. Tell them what to say. Encourage them to persevere. Remind them if they become careless and slack about it. Let it not be your fault, at any rate, if they never call on the name of the Lord.

This, remember, is the first step in religion which a child is able to take. Long before he can read, you can teach him to kneel by his mother's side, and repeat the simple words of prayer and praise which she puts in his mouth. And as the first steps in any undertaking are always the most important, so is the manner in which your children's prayers are prayed, a point which deserves your closest attention. Few seem to know how much depends on this. You must beware lest they get into a way of saying them in a hasty, careless, and irreverent manner. You must beware of giving up the oversight of this matter to servants and nurses, or of trusting too much to your children doing it when left to themselves. I cannot praise that mother who never looks after this most important part of her child's daily life herself. Surely if there be any habit which your own hand and eye should help in forming, it is the habit of prayer. Believe me, if you never hear your children pray yourself, you are much to blame. You are little wiser than the bird described in Job, "which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labour is in vain without fear" (Job 39:14-16).

Prayer is, of all habits, the one which we recollect the longest. Many a grey-headed man could tell you how his mother used to make him pray in the days of his childhood. Other things have passed away from his mind perhaps. The church where he was taken to worship, the minister whom he heard preach, the companions who used to play with him—all these, it may be, have passed from his memory, and left no mark behind. But you will often find it is far different with his first prayers. He will often be able to tell you where he knelt, and what he was taught to say, and even how his mother looked all the while. It will come up as fresh before his mind's eye as if it was but yesterday.

Reader, if you love your children, I charge you, do not let the seed-time of a prayerful habit pass away unimproved. If you train your children to anything, train them, at least, to a habit of prayer.

7. Train them to habits of diligence, and regularity about public means of grace.

Tell them of the duty and privilege of going to the house of God, and joining in the prayers of the congregation. Tell them that wherever the Lord's people are gathered to-

gether, there the Lord Jesus is present in an especial manner, and that those who absent themselves must expect, like the Apostle Thomas, to miss a blessing. Tell them of the importance of hearing the Word preached, and that it is God's ordinance for converting, sanctifying, and building up the souls of men. Tell them how the Apostle Paul enjoins us not "to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb 10:25); but to exhort one another, to stir one another up to it, and so much the more as we see the day approaching.

I call it a sad sight in a church when nobody comes up to the Lord's table but the elderly people, and the young men and the young women all turn away. But I call it a sadder sight still when no children are to be seen in a church, excepting those who come to the Sunday School, and are obliged to attend. Let none of this guilt lie at your doors. There are many boys and girls in every parish, besides those who come to school, and you who are their parents and friends should see to it that they come with you to church.

Do not allow them to grow up with a habit of making vain excuses for not coming. Give them plainly to understand, that so long as they are under your roof it is the rule of your house for every one in health to honour the Lord's house upon the Lord's day, and that you reckon the Sabbath-breaker to be a murderer of his own soul.

See to it too, if it can be so arranged, that your children go with you to church, and sit near you when they are there. To go to church is one thing, but to behave well at church is quite another. And believe me, there is no security for good behaviour like that of having them under your own eye.

The minds of young people are easily drawn aside, and their attention lost, and every possible means should be used to counteract this. I do not like to see them coming to church by themselves—they often get into bad company by the way, and so learn more evil on the Lord's day than in all the rest of the week. Neither do I like to see what I call "a young people's corner" in a church. They often catch habits of inattention and irreverence there, which it takes years to unlearn, if ever they are unlearned at all. What I like to see is a whole family sitting together, old and young, side by side—men, women, and children, serving God according to their households.

But there are some who say that it is useless to urge children to attend means of grace, because they cannot understand them.

I would not have you listen to such reasoning. I find no such doctrine in the Old Testament. When Moses goes before Pharaoh (Ex. 10:9), I observe he says, "We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters: for we must hold a feast unto the Lord." When Joshua read the law (Jos 8:35), I observe, "There was not a word which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them." "Thrice in the year," says Exodus 34:23, "shall all your men-children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel." And when I turn to the New Testament, I find children mentioned there as partaking in public acts of religion as well as in the Old. When Paul was leaving the

disciples at Tyre for the last time, I find it said (Act 21:5), "They all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed."

Samuel, in the days of his childhood, appears to have ministered unto the Lord some time before he really knew Him. "Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him" (1 Sam. 3:7). The Apostles themselves do not seem to have understood all that our Lord said at the time that it was spoken: "These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him" (Joh 12:16).

Parents, comfort your minds with these examples. Be not cast down because your children see not the full value of the means of grace now. Only train them up to a habit of regular attendance. Set it before their minds as a high, holy, and solemn duty, and believe me, the day will very likely come when they will bless you for your deed.

8. Train them to a habit of faith.

I mean by this, you should train them up to believe what you say. You should try to make them feel confidence in your judgment, and respect your opinions, as better than their own. You should accustom them to think that, when you say a thing is bad for them, it must be bad, and when you say it is good for them, it must be good; that your knowledge, in short, is better than their own, and that they may rely implicitly on your word. Teach them to feel that what they know not now, they will probably know hereafter, and to be satisfied there is a reason and a needs-be for everything you require them to do.

Who indeed can describe the blessedness of a real spirit of faith? Or rather, who can tell the misery that unbelief has brought upon the world? Unbelief made Eve eat the forbidden fruit—she doubted the truth of God's word: "Ye shall surely die." Unbelief made the old world reject Noah's warning, and so perish in sin. Unbelief kept Israel in the wilderness—it was the bar that kept them from entering the promised land. Unbelief made the Jews crucify the Lord of glory—they believed not the voice of Moses and the prophets, though read to them every day. And unbelief is the reigning sin of man's heart down to this very hour—unbelief in God's promises—unbelief in God's threatenings—unbelief in our own sinfulness—unbelief in our own danger—unbelief in everything that runs counter to the pride and worldliness of our evil hearts. Reader, you train your children to little purpose if you do not train them to a habit of implicit faith—faith in their parents' word, confidence that what their parents say must be right.

I have heard it said by some, that you should require nothing of children which they cannot understand that you should explain and give a reason for everything you desire them to do. I warn you solemnly against such a notion. I tell you plainly, I think it an unsound and rotten principle. No doubt it is absurd to make a mystery of everything you do, and there are many things which it is well to explain to children, in order that they may see that they are reasonable and wise. But to bring them up with the idea that they

must take nothing on trust, that they, with their weak and imperfect understandings, must have the “why” and the “wherefore” made clear to them at every step they take—this is indeed a fearful mistake, and likely to have the worst effect on their minds.

Reason with your child if you are so disposed, at certain times, but never forget to keep him in mind (if you really love him) that he is but a child after all—that he thinks as a child, he understands as a child, and therefore must not expect to know the reason of everything at once.

Set before him the example of Isaac, in the day when Abraham took him to offer him on Mount Moriah (Gen 22). He asked his father that single question, “Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?” and he got no answer but this, “God will provide Himself a lamb.” How, or where, or whence, or in what manner, or by what means—all this Isaac was not told; but the answer was enough. He believed that it would be well, because his father said so, and he was content.

Tell your children, too, that we must all be learners in our beginnings, that there is an alphabet to be mastered in every kind of knowledge—that the best horse in the world had need once to be broken—that a day will come when they will see the wisdom of all your training. But in the meantime if you say a thing is right, it must be enough for them—they must believe you, and be content.

Parents, if any point in training is important, it is this. I charge you by the affection you have to your children, use every means to train them up to a habit of faith.

9. Train them to a habit of obedience.

This is an object which it is worth any labour to attain. No habit, I suspect, has such an influence over our lives as this. Parents, determine to make your children obey you, though it may cost you much trouble, and cost them many tears. Let there be no questioning, and reasoning, and disputing, and delaying, and answering again. When you give them a command, let them see plainly that you will have it done.

Obedience is the only reality. It is faith visible, faith acting, and faith incarnate. It is the test of real discipleship among the Lord’s people. “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14). It ought to be the mark of well-trained children, that they do whatsoever their parents command them. Where, in deed, is the honour which the fifth commandment enjoins, if fathers and mothers are not obeyed cheerfully, willingly, and at once?

Early obedience has all Scripture on its side. It is in Abraham’s praise, not merely he will train his family, but “he will command his children, and his household after him” (Gen 18:19). It is said of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, that when “he was young he was subject to Mary and Joseph” (Luk 2:51). Observe how implicitly Joseph obeyed the order of his father Jacob (Gen 37:13). See how Isaiah speaks of it as an evil thing, when “the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient” (Isa 3:5). Mark how the Apostle Paul names disobedience to parents as one of the bad signs of the latter days (2Ti 3:2). Mark how he singles out this grace of requiring obedience as one that should adorn a

Christian minister: “a bishop must be one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.” And again, “Let the deacons rule their children and their own houses well “ (1Ti 3:4,12). And again, an elder must be one “having faithful children, children not accused of riot, or unruly” (Ti 1:6).

Parents, do you wish to see your children happy? Take care, then, that you train them to obey when they are spoken to—to do as they are bid. Believe me, we are not made for entire independence—we are not fit for it. Even Christ’s freemen have a yoke to wear, they “serve the Lord Christ” (Col 3:24). Children cannot learn too soon that this is a world in which we are not all intended to rule, and that we are never in our right place until we know how to obey our betters. Teach them to obey while young, or else they will be fretting against God all their lives long, and wear themselves out with the vain idea of being independent of His control.

Reader, this hint is only too much needed. You will see many in this day who allow their children to choose and think for themselves long before they are able, and even make excuses for their disobedience, as if it were a thing not to be blamed. To my eyes, a parent always yielding, and a child always having its own way, are a most painful sight—painful, because I see God’s appointed order of things inverted and turned upside down—painful, because I feel sure the consequence to that child’s character in the end will be self-will, pride, and self-conceit. You must not wonder that men refuse to obey their Father which is in heaven, if you allow them, when children, to disobey their father who is upon earth.

Parents, if you love your children, let obedience be a motto and a watchword continually before their eyes.

10. Train them to a habit of always speaking the truth.

Truth-speaking is far less common in the world than at first sight we are disposed to think. The whole truth, and nothing but the truth, is a golden rule which many would do well to bear in mind. Lying and prevarication are old sins. The devil was the father of them—he deceived Eve by a bold lie, and ever since the fall it is a sin against which all the children of Eve have need to be on their guard.

Only think how much falsehood and deceit there is in the world! How much exaggeration! How many additions are made to a simple story! How many things left out, if it does not serve the speaker’s interest to tell them! How few there are about us of whom we can say, we put unhesitating trust in their word! Verily the ancient Persians were wise in their generation: it was a leading point with them in educating their children, that they should learn to speak the truth. What an awful proof it is of man’s natural sinfulness, that it should be needful to name such a point at all!

Reader, I would have you remark how often God is spoken of in the Old Testament as the God of truth. Truth seems to be especially set before us as a leading feature in the character of Him with whom we have to do. He never swerves from the straight line. He abhors lying and hypocrisy. Try to keep this continually before your children’s minds.

Press upon them at all times, that less than the truth is a lie; that evasion, excuse-making, and exaggeration are all halfway houses towards what is false, and ought to be avoided. Encourage them in any circumstances to be straightforward, and, whatever it may cost them, to speak the truth.

I press this subject on your attention, not merely for the sake of your children's character in the world—though I might dwell much on this—I urge it rather for your own comfort and assistance in all your dealings with them. You will find it a mighty help indeed, to be able always to trust their word. It will go far to prevent that habit of concealment, which so unhappily prevails sometimes among children. Openness and straightforwardness depend much upon a parent's treatment of this matter in the days of our infancy.

11. Train them to a habit of always redeeming the time.

Idleness is the devil's best friend. It is the surest way to give him an opportunity of doing us harm. An idle mind is like an open door, and if Satan does not enter in himself by it, it is certain he will throw in something to raise bad thoughts in our souls.

No created being was ever meant to be idle. Service and work is the appointed portion of every creature of God. The angels in heaven work—they are the Lord's ministering servants, ever doing His will. Adam, in Paradise, had work—he was appointed to dress the Garden of Eden, and to keep it. The redeemed saints in glory will have work, "They rest not day and night singing praise and glory to Him who bought them." And man, weak, sinful man, must have something to do, or else his soul will soon get into an unhealthy state. We must have our hands filled, and our minds occupied with something, or else our imaginations will soon ferment and breed mischief.

And what is true of us, is true of our children too. Alas, indeed, for the man that has nothing to do! The Jews thought idleness a positive sin: it was a law of theirs that every man should bring up his son to some useful trade—and they were right. They knew the heart of man better than some of us appear to do.

Idleness made Sodom what she was. "This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her" (Eze 16:49). Idleness had much to do with David's awful sin with the wife of Uriah.—I see in 2 Samuel 11 that Joab went out to war against Ammon, "but David tarried still at Jerusalem." Was not that idle? And then it was that he saw Bathsheba—and the next step we read of is his tremendous and miserable fall.

Verily, I believe that idleness has led to more sin than almost any other habit that could be named. I suspect it is the mother of many a work of the flesh—the mother of adultery, fornication, drunkenness, and many other deeds of darkness that I have not time to name. Let your own conscience say whether I do not speak the truth. You were idle, and at once the devil knocked at the door and came in.

And indeed I do not wonder—everything in the world around us seems to teach the same lesson. It is the still water which becomes stagnant and impure: the running, mov-

ing streams are always clear. If you have steam machinery, you must work it, or it soon gets out of order. If you have a horse, you must exercise him; he is never so well as when he has regular work. If you would have good bodily health yourself, you must take exercise. If you always sit still, your body is sure at length to complain. And just so is it with the soul. The active moving mind is a hard mark for the devil to shoot at. Try to be always full of useful employment, and thus your enemy will find it difficult to get room to sow tares.

Reader, I ask you to set these things before the minds of your children. Teach them the value of time, and try to make them learn the habit of using it well. It pains me to see children idling over what they have in hand, whatever it may be. I love to see them active and industrious, and giving their whole heart to all they do; giving their whole heart to lessons, when they have to learn—giving their whole heart even to their amusements, when they go to play.

But if you love them well, let idleness be counted a sin in your family.

12. Train them with a constant fear of over-indulgence.

This is the one point of all on which you have most need to be on your guard. It is natural to be tender and affectionate towards your own flesh and blood, and it is the excess of this very tenderness and affection which you have to fear. Take heed that it does not make you blind to your children's faults, and deaf to all advice about them. Take heed lest it make you overlook bad conduct, rather than have the pain of inflicting punishment and correction.

I know well that punishment and correction are disagreeable things. Nothing is more unpleasant than giving pain to those we love, and calling forth their tears. But so long as hearts are what hearts are, it is vain to suppose, as a general rule, that children can ever be brought up without correction.

Spoiling is a very expressive word, and sadly full of meaning. Now it is the shortest way to spoil children to let them have their own way—to allow them to do wrong and not to punish them for it. Believe me, you must not do it, whatever pain it may cost you unless you wish to ruin your children's souls.

You cannot say that Scripture does not speak expressly on this subject: "He that spareth his rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chasteneth him betimes" (Pro 13:24). "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Pro 19:18). "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child: but the rod of correction shall drive it from him" (Pro 22:15). "Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beat him with the rod he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from hell" (Pro 23:13-14). "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." "Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest, yea, he shall give delight to thy soul" (Pro 29:15, 17).

How strong and forcible are these texts! How melancholy is the fact, that in many Christian families they seem almost unknown! Their children need reproof, but it is

hardly ever given; they need correction, but it is hardly ever employed. And yet this book of Proverbs is not obsolete and unfit for Christians. It is given by inspiration of God, and profitable. It is given for our learning, even as the Epistles to the Romans and Ephesians. Surely the believer who brings up his children without attention to its counsel is making himself wise above that which is written, and greatly errs.

Fathers and mothers, I tell you plainly, if you never punish your children when they are in fault, you are doing them a grievous wrong. I warn you, this is the rock on which the saints of God, in every age, have only too frequently made shipwreck. I would fain persuade you to be wise in time, and keep clear of it. See it in Eli's case. His sons Hophni and Phinehas "made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." He gave them no more than a tame and lukewarm reproof, when he ought to have rebuked them sharply. In one word, he honoured his sons above God. And what was the end of these things? He lived to hear of the death of both his sons in battle, and his own grey hairs were brought down with sorrow to the grave (1Sa 2:22-29; 3:13).

See, too, the case of David. Who can read without pain the history of his children, and their sins? Amnon's incest—Absalom's murder and proud rebellion—Adonijah's scheming ambition: truly these were grievous wounds for the man after God's own heart to receive from his own house. But was there no fault on his side? I fear there can be no doubt there was. I find a clue to it all in the account of Adonijah in 1 Kings 1:6: "His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" There was the foundation of all the mischief. David was an over-indulgent father—a father who let his children have their own way—and he reaped according as he had sown.

Parents, I beseech you, for your children's sake, beware of over-indulgence. I call on you to remember, it is your first duty to consult their real interests, and not their fancies and likings—to train them, not to humour them—to profit, not merely to please.

You must not give way to every wish and caprice of your child's mind, however much you may love him. You must not let him suppose his will is to be everything, and that he has only to desire a thing and it will be done. Do not, I pray you, make your children idols, lest God should take them away, and break your idol, just to convince you of your folly.

Learn to say "No" to your children. Show them that you are able to refuse whatever you think is not fit for them. Show them that you are ready to punish disobedience, and that when you speak of punishment, you are not only ready to threaten, but also to perform. Do not threaten too much.⁷¹ Threatened folks, and threatened faults, live long. Punish seldom, but really and in good earnest—frequent and slight punishment is a wretched system indeed.⁷²

⁷¹ Some parents and nurses have a way of saying, "Naughty child," to a boy or girl on every slight occasion, and often without good cause. It is a very foolish habit. Words of blame should never be used without real reason.

⁷² As to the best way of punishing a child, no general rule can be laid down. The characters of children are so exceedingly different, that what would be a severe punishment to one child, would be no punishment

Beware of letting small faults pass unnoticed under the idea “it is a little one.” There are no little things in training children; all are important. Little weeds need plucking up as much as any. Leave them alone, and they will soon be great.

Reader, if there be any point which deserves your attention, believe me, it is this one. It is one that will give you trouble, I know. But if you do not take trouble with your children when they are young, they will give you trouble when they are old. Choose which you prefer.

13. Train them remembering continually how God trains His children.

The Bible tells us that God has an elect people—a family in this world. All poor sinners who have been convinced of sin, and fled to Jesus for peace, make up that family. All of us who really believe on Christ for salvation are its members.

Now God the Father is ever training the members of this family for their everlasting abode with Him in heaven. He acts as a husbandman pruning his vines, that they may bear more fruit. He knows the character of each of us—our besetting sins—our weaknesses—our peculiar infirmities—our special wants. He knows our works and where we dwell, who are our companions in life, and what are our trials, what our temptations, and what are our privileges. He knows all these things, and is ever ordering all for our good. He allots to each of us, in His providence, the very things we need, in order to bear the most fruit—as much of sunshine as we can stand, and as much of rain—as much of bitter things as we can bear, and as much of sweet. Reader, if you would train your children wisely, mark well how God the Father trains His. He doeth all things well; the plan which He adopts must be right.

See, then, how many things there are which God withholds from His children. Few could be found, I suspect, among them who have not had desires which He has never been pleased to fulfil. There has often been some one thing they wanted to attain, and yet there has always been some barrier to prevent attainment. It has been just as if God was placing it above our reach, and saying, “This is not good for you; this must not be.” Moses desired exceedingly to cross over Jordan, and see the goodly land of promise; but you will remember his desire was never granted.

See, too, how often God leads His people by ways which seem dark and mysterious to our eyes. We cannot see the meaning of all His dealings with us; we cannot see the reasonableness of the path in which our feet are treading. Sometimes so many trials have assailed us—so many difficulties encompassed us—that we have not been able to discover the needs-be of it all. It has been just as if our Father was taking us by the hand into a dark place and saying, “Ask no questions, but follow Me.” There was a direct road from Egypt to Canaan, yet Israel was not led into it; but round, through the wilderness. And

at all to another. I only beg to enter my decided protest against the modern notion that no child ought ever to be whipped. Doubtless some parents use bodily correction far too much, and far too violently; but many others, I fear, use it far too little.

this seemed hard at the time. “The soul of the people,” we are told, “was much discouraged because of the way” (Exo 13:17; Num 21:4).

See, also, how often God chastens His people with trial and affliction. He sends them crosses and disappointments; He lays them low with sickness; He strips them of property and friends; He changes them from one position to another; He visits them with things most hard to flesh and blood; and some of us have well-nigh fainted under the burdens laid upon us. We have felt pressed beyond strength, and have been almost ready to murmur at the hand which chastened us. Paul the Apostle had a thorn in the flesh appointed him, some bitter bodily trial, no doubt, though we know not exactly what it was. But this we know—he besought the Lord thrice that it might be removed; yet it was not taken away (2Co 12:8-9).

Now, reader, notwithstanding all these things, did you ever hear of a single child of God who thought his Father did not treat him wisely? No, I am sure you never did. God’s children would always tell you, in the long run, it was a blessed thing they did not have their own way, and that God had done far better for them than they could have done for themselves. Yes! And they could tell you, too, that God’s dealings had provided more happiness for them than they ever would have obtained themselves, and that His way, however dark at times, was the way of pleasantness and the path of peace.

I ask you to lay to heart the lesson which God’s dealings with His people is meant to teach you. Fear not to withhold from your child anything you think will do him harm, whatever his own wishes may be. This is God’s plan.

Hesitate not to lay on him commands, of which he may not at present see the wisdom, and to guide him in ways which may not now seem reasonable to his mind. This is God’s plan.

Shrink not from chastising and correcting him whenever you see his soul’s health requires it, however painful it may be to your feelings; and remember medicines for the mind must not be rejected because they are bitter. This is God’s plan.

And be not afraid, above all, that such a plan of training will make your child unhappy. I warn you against this delusion. Depend on it, there is no surer road to unhappiness than always having our own way. To have our wills checked and denied is a blessed thing for us; it makes us value enjoyments when they come. To be indulged perpetually is the way to be made selfish; and selfish people and spoiled children, believe me, are seldom happy.

Reader, be not wiser than God—train your children as He trains His.

14. Train them remembering continually the influence of your own example.

Instruction, and advice, and commands will profit little, unless they are backed up by the pattern of your own life. Your children will never believe you are in earnest, and really wish them to obey you, so long as your actions contradict your counsel. Archbishop Tillotson made a wise remark when he said, “To give children good instruction, and a

bad example, is but beckoning to them with the head to show them the way to heaven, while we take them by the hand and lead them in the way to hell.”

We little know the force and power of example. No one of us can live to himself in this world; we are always influencing those around us, in one way or another, either for good or for evil, either for God or for sin.—They see our ways, they mark our conduct, they observe our behaviour, and what they see us practise, that they may fairly suppose we think right. And never, I believe, does example tell so powerfully as it does in the case of parents and children.

Fathers and mothers, do not forget that children learn more by the eye than they do by the ear. No school will make such deep marks on character as home. The best of schoolmasters will not imprint on their minds as much as they will pick up at your fire-side. Imitation is a far stronger principle with children than memory. What they see has a much stronger effect on their minds than what they are told.

Take care, then, what you do before a child. It is a true proverb, “Who sins before a child, sins double.” Strive rather to be a living epistle of Christ, such as your families can read, and that plainly too. Be an example of reverence for the Word of God, reverence in prayer, reverence for means of grace, reverence for the Lord’s Day. Be an example in words, in temper, in diligence, in temperance, in faith, in charity, in kindness, in humility. Think not your children will practise what they do not see you do. You are their model picture, and they will copy what you are. Your reasoning and your lecturing, your wise commands and your good advice; all this they may not understand, but they can understand your life.

Children are very quick observers; very quick in seeing through some kinds of hypocrisy, very quick in finding out what you really think and feel, very quick in adopting all your ways and opinions. You will often find as the father is, so is the son.

Remember the word that the conqueror Caesar always used to his soldiers in a battle. He did not say “Go forward,” but “Come.” So it must be with you in training your children. They will seldom learn habits which they see you despise, or walk in paths in which you do not walk yourself. He that preaches to his children what he does not practise, is working a work that never goes forward. It is like the fabled web of Penelope of old, who wove all day, and unwove all night. Even so, the parent who tries to train without setting a good example is building with one hand, and pulling down with the other.

15. Train them remembering continually the power of sin.

I name this shortly, in order to guard you against unscriptural expectations.

You must not expect to find your children’s minds a sheet of pure white paper, and to have no trouble if you only use right means. I warn you plainly you will find no such thing. It is painful to see how much corruption and evil there is in a young child’s heart, and how soon it begins to bear fruit. Violent tempers, self-will, pride, envy, sullenness, passion, idleness, selfishness, deceit, cunning, falsehood, hypocrisy, a terrible aptness to learn what is bad, a painful slowness to learn what is good, a readiness to pretend any-

thing in order to gain their own ends—all these things, or some of them, you must be prepared to see, even in your own flesh and blood. In little ways they will creep out at a very early age; it is almost startling to observe how naturally they seem to spring up. Children require no schooling to learn to sin.

But you must not be discouraged and cast down by what you see. You must not think it a strange and unusual thing, that little hearts can be so full of sin. It is the only portion which our father Adam left us; it is that fallen nature with which we come into the world; it is that inheritance which belongs to us all. Let it rather make you more diligent in using every means which seem most likely, by God's blessing, to counteract the mischief. Let it make you more and more careful, so far as in you lies, to keep your children out of the way of temptation.

Never listen to those who tell you your children are good, and well brought up, and can be trusted. Think rather that their hearts are always inflammable as tinder. At their very best, they only want a spark to set their corruptions alight. Parents are seldom too cautious. Remember the natural depravity of your children, and take care.

16. Train them remembering continually the promises of Scripture.

I name this also shortly, in order to guard you against discouragement.

You have a plain promise on your side, "Train up your child in the way he should go, and when he is old he shall not depart from it" (Pro 22:6). Think what it is to have a promise like this. Promises were the only lamp of hope which cheered the hearts of the patriarchs before the Bible was written. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph—all lived on a few promises, and prospered in their souls. Promises are the cordials which in every age have supported and strengthened the believer. He that has got a plain text upon his side need never be cast down. Fathers and mothers, when your hearts are failing, and ready to halt, look at the word of this text, and take comfort.

Think who it is that promises. It is not the word of a man, who may lie or repent; it is the word of the King of kings, who never changes. Hath He said a thing, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? Neither is anything too hard for Him to perform. The things that are impossible with men are possible with God. Reader, if we get not the benefit of the promise we are dwelling upon, the fault is not in Him, but in ourselves.

Think, too, what the promise contains, before you refuse to take comfort from it. It speaks of a certain time when good training shall especially bear fruit—"when a child is old." Surely there is comfort in this. You may not see with your own eyes the result of careful training, but you know not what blessed fruits may not spring from it, long after you are dead and gone. It is not God's way to give everything at once. "Afterwards" is the time when He often chooses to work, both in the things of nature and in the things of grace. "Afterward" is the season when affliction bears the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11). "Afterward" was the time when the son who refused to work in his father's vineyard repented and went (Matt. 21:29). And "afterward" is the time to which

parents must look forward if they see not success at once—you must sow in hope and plant in hope.

Cast thy bread upon the waters,” saith the Spirit, “for thou shalt find it after many days” (Ecc 11:1). Many children, I doubt not, shall rise up in the day of judgment, and bless their parents for good training, who never gave any signs of having profited by it during their parents’ lives. Go forward then in faith, and be sure that your labour shall not be altogether thrown away. Three times did Elijah stretch himself upon the widow’s child before it revived. Take example from him, and persevere.

17. Train them, lastly, with continual prayer for a blessing on all you do.

Without the blessing of the Lord, your best endeavours will do no good. He has the hearts of all men in His hands, and except He touch the hearts of your children by His Spirit, you will weary yourself to no purpose. Water, therefore, the seed you sow on their minds with unceasing prayer. The Lord is far more willing to hear than we to pray; far more ready to give blessings than we to ask them—but He loves to be entreated for them. And I set this matter of prayer before you, as the top-stone and seal of all you do. I suspect the child of many prayers is seldom cast away.

Look upon your children as Jacob did on his; he tells Esau they are “the children which God hath graciously given thy servant” (Gen 33:5). Look on them as Joseph did on his; he told his father, “They are the sons whom God hath given me” (Gen 48:9). Count them with the Psalmist to be “an heritage and reward from the Lord” (Psa 127:3). And then ask the Lord, with a holy boldness, to be gracious and merciful to His own gifts. Mark how Abraham intercedes for Ishmael, because he loved him, “Oh that Ishmael might live before thee” (Gen 17:18). See how Manoah speaks to the angel about Samson, “How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?” (Jud 13:12). Observe how tenderly Job cared for his children’s souls, “He offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all, for he said, It may be my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually” (Job 1:5). Parents, if you love your children, go and do likewise. You cannot name their names before the mercy-seat too often.

Conclusion

And now, reader, in conclusion, let me once more press upon you the necessity and importance of using every single means in your power, if you would train children for heaven.

I know well that God is a sovereign God, and doeth all things according to the counsel of His own will. I know that Rehoboam was the son of Solomon, and Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, and that you do not always see godly parents having a godly seed. But I know also that God is a God who works by means, and sure am I, if you make light of such means as I have mentioned, your children are not likely to turn out well.

Fathers and mothers, you may take your children to be baptized, and have them enrolled in the ranks of Christ’s Church—you may get godly sponsors to answer for them,

and help you by their prayers—you may send them to the best of schools, and give them Bibles and Prayer Books, and fill them with head knowledge but if all this time there is no regular training at home, I tell you plainly, I fear it will go hard in the end with your children's souls. Home is the place where habits are formed—home is the place where the foundations of character are laid—home gives the bias to our tastes, likings, and opinions. See then, I pray you, that there be careful training at home. Happy indeed is the man who can say, as Bolton did upon his dying bed, to his children, “I do believe not one of you will dare to meet me before the tribunal of Christ in an unregenerate state.”

Fathers and mothers, I charge you solemnly before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, take every pains to train your children in the way they should go. I charge you not merely for the sake of your children's souls; I charge you for the sake of your own future comfort and peace. Truly it is your interest so to do. Truly your own happiness in great measure depends on it. Children have ever been the bow from which the sharpest arrows have pierced man's heart. Children have mixed the bitterest cups that man has ever had to drink. Children have caused the saddest tears that man has ever had to shed. Adam could tell you so; Jacob could tell you so; David could tell you so. There are no sorrows on earth like those which children have brought upon their parents. Oh! take heed, lest your own neglect should lay up misery for you in your old age. Take heed, lest you weep under the ill-treatment of a thankless child, in the days when your eye is dim, and your natural force abated.

If ever you wish your children to be the restorers of your life, and the nourishers of your old age—if you would have them blessings and not curses—joys and not sorrows—Judahs and not Reubens—Ruths and not Orpahs—if you would not, like Noah, be ashamed of their deeds, and, like Rebekah, be made weary of your life by them: if this be your wish, remember my advice betimes, train them while young in the right way.

And as for me, I will conclude by putting up my prayer to God for all who read this paper, that you may all be taught of God to feel the value of your own souls. This is one reason why baptism is too often a mere form, and Christian training despised and disregarded. Too often parents feel not for themselves, and so they feel not for their children. They do not realize the tremendous difference between a state of nature and a state of grace, and therefore they are content to let them alone.

Now the Lord teach you all that sin is that abominable thing which God hateth. Then, I know you will mourn over the sins of your children, and strive to pluck them out as brands from the fire.

The Lord teach you all how precious Christ is, and what a mighty and complete work He hath done for our salvation. Then, I feel confident you will use every means to bring your children to Jesus, that they may live through Him.

The Lord teach you all your need of the Holy Spirit, to renew, sanctify, and quicken your souls. Then, I feel sure you will urge your children to pray for Him without ceasing, and never rest till He has come down into their hearts with power, and made them new creatures.

The Lord grant this, and then I have a good hope that you will indeed train up your children well—train well for this life, and train well for the life to come; train well for earth, and train well for heaven; train them for God, for Christ, and for eternity. ✎

Thoughts for Young Men

“Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.”—Titus 2:6

When St. Paul wrote his Epistle to Titus about his duty as a minister, he mentioned young men as a class requiring peculiar attention. After speaking of aged men and aged women, and young women, he adds this pithy advice—“Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded” (Ti 2:6). I am going to follow the Apostle’s advice. I propose to offer a few words of friendly exhortation to young men.

I am growing old myself, but there are few things I remember so well as the days of my youth. I have a most distinct recollection of the joys and the sorrows, the hopes and the fears, the temptations and the difficulties, the mistaken judgments and the misplaced affections, the errors and the aspirations, which surround and accompany a young man’s life. If I can only say something to keep some young man in the right way, and preserve him from faults and sins, which may mar his prospects both for time and eternity, I shall be very thankful.

There are four things which I propose to do:

- I. I will mention some *general reasons* why young men need exhorting.
- II. I will notice some special *dangers* against which young men need to be warned.
- III. I will give some general *counsels, which* I entreat young men to receive.
- IV. I will set down some special *rules of conduct, which* I strongly advise young men to follow.

On each of these four points, I have something to say, and I pray God that what I say may do good to some soul.

I. Reasons for Exhorting Young Men

In the first place, what are the general reasons why young men need peculiar exhortation? I will mention several of them in order.

1. *For one thing, there is the painful fact that there are few young men anywhere who seem to have any religion.*

I speak without respect of persons; I say it of all. High or low, rich or poor, gentle or simple, learned or unlearned, in town or in country—it makes no matter. I tremble to observe how few young men are led by the Spirit, how few are in that narrow way which leads to life, how few are setting their affections upon things above, how few are taking up the cross and following Christ. I say it with all sorrow, but I believe, as in God's sight, I am saying nothing more than the truth.

Young men, you form a large and most important class in the population of this country; but where, and in what condition, are your immortal souls? Alas, whatever way we turn for an answer, the report will be one and the same!

Let us ask any *faithful minister* of the Gospel and mark what he will tell us. How many unmarried young people can he reckon up who come to the Lord's Supper? Who are the most backward about means of grace—the most irregular about Sunday services—the most difficult to draw to weekly lectures and prayer meetings—the most inattentive under preaching at all times? Which part of his congregation fills him with most anxiety? Who are the Reubens for whom he has the deepest "searchings of heart"? Who in his flock are the hardest to manage, who require the most frequent warnings and rebukes, who occasion him the greatest uneasiness and sorrow, who keep him most constantly in fear for their souls, and seem most hopeless? Depend on it, his answer will always be, "*The Young Men.*"

Let us ask the *parents* in any parish throughout England and see what they will generally say. Who in their families give them most pain and trouble? Who need the most watchfulness, and most often vex and disappoint them? Who are the first to be led away from what is right, and the last to remember cautions and good advice? Who are the most difficult to keep in order and bounds? Who most frequently break out into open sin, disgrace the name they bear, make their friends unhappy, embitter the old age of their relations, and bring down grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? Depend on it, the answer will generally be, "*The Young Men.*"

Let us ask the *magistrates* and officers of justice, and mark what they will reply. Who go to public-houses and beer-shops most? Who are the greatest Sabbath-breakers? Who make up riotous mobs and seditious meetings? Who are oftenest taken up for drunkenness, breaches of the peace, fighting, poaching, stealing, assaults, and the like? Who fill the gaols,⁷³ and penitentiaries, and convict-ships? Who are the class which requires the most incessant watching and looking after? Depend on it, they will at once point to the same quarter—they will say, "*The Young Men.*"

Let us turn to the *upper classes*, and mark the report we shall get from them. In one family, the sons are always wasting time, health, and money, in the selfish pursuit of pleasure. In another, the sons will follow no profession, and fritter away the most pre-

⁷³ **gaol** – local jail house.

cious years of their life in doing nothing. In another, they take up a profession as a mere form, but pay no attention to its duties. In another, they are always forming wrong connections, gambling, getting into debt, associating with bad companions, keeping their friends in a constant fever of anxiety. Alas, rank, title, wealth, and education do not prevent these things! Anxious fathers, heart-broken mothers, and sorrowing sisters could tell sad tales about them, if the truth were known. Many a family, with everything this world can give, numbers among its connections some name that is never named, or only named with regret and shame—some son, some brother, some cousin, some nephew—who will have his own way, and is a grief to all who know him.

There is seldom a rich family, which has not got some thorn in its side, some blot in its page of happiness, some constant source of pain and anxiety. Often, far too often, is not this the true cause, *“The Young Men”*?

What shall we say to these things? These are facts: plain staring facts, facts which meet us on every side, facts which cannot be denied. How dreadful this is! How dreadful the thought, that every time I meet a young man, I meet one who is in all probability an enemy of God, traveling in the broad way, which leads to destruction, unfit for heaven! Surely, with such facts before me, you must allow there is a cause; you will not wonder that *I exhort you!*

2. For another thing, death and judgment are before young men, even as others, and they nearly all seem to forget it.

Young men, it is appointed unto you once to die; and however strong and healthy you may be now, the day of your death is perhaps very near. I see young people sick as well as old. I bury youthful corpses as well as aged. I read the names of persons no older than yourselves in every churchyard. I learn from books that, excepting infancy and old age, more die between thirteen and twenty-three than at any other season of life. And yet you live as if you were sure at present not to die at all!

Are you thinking you will mind these things *tomorrow*? Remember the words of Solomon: “Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Pro 27:1). “Serious things tomorrow,” said a heathen (Archias, the Theban⁷⁴), to one who warned him of coming danger; but his tomorrow never came. Tomorrow is the devil’s day, but today is God’s. Satan cares not how spiritual your intentions may be, and how holy your resolutions, if only they are fixed for *tomorrow*. Oh, give not place to the devil in this matter! Answer him, “No, Satan! It shall be today, today.” All men do not live to be patriarchs, like Isaac and Jacob. Many children die before their fathers. David had to mourn the death of his two finest sons; Job lost all his ten children in one day. Your lot may be like one of theirs, and when death summons, it will be vain to talk of tomorrow—you must go at once.

⁷⁴ **Archias** – the Greek biographer Plutarch relates this story of Archias, a general of the ancient Greek city of Thebes, who put off reading a letter that would have alerted him of Pelopidas’ plan to kill him the next day.

Are you thinking you will have a *convenient season* to mind these things by and by? So thought Felix and the Athenians to whom Paul preached (Act 24:10-22; 17:22); but it never came. Hell is paved with such fancies. Better make sure work while you can. Leave nothing unsettled that is eternal. Run no risk when your soul is at stake. Believe me, the salvation of a soul is no easy matter. All need a “great” salvation, whether young or old. All need to be born again—all need to be washed in Christ’s blood—all need to be sanctified by the Spirit. Happy is that man who does not leave these things uncertain, but never rests till he has the witness of the Spirit within him that he is a child of God.

Young men, your time is short. Your days are but a span long—a shadow, a vapor—a tale that is soon told. Your bodies are not brass. “Even the young men,” says Isaiah, “shall utterly fall” (Isa 40:30). Your health may be taken from you in a moment: it only needs a fall, a fever, an inflammation, a broken blood vessel—and the worm would soon feed upon you. There is but a step between any one of you and death. This night your soul might be required of you (Luk 12:20). You are fast going the way of all the earth; you will soon be gone. Your life is all uncertainty; your death and judgment are perfectly sure. You too must hear the Archangel’s trumpet, and go forth to stand before the great white throne (Rev 20:11). You too must obey that summons, which Jerome⁷⁵ says was always ringing in his ears: “Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.” “Surely I come quickly” (Rev 22:7) is the language of the Judge Himself. I cannot, dare not, will not let you alone.

Oh, that you would all lay to heart the words of the Preacher: “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment” (Ecc 11:9). Incredible, that with such a prospect, any man can be careless and unconcerned! Surely, none are so mad⁷⁶ as those who are content to live unprepared to die. Surely, the unbelief of men is the most amazing thing in the world. Well may the clearest prophecy in the Bible begin with these words, “Who hath believed our report?” (Isa 53:1). Well may the Lord Jesus say, “When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?” (Luk 18:8). Young men, I fear lest this be the report of many of you in the courts above: “They will not believe.” I fear lest you be hurried out of the world, and awake to find out, too late, that death and judgment are realities.

I fear all this, and therefore *I exhort you*.

3. *For another thing, what young men will be, in all probability, depends on what they are now, and they seem to forget this.*

Youth is the seedtime of full age, the molding season in the little space of human life, the turning point in the history of man’s mind.

⁷⁵ **Jerome (A.D. 345-420)** – Bible translator and advocate of monasticism.

⁷⁶ **mad** – insane, unrealistic.

By the shoot, we judge of the tree; by the blossoms, we judge of the fruit; by the spring, we judge of the harvest; by the morning we judge of the day; and by the character of the young man, we may generally judge what he will be when he grows up.

Young men, be not deceived. Think not you can, at will, serve lusts and pleasures in your beginning, and then go and serve God with ease at your latter end. Think not you can live with Esau, and then die with Jacob. It is a mockery to deal with God and your souls in such a fashion. It is an awful mockery to suppose you can give the flower of your strength to the world and the devil, and then put off the King of kings with the scraps and leavings of your hearts—the wreck and remnant of your powers. It is an awful mockery, and you may find to your cost the thing cannot be done.

I daresay you are reckoning on a *late repentance*. You know not what you are doing. You are reckoning without God. Repentance and faith are the gifts of God, and gifts that He often withholds when they have been long offered in vain. I grant you true repentance is never too late, but I warn you at the same time, late repentance is seldom true. I grant you, one penitent thief was converted in his last hours that no man might despair; but I warn you, only one was converted that no man might presume. I grant you it is written, Jesus is “able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by Him” (Heb 7:25). But I warn you, it is also written by the same Spirit, “Because I have called, and ye refused, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh” (Pro 1:24, 26).

Believe me, you will find it no easy matter to turn to God just when you please. It is a true saying of good Archbishop Leighton: “The way of sin is down hill; a man cannot stop when he would.” Holy desires and serious convictions are not like the servants of the Centurion (Mat 8:5), ready to come and go at your desire; rather are they like the unicorn in Job (Job 39:9)—they will not obey your voice, nor attend at your bidding. It was said of a famous general of old, Hannibal, when he could have taken Rome, he warred against it, but *would not* take it; and by and by when he would, he *could not*. Beware, lest the same kind of event befall you in the matter of eternal life.

Why do I say all this? I say it because of the *force of habit*. I say it because experience tells me that people’s hearts are seldom changed if they are not changed when young. Seldom indeed are men converted when they are old. Habits have long roots. Sin once allowed to nestle in your bosom will not be turned out at your bidding. Custom becomes second nature, and its chains are threefold cords not easily broken. Well says the prophet, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23). Habits are like stones rolling down hill: the further they roll, the faster and more ungovernable is their course. Habits, like trees, are strengthened by age. A boy may bend an oak when it is a sapling; a hundred men cannot root it up when it is a full-grown tree. A child can wade over the Thames at its fountainhead; the largest ship in the world can float in it when it gets near the sea. So it is with habits: the older the stronger—the longer they have held possession, the harder they will be to cast out. They grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength.

Custom is the nurse of sin. Every fresh act of sin lessens fear and remorse, hardens our hearts, blunts the edge of our conscience, and increases our evil inclination.

Young men, you may fancy I am laying too much stress on this point. If you had seen old men, as I have done, on the brink of the grave, feelingless, seared, callous, dead, cold, hard as the nether⁷⁷ mill-stone—you would not think so. Believe me, you cannot stand still in the affairs of your souls. Habits of good or evil are daily strengthening in your hearts. Every day you are either getting nearer to God, or further off. Every year that you continue impenitent, the wall of division between you and heaven becomes higher and thicker, and the gulf to be crossed deeper and broader. Oh, dread the hardening effect of constant lingering in sin! Now is the accepted time. See that your flight be not in the winter of your days. If you seek not the Lord when young, the strength of habit is such that you will probably never seek Him at all.

I fear this, and therefore *I exhort you*.

4. For another thing, the devil uses special diligence to destroy the souls of young men, and they seem not to know it.

Satan knows well that you will make up the next generation, and therefore he employs every art betimes to make you his own. I would not have you ignorant of his devices.

You are those on whom he plays off all his choicest temptations. He spreads his net with the most watchful carefulness to entangle your hearts. He baits his traps with the sweetest morsels to get you into his power. He displays his wares before your eyes with his utmost ingenuity in order to make you buy his sugared poisons, and eat his accursed dainties. You are the grand object of his attack. May the Lord rebuke him, and deliver you out of his hands.

Young men, beware of being taken by his snares. He will try to throw dust in your eyes, and prevent you seeing anything in its true colors. He would fain make you think evil good, and good evil (Isa 5:20). He will paint, and gild, and dress up sin, in order to make you fall in love with it (2Co 11:15). He will deform, and misrepresent, and caricature true religion, in order to make you take a dislike to it. He will exalt the pleasures of wickedness, but he will hide from you the sting. He will lift up before your eyes the cross and its painfulness, but he will keep out of sight the eternal crown. He will promise you everything, as he did to Christ, if you will only serve him (Mat 4:8). He will even help you to wear a form of religion, if you will only neglect the power (2Ti 3:5). He will tell you at the beginning of your lives, it is *too soon* to serve God; he will tell you at the end, it is *too late*. Oh, be not deceived!

⁷⁷ **nether** – lower, lying under. Two circular stones are used to grind grain in a mill, placed horizontally with the grain in between; the lower had to be the harder in order to bear the weight of the upper stone.

You little know the danger you are in from this enemy; and it is this very ignorance which makes me afraid. You are like blind men, walking amidst holes and pitfalls; you do not see the perils which are around you on every side (Luk 6:39).

Your enemy is *mighty*. He is called “The Prince of this world” (Joh 14:30). He opposed our Lord Jesus Christ all through His ministry. He tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and so brought sin and death into the world (Gen 3). He tempted even David, the man after God’s own heart, and caused his latter days to be full of sorrow (2Sa 11:2). He tempted even Peter, the chosen Apostle, and made him deny his Lord (Mat 26:69). Surely, his enmity is not to be despised?

Your enemy is *restless*. He never sleeps. He is always going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1Pe 5:8). He is ever going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it (Job 1:7). You may be careless about your souls; he is not. He wants them to make them miserable, like himself, and will have them if he can. Surely, his enmity is not to be despised?

And your enemy is *cunning*. For near six thousand years he has been reading one book, and that book is the heart of man. He ought to know it well, and he does know it—all its weakness, all its deceitfulness, all its folly. And he has a store of temptations such as are most likely to do it harm. Never will you go to the place where he will not find you. Go into towns; he will be there. Go into a wilderness; he will be there also. Sit among drunkards and revelers, and he will be there to help you. Listen to preaching, and he will be there to distract you. Surely, such enmity is not to be despised?

Young men, this enemy is working hard for your destruction, however little you may think it. You are the prize for which he is specially contending. He foresees you must either be the blessings or the curses of your day, and he is trying hard to effect a lodgment⁷⁸ in your hearts thus early in order that you may help forward his kingdom by and by. Well does he understand that to spoil the bud is the surest way to mar the flower. Oh that your eyes were opened, like those of Elisha’s servant in Dothan (2Ki 6:13-17)! Oh, that you did but see what Satan is scheming against your peace! Whether you will hear or not, I cannot, dare not, leave you alone. I must warn you; *I must exhort you*.

5. For another thing, young men need exhorting because of the sorrow it will save them, to begin serving God now.

Sin is the mother of all sorrow, and no sort of sin appears to give a man so much misery and pain as the sins of his youth. The foolish acts he did—the time he wasted—the mistakes he made—the bad company he *kept*—the harm he did himself, both body and soul—the chances of happiness he threw away—the openings of usefulness he neglected—all these are things that often embitter the conscience of an old man, throw a gloom on the evening of his days, and fill the later hours of his life with self-reproach and shame.

⁷⁸ **lodgment** – an obstruction, an accumulated deposit of material.

Some men could tell you of the untimely *loss of health* brought on by youthful sins. Disease racks their limbs with pain, and life is almost a weariness. Their muscular strength is so wasted that a grasshopper seems a burden. Their eye has become prematurely dim, and their natural force abated. The sun of their health has gone down while it is yet day, and they mourn to see their flesh and body consumed. Believe me, this is a bitter cup to drink.

Others could give you sad accounts of the *consequences of idleness*. They threw away the golden opportunity for learning. They would not get wisdom at the time when their minds were most able to receive it, and their memories most ready to retain it. And now it is too late. They have no leisure to sit down and learn. They have no longer the same power, even if they had the leisure. Lost time can never be redeemed. This too is a bitter cup to drink.

Others could tell you of grievous *mistakes in judgment*, from which they suffer all their lives long. They would have their own way. They would not take advice. They formed some connection which has been altogether ruinous to their happiness. They chose a profession for which they were entirely unsuited. And they see it all now. But their eyes are only open when the mistake cannot be retrieved. Oh, this is also a bitter cup to drink!

Young men, young men, I wish you did but know the comfort of a conscience not burdened with a long list of *youthful sins*. These are the wounds that pierce the deepest. These are the arrows that drink up a man's spirit. This is the iron that enters into the soul. Be merciful to yourselves. Seek the Lord early, and so you will be spared many a bitter tear.

This is the truth that Job seems to have felt. He says, "Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth" (Job 13:26). So also his friend Zophar, speaking of the wicked, says, "His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust" (Job 20:11).

David also seems to have felt it. He says to the Lord, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions" (Psa 25:7).

Beza, the great Swiss Reformer, felt it so strongly, that he named it in his will as a special mercy that he had been called out from the world, by the grace of God, at the age of sixteen.

Go and ask believers now, and I think many an one will tell you much the same. "Oh, that I could live my young days over again!" he will most probably say. "Oh, that I had spent the beginning of my life in a better fashion! Oh, that I had not laid the foundation of evil habits so strongly in the springtime of my course!"

Young men, I want to save you all this sorrow, if I can. Hell itself is truth known too late. Be wise in time. What youth sows, old age must reap. Give not the most precious season of your life to that which will not comfort you in your latter end. Sow to yourselves rather in righteousness; break up your fallow ground; sow not among thorns.

Sin may go lightly from your hand, or run smoothly off your tongue now, but depend on it, sin and you will meet again by and by, however little you may like it. Old wounds will often ache and give pain long after they are healed, and only a scar remains—so may you find it with your sins. The footprints of animals have been found on the surface of rocks that were once wet sand, thousands of years after the animal that made them has perished and passed away—so also it may be with your sins.

“Experience,” says the proverb, “keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other.” I want you all to escape the misery of learning in that school. I want you to avoid the wretchedness that youthful sins are sure to entail. This is the last reason why *I exhort you*.

II. Dangers to Young Men

There are some special dangers against which young men need to be warned. I know well that all souls are in fearful peril. Old or young, it matters not; all have a race to run, a battle to fight, a heart to mortify, a world to overcome, a body to keep under, a devil to resist—and we may well say, Who is sufficient for these things? But still every age and condition has its own peculiar snares and temptations, and it is well to know them. He that is forewarned is forearmed. If I can only persuade you to be on your guard against the dangers I am going to name, I am sure I shall do your souls an essential service.

1. One danger to young men is pride.

Pride is the oldest sin in the world. Indeed, it was before the world. Satan and his angels fell by pride. They were not satisfied with their first estate. Thus, pride stocked hell with its first inhabitants.

Pride cast Adam out of paradise. He was not content with the place God assigned him. He tried to raise himself, and fell. Thus sin, sorrow, and death entered in by pride.

Pride sits in all our hearts by nature. We are born proud. Pride makes us rest satisfied with ourselves, think we are good enough as we are, stop our ears against advice, refuse the Gospel of Christ, and turn every one to his own way. But pride never reigns anywhere so powerfully as in the heart of a young man.

How common is it to see young men heady, high-minded, and impatient of counsel! How often they are rude and discourteous to all about them, thinking they are not valued and honored as they deserve! How often they will not stop to listen to a hint from an older person! They think they know everything. They are full of conceit of their own wisdom. They reckon elderly people, and especially their relations, stupid, dull, and slow. They fancy they want no teaching or instruction themselves: they understand all things. It makes them almost angry to be spoken to. Like young horses, they cannot bear the least control. They must needs be independent and have their own way. They seem to think, like those whom Job mentioned, “We are the people, and wisdom shall die with us” (Job 12:2). And this is all pride.

Such an one was Rehoboam, who despised the counsel of the old experienced men who stood before his father, and hearkened to the advice of the young men of his own generation. He lived to reap the consequences of his folly. There are many like him.

Such an one was the prodigal son in the parable, who must needs have the portion of goods which fell to him, and set up for himself. He could not submit to live quietly under his father's roof, but would go into a far country and be his own master. Like the little child that will leave its mother's hand and walk alone, he soon smarted for his folly. He became wiser when he had to eat husks with the swine. But there are many like him.

Young men, I beseech you earnestly, beware of pride. Two things are said to be very rare sights in the world: one is a young man humble, and the other is an old man content. I fear this saying is only too true.

Be not proud of your own abilities, your own strength, your own knowledge, your own appearance, or your own cleverness. Be not proud of yourself or your endowments of any kind. It all comes from not knowing yourself and the world. The older you grow and the more you see, the less reason you will find for being proud. Ignorance and inexperience are the pedestal of pride; once let the pedestal be removed, and pride will soon come down.

Remember how often Scripture sets before us the excellence of a humble spirit. How strongly we are warned "not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think" (Rom 12:3)! How plainly we are told, "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1Co 8:2)! How strict is the command, "Put on humbleness of mind" (Col 3:12)! And again, "Be clothed with humility" (1Pe 5:5). Alas, this is a garment of which many seem not to have so much as a rag!

Think of the great example our Lord Jesus Christ leaves us in this respect. He washed the feet of His disciples, saying, "Ye should do as I have done to you" (Joh 13:15). It is written, "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor" (2Co 8:9). And again, "He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself" (Phi 2:7,8). Surely to be proud is to be more like the devil and fallen Adam, than like Christ. Surely, it can never be mean⁷⁹ and low-spirited to be like Him.

Think of the wisest man that ever lived—I mean Solomon. See how he speaks of himself as a "little child," as one who "knew not how to go out or come in" or manage for himself (1Ki 3:7, 8). That was a very different spirit from his brother Absalom's, who thought himself equal to anything: "Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice" (2Sa 15:4). That was a very different spirit from his brother Adonijah's, who "exalted himself, saying, I will be king" (1Ki 1:5). Humility was the beginning of Solomon's wisdom. He writes it down as his own experience, "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him" (Pro 26:12).

⁷⁹ **mean** – contemptible, despicable (derived from "common").

Young men, lay to heart the Scriptures here quoted. Do not be too confident in your own judgment. Cease to be sure that you are always right, and others wrong. Be distrustful of your own opinion when you find it contrary to that of older men than yourselves, and specially to that of your own parents. Age gives experience, and therefore deserves respect. It is a mark of Elihu's wisdom, in the book of Job, that "he waited till Job had spoken, because they were older than himself" (Job 32:4). And afterwards he said, "I am young, and you are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom" (Job 32:6, 7). Modesty and silence are beautiful graces in young people. Never be ashamed of being a learner: Jesus was one at twelve years; when He was found in the temple, He was "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Luk 2:46). The wisest men would tell you they are always learners, and are humbled to find after all how little they know. The great Sir Isaac Newton used to say that he felt himself no better than a little child who had picked up a few precious stones on the shore of the sea of knowledge.

Young men, if you would be wise, if you would be happy, remember the warning I give you: *Beware of pride.*

2. Another danger to young men is the love of pleasure.

Youth is the time when our passions are strongest, and like unruly children, cry most loudly for indulgence. Youth is the time when we have generally most health and strength; death seems far away, and to enjoy ourselves in this life seems everything. Youth is the time when most people have few earthly cares or anxieties to take up their attention. And all these things help to make young men think of nothing so much as pleasure. "I serve lusts and pleasures"—that is the true answer many a young man should give, if asked, "Whose servant are you?"

Young men, time would fail me if I were to tell you all the fruits this love of pleasure produces, and all the ways in which it may do you harm. Why should I speak of reveling, feasting, drinking, gambling, theater going, dancing, and the like? Few are to be found who do not know something of these things by bitter experience. And these are only instances. All things that give a feeling of excitement for the time, all things that drown thought and keep the mind in a constant whirl, all things that please the senses and gratify the flesh—these are the sort of things that have mighty power at your time of life, and they owe their power to the love of pleasure. Be on your guard. Be not like those of whom Paul speaks, "Lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2Ti 3:4).

Remember what I say: If you would cleave to earthly pleasures, these are the things, which *murder souls*. There is no surer way to get a seared conscience and a hard impenitent heart than to give way to the desires of the flesh and mind. It seems nothing at first, but it tells in the long run.

Consider what Peter says: "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1Pe 2:11). They destroy the soul's peace, break down its strength, lead it into hard captivity, and make it a slave.

Consider what Paul says: “Mortify your members which are upon the earth” (Col 3:5). “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24). “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1Co 9:27). Once the body was a perfect mansion of the soul; now it is all corrupt and disordered, and needs constant watching. It is a burden to the soul, not a helpmeet; a hindrance, not an assistance. It may become a useful servant, but it is always a bad master.

Consider again the words of Paul: “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14). “These,” says Leighton,⁸⁰ “are the words, the very reading of which so wrought with Augustine,⁸¹ that from a licentious young man he turned a faithful servant of Jesus Christ.” Young men, I wish this might be the case with all of you.

Remember, again, if you will cleave to earthly pleasures, they are all *unsatisfying*, *empty*, and *vain*. Like the locusts of the vision in Revelation, they seem to have crowns on their heads; but like the same locusts, you will find they have stings, real stings, in their tails. All is not gold that glitters. All is not good that tastes sweet. All is not real pleasure that pleases for a time.

Go and take your fill of earthly pleasures if you will—you will never find your heart satisfied with them. There will always be a voice within, crying, like the horseleech in the Proverbs, “Give, give!” (Pro 30:15). There is an empty place there, which nothing but God can fill. You will find, as Solomon did by experience, that earthly pleasures are but a vain show—vanity and vexation of spirit—whited sepulchers, fair to look at without, full of ashes and corruption within. Better be wise in time. Better write “poison” on all earthly pleasures. The most lawful of them must be used with moderation. All of them are soul-destroying if you give them your heart. “Pleasure,” says Adams on Second Peter, “must first have the *warrant*,⁸² that it be without sin—then the *measure*, that it be without excess.”

Impurity

And here I will not shrink from warning all young men to remember the seventh commandment (Exo 20:14): to beware of adultery, fornication, and all impurity of every kind. I fear there is often a want⁸³ of plain speaking on this part of God’s law. But when I see how prophets and Apostles have dealt with this subject—when I observe the open way in which the Reformers of our own Church denounce it—when I see the number of young men who walk in the footsteps of Reuben, Hophni, Phinehas, and Amnon—I for one cannot, with a good conscience, hold my peace. I doubt whether the world is any better for the excessive silence which prevails upon this commandment. For my own

⁸⁰ **Robert Leighton (1611-1684)** – Archbishop of Glasgow, Scotland.

⁸¹ **Augustine (A.D. 354-430)** – Bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa and leader in the early Christian Church; miraculously converted as a young man from a life of debauchery to become wise and godly.

⁸² **warrant** – authorization, reason for being permissible.

⁸³ **want** – lack.

part, I feel it would be false and unscriptural delicacy, in addressing young men, not to speak of that which is pre-eminently “*the young man’s sin*.”

The breach of the seventh commandment is the sin above all others, that as Hosea says, “takes away the heart” (Hos 4:11). It is the sin that leaves deeper scars upon the soul than any sin that a man can commit. It is a sin that slays its thousands in every age, and has overthrown not a few of the saints of God in time past. Lot, Samson, and David are fearful proofs. It is the sin that man dares to smile at, and smoothes over under the names of *gaiety*, *unsteadiness*, *wildness*, and *irregularity*. But it is the sin that the devil peculiarly rejoices over, for he is the “unclean spirit.” It is the sin that God peculiarly abhors and declares He “will judge” (Heb 13:4).

Young men, “flee fornication” (1Co 6:18) if you love life. “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph 5:6). Flee the *occasions* of it—the company of those who might draw you into it—the places where you might be tempted to it. Read what our Lord says about it in Matthew 5:28. Be like holy Job: Make “a covenant with your eyes” (Job 31:1). Flee *talking* of it. It is one of the things that ought not so much as to be named. You cannot handle pitch⁸⁴ and not be defiled. Flee the *thoughts* of it; resist them, mortify them, pray against them—make any sacrifice rather than give way. Imagination is the hotbed where this sin is too often hatched. Guard your thoughts, and there is little fear about your deeds.

Consider the caution I have been giving. If you forget all else, do not let this be forgotten.

3. Another danger to young men is thoughtlessness

Want of thought is one simple reason why thousands of souls are cast away forever. Men will not consider, will not look forward, will not look around them, will not reflect on the end of their present course and the sure consequences of their present ways. They will awake at last to find they are damned for want of thinking.

Young men, none are in more danger of this than yourselves. You know little of the perils around you, and so you are heedless how you walk. You hate the trouble of sober, quiet thinking, and so you form wrong decisions and run your heads into sorrow. Young Esau must needs have his brother’s pottage and sell his birthright; he never *thought* how much he should one day want it. Young Simeon and Levi must needs avenge their sister Dinah, and slay the Shechemites; they never *considered* how much trouble and anxiety they might bring on their father Jacob and his house. Job seems to have been specially afraid of this thoughtlessness among his children: it is written, that when they had a feast, and “the days of their feasting were gone about, Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings, according to the number

⁸⁴ **pitch** – a black, sticky substance formed in the distillation of coal or wood tar; used to waterproof boats made of wood.

of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually” (Job 1:5).

Believe me, this world is not a world in which we can do well without thinking, and least of all do well in the matter of our souls. “Don’t think,” whispers Satan; he knows that an unconverted heart is like a dishonest tradesman’s books: it will not bear close inspection. “Consider your ways,” says the Word of God, stop and think, consider and be wise. Well says the Spanish proverb, “Hurry comes from the devil.” Just as men marry in haste and then repent at leisure, so they make mistakes about their souls in a minute, and then suffer for it for years. Just as a bad servant does wrong and then says, “I never gave it a thought;” so young men run into sin and then say, “I did not think about it; it did not look like sin.” Not look like sin! What would you have? Sin will not come to you saying, “I am sin”; it would do little harm if it did. Sin always seems “good, and pleasant, and to be desired” at the time of commission (Gen 3:6). Oh, get wisdom, get discretion! Remember the words of Solomon: “Ponder the paths of thy feet, and let thy ways be established” (Pro 4:26). It is a wise saying of Lord Bacon, “Do nothing rashly. Stay a little, that you make an end the sooner.”

Some, I dare say, will object that I am asking what is unreasonable; that youth is not the time of life when people ought to be grave and thoughtful. I answer, there is little danger of their being too much so in the present day. Foolish talking, jesting, joking, and excessive merriment are only too common. Doubtless, there is a time for all things; but to be always light and trifling is anything but wise. What says the wisest of men?—“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth” (Ecc 7:2-4). Matthew Henry⁸⁵ tells a story of a great statesman, Secretary Walsingham,⁸⁶ in Queen Elizabeth’s time, who retired from public life in his latter days and gave himself up to serious thought. His former gay companions came to visit and told him he was becoming melancholy. “No,” he replied, “I am *serious*; for all are serious round about me. God is serious in observing us; Christ is serious in interceding for us; the Spirit is serious in striving with us; the truths of God are serious; our spiritual enemies are serious in their endeavors to ruin us; poor lost sinners are serious in hell—and why then should not you and I be serious too?”

Oh, young men, learn to be thoughtful! Learn to consider what you are doing and whither you are going. Make time for calm reflection. Commune with your own heart and be still. Remember my caution: Do not be lost merely for the want of thought.

⁸⁵ **Matthew Henry (1662-1714)** – Puritan Bible expositor who penned one of the most helpful commentaries on the entire Bible.

⁸⁶ **Francis Walsingham (c. 1532-1590)** – Queen Elizabeth I’s Secretary of State in charge of intelligence.

4. *Another danger to young men is contempt of religion.*

This also is one of your special dangers. I always observe that none pay so little outward respect to religion as young men. None attend so badly on the means⁸⁷ of grace—none take so little part in our services when they are present at them, use Bibles and Prayer Books so little, sing so little, listen to preaching so little. None are so generally absent at prayer meetings, and lectures, and all such weekday helps to the soul. Young men seem to think they do not need these things: they may be good for women and old men, but not for them. They appear ashamed of seeming to care about their souls; one would almost fancy they reckoned it a disgrace to go to heaven at all. And this is *contempt of religion!* It is the same spirit which made the young people of Bethel mock Elisha; and of this spirit I say to all young men, Beware! If it be worth while to have a religion, it is worth while to be in earnest about it.

Contempt of holy things is the high road to infidelity. Once let a man begin to make a jest and joke of any part of Christianity, and I am never surprised to hear that he has turned out a downright unbeliever.

Young men, have you really made up your minds to this? Have you fairly looked into the gulf which is before you if you persist in despising religion? Call to mind the words of David: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psa 14:1). The *fool*, and none but the fool! He has *said* it, but he has never proved it! Remember, if ever there was a book, which has been proved true from beginning to end, by every kind of evidence, that book is the Bible. It has defied the attacks of all enemies and faultfinders. “The Word of the Lord is indeed *tried*” (Psa 18:30). It has been tried in every way, and the more it has been tried, the more evidently has it been shown to be the very handiwork of God Himself. What will you believe if you do not believe the Bible? There is no choice but to believe something ridiculous and absurd. Depend on it, no man is so grossly credulous as the man who denies the Bible to be the Word of God. And if it be the Word of God, take heed that you despise it not.

Men may tell you there are difficulties in the Bible, things hard to be understood. It would not be God’s book if there were not. And what if there are? You do not despise medicines because you cannot explain all that your doctor does by them. But whatever men may say, the things needful to salvation are as clear as daylight. Be very sure of this: people never reject the Bible because they cannot understand it. They understand it only too well; they understand that it condemns their own behavior; they understand that it witnesses against their own sins and summons them to judgment. They try to believe it is false and useless, because they do not like to allow it is true. “A bad life,” said the celebrated Lord Rochester,⁸⁸ laying his hand on the Bible, “a bad life is the only grand objection to this book.” “Men question the truth of Christianity,” says South,⁸⁹ “because they hate the practice of it.”

⁸⁷ **means** – the instruments through which God works to communicate to the hearts of men.

⁸⁸ **John Rochester (1647-1680)** – advisor to the king and member of his court.

⁸⁹ **Robert South (1634-1716)** – Anglican clergyman whose sermons have been called “classics of English

Young men, when did God ever fail to keep His word? Never. What He has said He has always done, and what He has spoken He has always made good. Did He fail to keep His word at the flood?—No. Did He fail with Sodom and Gomorrah?—No. Did He fail with unbelieving Jerusalem?—No. Has He failed with the Jews up to this very hour?—No. He has never failed to fulfill His word. Take care, lest you be found amongst those by whom God's Word is despised.

Never laugh at religion. Never make a jest of sacred things. Never mock those who are serious and in earnest about their souls. The time may come when you will count those happy whom you laughed at—a time when your laughter will be turned into sorrow, and your mockery into heaviness.

5. Another danger to young men is the fear of man's opinion.

"The fear of man" does indeed "bring a snare" (Pro 29:25). It is terrible to observe the power which it has over most minds, and especially over the minds of the young. Few seem to have any opinions of their own, or to think for themselves. Like dead fish, they go with the stream and tide: what others think right, they think right; and what others call wrong, they call wrong too. There are not many original thinkers in the world. Most men are like sheep: they follow a leader. If it was the fashion of the day to be Romanists⁹⁰ they would be Romanists; if to be Mohammedans⁹¹ they would be Mohammedans. They dread the idea of going against the current of the times. In a word, the opinion of the day becomes their religion, their creed, their Bible, and their God.

The thought, "What will my friends say or think of me?" nips many a good inclination in the bud. The fear of being observed upon, laughed at, or ridiculed prevents many a good habit being taken up. There are Bibles that would be read this very day if the owners dared. They know they ought to read them, but they are afraid: "What will people say?" There are knees that would be bent in prayer this very night, but the fear of man forbids it: "What would my wife, my brother, my friend, my companion say, if they saw me praying?" Alas, what wretched slavery this is, and yet how common! "I feared the people," said Saul to Samuel, and so he transgressed the commandment of the Lord (1Sa 15:24). "I am afraid of the Jews," said Zedekiah, the graceless king of Judah: and so he disobeyed the advice, which Jeremiah gave him (Jer 38:19). Herod was afraid of what his guests would think of him, so he did that which made him "exceeding sorry": he beheaded John the Baptist. Pilate feared offending the Jews, so he did that which he knew in his conscience was unjust: he delivered up Jesus to be crucified. If this be not slavery, what is?

Young men, I want you all to be free from this bondage. I want you each to care nothing for man's opinion, when the path of duty is clear. Believe me, it is a great thing to be able to say "No!" Here was good King Jehoshaphat's weak point: he was too easy

Divinity."

⁹⁰ **Romanists** – adherents to the Roman Catholic Church.

⁹¹ **Mohammedans** – those who follow the prophet Mohammed, Muslims.

and yielding in his dealings with Ahab, and hence many of his troubles (1Ki 22:4). Learn to say “No!” Let not the fear of not seeming good-natured make you unable to do it. When sinners entice you, be able to say decidedly, “I will not consent” (Pro 1:10).

Consider only how *unreasonable* this fear of man is. How short-lived is man’s enmity and how little harm he can do you! “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man, which shall be as grass: and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?” (Isa 51:12, 13). And how *thankless* is this fear! None will really think better of you for it. The world always respects those most who act boldly for God. Oh, break these bonds and cast these chains from you! Never be ashamed of letting men see that you want to go to heaven. Think it no disgrace to show yourself a servant of God. Never be afraid of doing what is right.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat 10:28). Only try to please God, and He can soon make others pleased with you. “When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Pro 16:7).

Young men, be of good courage. Care not for what the world says or thinks: you will not be with the world always. Can man save your soul?—No. Will man be your judge in the great and dreadful day of account?—No. Can man give you a good conscience in life, a good hope in death, a good answer in the morning of resurrection?—No! No! No! Man can do nothing of the sort. Then “fear not the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings: for the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool” (Isa 51:7, 8). Call to mind the saying of good Colonel Gardiner:⁹² “I fear God, and therefore I have none else to fear.” Go and be like him.

Such are the warnings I give you. Lay them to heart. They are worth thinking over. I am much mistaken if they are not greatly needed. The Lord grant they may not have been given you in vain.

III. General Counsels to Young Men

In the third place, I wish to give some general counsels to young men .

1. *For one thing, try to get a clear view of the evil of sin.*

Young men, if you did but know what sin is, and what sin has done, you would not think it strange that I exhort you as I do. You do not see it in its true colors. Your eyes are naturally blind to its guilt and danger, and hence you cannot understand what makes me so anxious about you. Oh, let not the devil succeed in persuading you that sin is a small matter!

Think for a moment *what the Bible says about sin*:

⁹² **Col. James Gardiner (1687-1745)** – a godly preacher who was marvelously converted by reading Thomas Watson’s book *Heaven Taken by Storm*.

- how it dwells naturally in the heart of every man and woman alive (Ecc 7:20; Rom 3:23)
- how it defiles our thoughts, words, and actions, and that continually (Gen 6:5; Mat 15:19)
- how it renders us all guilty and abominable in the sight of a holy God (Isa 64:6; Hab 1:13)
- how it leaves us utterly without hope of salvation, if we look to ourselves (Psa 143:2; Rom 3:20)
- how its fruit in this world is shame, and its wages in the world to come, death (Rom 6:21,23).

Think calmly of all this. I tell you this day, it is not more sad to be dying of consumption, and not to know it, than it is to be a living man, and not know it.

Think *what an awful change sin has worked* on all our natures. Man is no longer what he was when God formed him out of the dust of the ground. He came out of God's hand upright and sinless (Ecc 7:29). In the day of his creation he was, like everything else, "very good" (Gen 1:31). And what is man now?:

- a fallen creature, a ruin, a being that shows the marks of corruption all over
- his heart like Nebuchadnezzar, degraded and earthly, looking down and not up
- his affections like a household in disorder, calling no man master, all extravagance and confusion
- his understanding like a lamp flickering in the socket, impotent to guide him, not knowing good from evil
- his will like a rudderless ship, tossed to and fro by every desire, and constant only in choosing any way rather than God's.

Alas, what a wreck is man, compared to what he might have been! Well may we understand such figures being used as blindness, deafness, disease, sleep, death, when the Spirit has to give us a picture of man as he is. And man as he is, remember, was so made by sin.

Think, too, *what it has cost to make atonement*⁹³ for sin, and to provide a pardon and forgiveness for sinners. God's own Son must come into the world and take upon Him our nature, in order to pay the price of our redemption and deliver us from the curse of a broken law. He who was in the beginning with the Father, and by whom all things were made, must suffer for sin the just for the unjust, must die the death of a malefactor, before the way to heaven can be laid open to any soul. See the Lord Jesus Christ despised and rejected of men, scourged, mocked, and insulted;—behold Him bleeding on the cross of Calvary;—hear Him crying in agony, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"—mark how the sun was darkened, and the rocks rent at the sight;—and then consider, young men, what must be the evil and guilt of sin.

⁹³ **atonement** – to bring reconciliation by paying the debt owed for an offense.

Think, also, *what sin has done* already upon the earth. Think how it cast Adam and Eve out of Eden, brought the flood upon the old world, caused fire to come down on Sodom and Gomorrah, drowned Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, destroyed the seven wicked nations of Canaan, scattered the twelve tribes of Israel over the face of the globe. Sin alone did all this.

Think, moreover, of all the *misery and sorrow that sin has caused*, and is causing at this very day. Pain, disease, and death—strifes, quarrels, and divisions—envy, jealousy, and malice—deceit, fraud, and cheating—violence, oppression, and robbery—selfishness, unkindness, and ingratitude;—all these are the fruits of sin. Sin is the parent of them all. Sin it is that has so marred and spoiled the face of God's creation.

Young men, consider these things, and you will not wonder that we preach as we do. Surely, if you did but think of them, you would break with sin for ever. Will you play with poison? Will you sport with hell? Will you take fire in your hand? Will you harbor your deadliest enemy in your bosom? Will you go on living as if it mattered nothing whether your own sins were forgiven or not—whether sin had dominion over you, or you over sin? Oh, awake to a sense of sin's sinfulness and danger! Remember the words of Solomon: "Fools," none but fools, "make a mock at sin" (Pro 14:9).

Hear, then, the request that I make of you this day: pray that God would teach you the real evil of sin. As you would have your soul saved, arise and pray.

2. For another thing, seek to become acquainted with our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is, indeed, the principal thing in religion. This is the corner-stone of Christianity. Until you know this, my warnings and advice will be useless, and your endeavors, whatever they may be, will be in vain. A watch without a mainspring is not more unserviceable than is religion without Christ.

But let me not be misunderstood. It is not the mere knowing Christ's name that I mean. It is the knowing His mercy, grace, and power—knowing Him not by the hearing of the ear, but by the experience of your hearts. I want you to know Him by faith; I want you, as Paul says, to know "the power of His resurrection; being made conformable unto His death" (Phi 3:10). I want you to be able to say of Him, He is my peace and my strength, my life and my consolation, my Physician and my Shepherd, my Savior and my God.

Why do I make such a point of this? I do it because in Christ alone "all fulness dwells" (Col 1:19), because in Him alone there is full supply of all that we require for the necessities of our souls. Of ourselves we are all poor, empty creatures, empty of righteousness and peace, empty of strength and comfort, empty of courage and patience, empty of power to stand, or go on, or make progress in this evil world. It is in Christ alone that all these things are to be found: grace, peace, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. It is just in proportion as we live upon Him that we are strong Christians. It is only when self is nothing and Christ is all our confidence, it is then only that we shall do great exploits. Then only are we armed for the battle of life, and shall

overcome. Then only are we prepared for the journey of life, and shall get forward. To live on Christ, to draw all from Christ, to do all in the strength of Christ, to be ever looking unto Christ—this is the true secret of spiritual prosperity. “I can do all things,” says Paul, “through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13).

Young men, I set before you Jesus Christ this day, as the treasury of your souls, and I invite you to begin by going to Him if you would so run as to obtain. Let this be your first step: *go to Christ*. Do you want to consult friends? He is the best friend: “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro 18:24).

Do you feel unworthy because of your sins? Fear not: His blood cleanseth from all sin. He says, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa 1:18).

Do you feel weak, and unable to follow Him? Fear not: He will give you power to become sons of God. He will give you the Holy Ghost to dwell in you, and seal you for His own; a new heart will He give you, and a new spirit will He put within you.

Are you troubled or beset with peculiar infirmities? Fear not: there is no evil spirit that Jesus cannot cast out; there is no disease of soul that He cannot heal.

Do you feel doubts and fears? Cast them aside: “Come unto Me,” He says; “him that cometh I will in no wise cast out.” He knows well the heart of a young man. He knows your trials and your temptations, your difficulties and your foes. In the days of His flesh, He was like yourselves, a young man at Nazareth. He knows by experience a young man’s mind. He can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities, for He suffered Himself, being tempted (Heb 2:18; 4:15). Surely, you will be without excuse if you turn away from such a Savior and Friend as this.

Hear the request I make of you this day: if you love life, seek to become acquainted with Jesus Christ.

3. For another thing, never forget that nothing is so important as your soul.

Your soul is eternal. It will live forever. The world and all that it contains shall pass away; firm, solid, beautiful, well ordered as it is, the world shall come to an end. “The earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2Pe 3:10). The works of statesmen, writers, painters, architects, are all short-lived; your soul will outlive them all. The angel’s voice shall proclaim one day that “Time shall be no longer” (Rev 10:6). But that shall never be said of your souls.

Try, I beseech you, to realize the fact that your soul is the one thing worth living for. It is the part of you which ought always to be first considered. No place, no employment is good for you which injures your soul. No friend, no companion deserves your confidence who makes light of your soul’s concerns. The man who hurts your person, your property, your character, does you but temporary harm. He is the true enemy who contrives to damage your soul.

Think for a moment what you were sent into the world for. Not merely to eat and drink and indulge the desires of the flesh—not merely to dress out your body, and follow

its lusts whithersoever they may lead you—not merely to work, and sleep, and laugh, and talk, and enjoy yourselves, and think of nothing but time. No! you were meant for something higher and better than this. You were placed here to train for eternity. Your body was only intended to be a house for your immortal spirit. It is flying in the face of God’s purposes to do as many do: to make the soul a servant to the body, and not the body a servant to the soul. Our Catechism begins with this admirable question and answer: “What is the chief and highest end of man?” “To glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him forever.”

Young men, God is no respecter of persons. He regards no man’s coat, purse, rank, or position. He sees not with man’s eyes. The poorest saint that ever died in a workhouse is nobler in His sight than the richest sinner that ever died in a palace. God does not look at riches, titles, learning, beauty, or anything of the kind. One thing only God does look at, and that is the immortal soul. He measures all men by one standard, one measure, one test, one criterion, and that is *the state of their souls*.

Do not forget this. Keep in view morning, noon, and night, the interests of your soul. Rise up each day desiring that it may prosper; lie down each evening inquiring of yourself whether it has really got on. Remember Zeuxis,⁹⁴ the great painter of old. When men asked him why he labored so intensely, and took such extreme pains with every picture, his simple answer was, “I paint for eternity.” Do not be ashamed to be like him. Set your immortal soul before your mind’s eye, and when men ask you why you live as you do, answer them in his spirit, “I live for my soul.” Believe me, the day is fast coming when the soul will be the one thing men will think of, and the only question of importance will be this, “*Is my soul lost or saved?*”

4. *For another thing, remember it is possible to be a young man and yet to serve God.*

I fear the snares that Satan lays for you on this point. I fear lest he succeed in filling your minds with the vain notion that to be a true Christian in youth is impossible. I have seen many carried away by this delusion. I have heard it said, “You are requiring impossibilities in expecting so much religion from young people. Youth is no time for seriousness. Our desires are strong, and it was never intended that we should keep them under, as you wish us to do. God meant us to enjoy ourselves. There will be time enough for religion by and by.” And this kind of talk is only too much encouraged by the world. The world is only too ready to wink at youthful sins. The world appears to think it a matter of course that young men must “sow their wild oats.” The world seems to take it for granted young people *must* be irreligious, and that it is not possible for them to follow Christ.

Young men, I will ask you this simple question: Where will you find anything of all this in the Word of God? Where is the chapter or verse in the Bible, which will support this talking, and reasoning of the world? Does not the Bible speak to old and young alike, without distinction? Is not sin, sin, whether committed at the age of twenty or fifty? Will it form the slightest excuse in the Day of Judgment to say, “I know I sinned, but then I

⁹⁴ **Zeuxis (464-396 B.C.)** – Greek painter during the golden age of Greece.

was young”? Show your common sense, I beg of you, by giving up such vain excuses. You are responsible and accountable to God from the very moment that you know right and wrong.

I know well there are many difficulties in a young man’s way; I allow it fully. But there are always difficulties in the way of doing right. The path to heaven is always narrow, whether we be young or old. There are difficulties, but God will give you grace to overcome them. God is no hard master. He will not, like Pharaoh, require you to make bricks without straw (Exo 5:16). He will take care the path of plain duty is never impossible. He never laid commands on man which He would not give man power to perform (1Co 10:13).

There are difficulties, but many a young man has overcome them hitherto, and so may you. Moses was a young man of like passions with yourselves, but see what is said of him in Scripture: “By faith Moses, when he was come to age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb 11:24-26). Daniel was a young man when he began to serve God in Babylon. He was surrounded by temptations of every kind. He had few with him and many against him. Yet Daniel’s life was so blameless and consistent, that even his enemies could find no fault in him, except “concerning the law of his God” (Dan 6:5). And these are not solitary cases. There is a cloud of witnesses whom I could name. Time would fail me if I were to tell you of young Isaac (Gen 22), young Joseph (Gen 39), young Joshua (Exo 17:9-14), young Samuel (1Sa 2:18-3:21), young David (1Sa 16, 17), young Solomon (1Ki 3:4-9), young Abijah (2Ch 13), young Obadiah (1Ki 18:3), young Josiah (2Ch 34, 35), young Timothy (Act 16:1-3). These were not angels, but men with hearts naturally like your own. They too had obstacles to contend with, lusts to mortify, trials to endure, hard places to fill, like any of yourselves. But young as they were, they all found it possible to serve God. Will they not all rise in judgment and condemn you if you persist in saying it cannot be done?

Young men, *try* to serve God. Resist the devil when he whispers it is impossible. Try and the Lord God of the promises will give you strength in the trying. He loves to meet those who struggle to come to Him, and He will meet you and give you the power that you feel you need. Be like the man whom Bunyan’s Pilgrim⁹⁵ saw in the Interpreter’s house: go forward boldly, saying, “Set down my name.” Those words of our Lord are true, though I often hear them repeated by heartless and unfeeling tongues: “Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Mat 7:7). Difficulties which seemed like mountains shall melt away like snow in spring. Obstacles which seemed like giants in the mist of distance shall dwindle into nothing when you fairly face them. The

⁹⁵ **John Bunyan (1628-1688)** – author of *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), an allegory of the Christian life, going from the heavy burden of sin, to conversion, to sanctification, to death and glorification. All the following metaphors (mountains, giants, lions) are scenes from *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

lion in the way which you fear shall prove to be chained. If men believed the promises more, they would never be afraid of duties. But remember that little word I press upon you, and when Satan says, “You cannot be a Christian while you are young,” answer him, “Get thee behind me, Satan: by God’s help *I will try*.”

5. *For another thing, determine as long as you live to make the Bible your guide and adviser.*

The Bible is God’s merciful provision for sinful man’s soul, the map by which he must steer his course if he would attain eternal life. All that we need to know in order to make us peaceful, holy, or happy, is there richly contained. If a young man would know how to begin life well, let him hear what David says: “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word” (Psa 119:9).

Young men, I charge you to make a habit of reading the Bible, and not to let the habit be broken. Let not the laughter of companions, nor the bad customs of the family you may live in—let none of these things prevent your doing it. Determine that you will not only *have* a Bible, but also make time to *read* it too. Suffer no man to persuade you that it is only a book for Sunday school children and old women. It is the book from which King David got wisdom and understanding. It is the book which young Timothy knew from his childhood. Never be ashamed of reading it. Do not “despise the Word” (Pro 13:13).

Read it *with prayer* for the Spirit’s grace to make you understand it. Bishop Beveridge⁹⁶ says well, “A man may as soon read the letter of Scripture without eyes, as understand the spirit of it without grace.”

Read it *reverently*, as the Word of God, not of man—believing implicitly that what it approves is right and what it condemns is wrong. Be very sure that every doctrine which will not stand the test of Scripture is false. This will keep you from being tossed to and fro, and carried about by the dangerous opinions of these latter days. Be very sure that every *practice* in your life which is contrary to Scripture is sinful and must be given up. This will settle many a question of conscience, and cut the knot of many a doubt. Remember how differently two kings of Judah read the Word of God: Jehoiakim read it, and at once cut the writing to pieces, and burned it on the fire (Jer 36:23). And why?—because his heart rebelled against it, and he was resolved not to obey. Josiah read it, and at once rent his clothes, and cried mightily to the Lord (2Ch 34:19). And why?—because his heart was tender and obedient. He was ready to do anything which Scripture showed him was his duty. Oh that you may follow the last of these two, and not the first!

And *read it regularly*. This is the only way to become “mighty in the Scriptures” (Act 18:24). A hasty glance at the Bible now and then does little good. At that rate you will never become familiar with its treasures, or feel the sword of the Spirit fitted to your hand in the hour of conflict. But get your mind stored with Scripture, by diligent reading, and you will soon discover its value and power. Texts will rise up in your hearts in

⁹⁶ **William Beveridge (1637-1708)** – Anglican Bishop of Asaph, England.

the moment of temptation. Commands will suggest themselves in seasons of doubt. Promises will come across your thoughts in the time of discouragement. And thus you will experience the truth of David's words, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa 119:11); and of Solomon's words, "When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee" (Pro 6:22).

I dwell on these things more because this is an age of reading. Of making many books there seems no end, though few of them are really profitable. There seems a rage for cheap printing and publishing. Newspapers of every sort abound, and the tone of some, which have the widest circulation, tells badly for the taste of the age. Amidst the flood of dangerous reading, I plead for my Master's book—I call upon you not to forget the book of the soul. Let not newspapers, novels, and romances be read, while the prophets and Apostles lie despised. Let not the exciting and licentious swallow up your attention, while the edifying and the sanctifying can find no place in your mind.

Young men, give the Bible the honor due to it every day you live. Whatever you read, read that first. And beware of bad books: there are plenty in this day. Take heed what you read. I suspect there is more harm done to souls in this way than most people have an idea is possible. Value all books in proportion as they are agreeable to Scripture. Those that are nearest to it are the best, and those that are farthest from it and most contrary to it, the worst.

6. For another thing, never make an intimate friend of anyone who is not a friend of God.

Understand me, I do not speak of *acquaintances*. I do not mean that you ought to have nothing to do with any but true Christians. To take such a line is neither possible nor desirable in this world. Christianity requires no man to be discourteous.

But I do advise you to be very careful in your choice of *friends*. Do not open all your heart to a man merely because he is clever, agreeable, good-natured, high-spirited, and kind. These things are all very well in their way, but they are not everything. Never be satisfied with the friendship of any one who will not be useful to your soul.

Believe me, the importance of this advice cannot be overrated. There is no telling the harm that is done by associating with godless companions and friends. The devil has few better helps in ruining a man's soul. Grant him this help, and he cares little for all the armor with which you may be armed against him. Good education, early habits of morality, sermons, books, regular homes, letters of parents—all, he knows well, will avail you little if you cling to ungodly friends. You may resist many open temptations, refuse many plain snares; but once take up a bad companion, and he is content. That awful chapter which describes Amnon's wicked conduct about Tamar, almost begins with these words, "But Amnon had a friend, a very subtle man" (2Sa 13:3). You must recollect, we are all creatures of imitation: precept may teach us, but it is example that draws us. There is that in us all, that we are always disposed to catch the ways of those with whom we live; and the more we like them, the stronger does the disposition grow. With-

out our being aware of it, they influence our tastes and opinions; we gradually give up what they dislike and take up what they like, in order to become more close friends with them. And worst of all, we catch their ways in things that are wrong far quicker than in things that are right. Health, unhappily, is not contagious, but disease is. It is far more easy to catch a chill than to impart a glow; and to make each other's religion dwindle away, than grow and prosper.

Young men, I ask you to lay these things to heart. Before you let anyone become your constant companion, before you get into the habit of telling him everything, and going to him in all your troubles and all your pleasures—before you do this, just think of what I have been saying, Ask yourself, “Will this be a useful friendship to me or not?”

“Evil communications” do indeed “corrupt good manners” (1Co 15:33). I wish that text were written in hearts as often as it is in copybooks. Good friends are among our greatest blessings. They may keep us back from much evil, quicken us in our course, speak a word in season, draw us upward, and draw us on. But a bad friend is a positive misfortune, a weight continually dragging us down, and chaining us to earth. Keep company with an irreligious man, and it is more than probable you will in the end become like him. That is the general consequence of all such friendships. The good go down to the bad, and the bad do not come up to the good. Even a stone will give way before a continual dropping. The world's proverb is only too correct: “Clothes and company tell true tales about character.” “Show me who a man lives with,” say the Spaniards, “and I will show you what he is.”

I dwell the more upon this point because it has more to do with your prospects in life than at first sight appears. If ever you marry, it is more than probable you will choose a wife among the connections of your friends. If Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had not formed a friendship with Ahab's family, he would most likely not have married Ahab's daughter. And who can estimate the importance of a right choice in marriage? It is a step which, according to the old saying, “either makes a man or mars him.” Your happiness in both lives may depend on it. Your wife must either help your soul or harm it: there is no medium. She will either fan the flame of religion in your heart, or throw cold water upon it and make it burn low. She will either be wings or fetters, a rein or a spur to your Christianity, according to her character. He that findeth a good wife doth indeed “findeth a good thing” (Pro 18:22); but if you have the least wish to find one, be very careful how you choose your friends.

Do you ask me what kind of friends you shall choose? Choose friends who will benefit your soul, friends whom you can really respect, friends whom you would like to have near you on your deathbed, friends who live the Bible and are not afraid to speak to you about it, friends such as you will not be ashamed of owning at the coming of Christ, and at the day of judgment. Follow the example that David sets you: he says, “I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts” (Psa 119:63). Remember the words of Solomon: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a

companion of fools shall be destroyed” (Pro 13:20). But depend on it, bad company in the life that now is, is the sure way to procure worse company in the life to come.

IV. Special Rules for Young Men

In the last place, I will set down some particular rules of conduct, which I strongly advise all young men to follow.

1. For one thing, resolve at once, by God’s help, to break off every known sin, however small.

Look within, each one of you. Examine your own hearts. Do you see there any habit or custom which you know to be wrong in the sight of God? If you do, delay not a moment in attacking it. Resolve at once to lay it aside.

Nothing darkens the eyes of the mind so much, and deadens the conscience so surely, as *an allowed sin*. It may be a little one, but it is not the less dangerous for all that. A small leak will sink a great ship, and a small spark will kindle a great fire, and a little allowed sin in like manner will ruin an immortal soul. Take my advice and never spare a little sin. Israel was commanded to slay every Canaanite, both great and small. Act on the same principle and show no mercy to little sins. Well says the book of The Song of Solomon, “Take us the foxes, the *little* foxes, that spoil the vines” (Song 2:15).

Be sure no wicked man ever meant to be so wicked at his first beginnings. But he began with allowing himself some *little* transgression, and that led on to something greater, and that in time produced something greater still, and thus he became the miserable being that he now is. When Hazael heard from Elisha of the horrible acts that he would one day do, he said with astonishment, “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” (2Ki 8:13). But he allowed sin to take root in his heart, and in the end he did them all.

Young men, resist sin in its beginnings. They may look small and insignificant, but mind what I say: resist them, make no compromise, let no sin lodge quietly and undisturbed in your heart. “The mother of mischief,” says an old proverb, “is no bigger than a midge’s wing.” There is nothing finer than the point of a needle, but when it has made a hole, it draws all the thread after it. Remember the Apostle’s words, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1Co 5:6).

Many a young man could tell you with sorrow and shame that he traces the ruin of all his worldly prospects to the point I speak of: to giving way to sin in its beginnings. He began habits of falsehood and dishonesty in little things, and they grew upon him. Step by step, he has gone on from bad to worse, till he has done things that at one time he would have thought impossible—till at last he has lost his place, lost his character, lost his comfort, and well nigh lost his soul. He allowed a gap in the wall of his conscience because it seemed a little one, and once allowed, that gap grew larger every day, till at length the whole wall seemed to come down.

Remember this especially in matters of *truth* and *honesty*. Make conscience of pins⁹⁷ and syllables. “He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much” (Luk 16:10). Whatever the world may please to say, there are no little sins. All great buildings are made up of little parts; the first stone is as important as any other. All habits are formed by a succession of little acts, and the first little act is of mighty consequence. The axe in the fable only begged the trees to let him have one little piece of wood to make a handle, and he would never trouble them any more. He got it, and then he soon cut them all down. The devil only wants to get the wedge of a little allowed sin into your heart, and you will soon be all his own. It is a wise saying of old William Bridge,⁹⁸ “There is nothing small betwixt us and God, for God is an infinite God.”

There are two ways of coming down from the top of a church steeple; one is to jump down, and the other is to come down by the steps: but both will lead you to the bottom. So also there are two ways of going to hell; one is to walk into it with your eyes open—few people do that; the other is to go down by the steps of little sins—and that way, I fear, is only too common. Put up with a few little sins, and you will soon want a few more. Even a heathen (Juvenal⁹⁹) could say, “Who ever was content with only one sin?” And then your course will be regularly worse and worse every year. Well did Jeremy Taylor describe the progress of sin in a man: “First it startles him, then it becomes pleasing, then easy, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed!—then the man is impenitent, then obstinate, then resolves never to repent, and then he is damned.”

Young men, if you would not come to this, recollect the rule I give you this day: resolve at once to break off every known sin.

2. For another thing, resolve, by God's help, to shun everything which may prove an occasion for sin.

It is an excellent saying of good Bishop Hall,¹⁰⁰ “He that would be safe from the acts of evil, must widely avoid the occasions.” There is an old fable, that the butterfly once asked the owl how she should deal with the fire which had singed her wings; and the owl counseled her, in reply, not to behold so much as its smoke.

It is not enough that we determine to commit no sin; we must carefully keep at a distance from all approaches to it. By this test we ought to try our ways of spending our time—the books that we read, the families that we visit, the society into which we go. We must not content ourselves with saying, “There is nothing positively wrong here;” we must go further, and say, “Is there anything here which may prove to me the occasion of sin?”

This, be it remembered, is one great reason why *idleness* is so much to be avoided. It is not that doing nothing is of itself so positively wicked; it is the opportunity it affords

⁹⁷ **pins** – things of little value.

⁹⁸ **William Bridge (1637-1708)** – English Puritan pastor and writer.

⁹⁹ **Juvenal (34-120 AD)** – Roman satirical poet.

¹⁰⁰ **Joseph Hall (1574-1656)** – Anglican Bishop of Norwich.

to evil thoughts and vain imaginations; it is the wide door it opens for Satan to throw in the seeds of bad things; it is this which is mainly to be feared. If David had not given occasion to the devil by idling on his housetop at Jerusalem, he would probably never have seen Bathsheba, nor murdered Uriah.

This, too, is one great reason why *worldly amusements* are so objectionable. It may be difficult, in some instances, to show that they are, in themselves, positively unscriptural and wrong. But there is little difficulty in showing that the *tendency* of almost all of them is most injurious to the soul. They sow the seeds of an earthly and sensual frame of mind. They war against the life of faith. They promote an unhealthy and unnatural craving after excitement. They minister to the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (1Jn 2:16). They dim the view of heaven and eternity, and give a false color to the things of time. They indispose the heart for private prayer, Scripture reading, and calm communion with God. The man who mingles in them is like one who gives Satan vantage-ground. He has a battle to fight, and he gives his enemy the help of sun, wind, and hill. It would be strange indeed if he did not find himself continually overcome.

Young men, endeavor, as much as in you lies, to keep clear of everything, which may prove injurious to your soul. Never hold a candle to the devil. People may say you are over scrupulous, too particular, where is the mighty harm of such and such things? But heed them not. It is dangerous to play tricks with edged tools; it is far more dangerous to take liberties with your immortal soul. He that would be safe must not come near the brink of danger. He must look on his heart as a magazine of gunpowder, and be cautious not to handle one spark of temptation more than he can help.

Where is the use of your praying, "Lead us not into temptation" (Mat 6:13), unless you are yourselves careful not to run into it; and "deliver us from evil," unless you show a desire to keep out of its way? Take example from Joseph: not merely did he refuse his mistress's solicitation to sin, but he showed his prudence in refusing to be "with her" at all (Gen 39:10). Lay to heart the advice of Solomon, not merely to "go not in the path of wickedness," but to "avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Pro 4:15); not merely not to be drunken, but not even to "*look* upon the wine when it is red" (Pro 23:31). The man who took the vow of a Nazarite in Israel not only took no wine, but he even abstained from grapes in any shape whatever. "*Abhor* that which is evil," says Paul to the Romans (Rom 12:9); not merely do not do it. "*Flee* youthful lusts," he writes to Timothy; get away from them as far as possible (2Ti 2:22). Alas, how needful are such cautions! Dinah must needs go out among the wicked Shechemites to see their ways, and she lost her character. Lot must needs pitch his tent near sinful Sodom, and he lost everything but his life.

Young men, be wise in time. Do not be always trying how near you can allow the enemy of souls to come, and yet escape him. Hold him at arm's length. Try to keep clear of temptation as far as possible, and this will be one great help to keep clear of sin.

3. *For another thing, resolve never to forget the eye of God.*

The eye of God! Think of that. Everywhere, in every house, in every field, in every room, in every company, alone or in a crowd, the eye of God is always upon you. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Pro 15:3), and they are eyes that read hearts as well as actions.

Endeavor, I beseech you all, to realize this fact. Recollect that you have to do with an all-seeing God, a God who never slumbereth nor sleepeth (Psa 121:4), a God who understands your thoughts afar off, and with whom the night shines as the day (Psa 139:2, 12). You may leave your father's roof and go away like the prodigal into a far country (Luk 15:13), and think that there is nobody to watch your conduct; but the eye and ear of God are there before you. You may deceive your parents or employers; you may tell them falsehoods, and be one thing before their faces and another behind their backs, but you cannot deceive God. He knows you through and through. He heard what you said as you came here today. He knows what you are thinking of at this minute. He has set your most secret sins in the light of His countenance, and they will one day come out before the world to your shame, except you take heed (1Co 4:5).

How little is this really felt! How many things are done continually, which men would never do if they thought they were seen! How many matters are transacted in the chambers of imagination, which would never bear the light of day! Yes; men entertain thoughts in private, and say words in private, and do acts in private, which they would be ashamed and blush to have exposed before the world. The sound of a footstep coming has stopped many a deed of wickedness. A knock at the door has caused many an evil work to be hastily suspended and hurriedly laid aside. But oh, what miserable driveling folly is all this! There is an all-seeing Witness with us wherever we go. Lock the door, draw down the blind, shut the shutters, put out the candle; it matters not; it makes no difference. God is everywhere; you cannot shut Him out, or prevent His seeing. "All things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13). Well did young Joseph understand this when his mistress tempted him. There was no one in the house to see them, no human eye to witness against him. But Joseph was one who lived as seeing Him that is invisible: "How can I do this great wickedness," said he, "and sin against God?" (Gen 39:9).

Young men, I ask you all to read Psalm 139. I advise you all to learn it by heart. Make it the test of all your dealings in this world's business: say to yourself often, "Do I remember that God sees me?"

Live as in the sight of God. This is what Abraham did; he walked *before* Him. This is what Enoch did; he walked *with* Him. This is what heaven itself will be, the eternal presence of God. *Do* nothing you would not like God to see. *Say* nothing you would not like God to hear. *Write* nothing you would not like God to read. *Go* to no place where you would not like God to find you. *Read* no book of which you would not like God to say, "Show it Me." Never spend your time in such a way that you would not like to have God say, "What art thou doing?"

4. *For another thing, be diligent in the use of all public means¹⁰¹ of grace.*

Means of grace

Be regular in going to the house of God whenever it is open for prayer and preaching, and it is in your power to attend. Be regular in keeping the Lord's Day holy, and determine that God's day out of the seven shall henceforth always be given to its rightful owner.

I would not leave any false impression on your minds. Do not go away and say I told you that keeping your church made up the whole of religion. I tell you no such thing. I have no wish to see you grow up formalists and Pharisees. If you think the mere carrying your body to a certain house, at certain times, on a certain day in the week, will make you a Christian and prepare you to meet God, I tell you flatly you are miserably deceived. All services without heart service are unprofitable and vain. They only are true worshippers who "worship God in spirit and in truth: the Father seeketh such to worship Him" (Joh 4:23).

But means of grace are not to be despised because they are not saviors. Gold is not food; you cannot eat it, but you would not therefore say it is useless and throw it away. Your soul's eternal well-doing most certainly does not depend on means of grace, but it is no less certain that without them, as a general rule, your soul will not do well. God *might* take all who are saved to heaven in a chariot of fire, as He did Elijah, but He does not do so. He *might* teach them all by visions, dreams, and miraculous interpositions, without requiring them to read or think for themselves, but He does not do so. And why not? Because He is a God that works by means, and it is His law and will that in all man's dealings with Him means shall be used. None but a fool or enthusiast would think of building a house without ladders and scaffolding, and just so no wise man will despise means.

I dwell the more on this point because Satan will try hard to fill your minds with arguments against means. He will draw your attention to the numbers of persons who use them and are no better for the using. "See there," he will whisper, "do you not observe those who go to church are no better than those who stay away?" But do not let this move you. It is never fair to argue against a thing because it is improperly used. It does not follow that means of grace can do no good because many attend on them and get no good from them. Medicine is not to be despised because many take it and do not recover their health. No man would think of giving up eating and drinking because others choose to eat and drink improperly, and so make themselves ill. The value of means of grace, like other things, depends in a great measure on the manner and spirit in which we use them.

¹⁰¹ **means of grace** – the instruments which God is pleased to use in order to accomplish salvation and sanctification in the heart of men: the preaching of the Word, Bible reading and study, prayer, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and godly fellowship with others.

Preaching of the Gospel

I dwell on this point, too, because of the strong anxiety I feel that every young man should regularly hear the preaching of Christ's Gospel. I cannot tell you how important I think this is. By God's blessing, the ministry of the Gospel might be the means of converting your soul, of leading you to a saving knowledge of Christ, of making you a child of God in deed and in truth. This would be cause for eternal thankfulness indeed. This would be an event over which angels would rejoice. But even if this were not the case, there is a *restraining* power and influence in the ministry of the Gospel, under which I earnestly desire every young man to be brought. There are thousands whom it keeps back from evil, though it has not yet turned them unto God. It has made them far better members of society, though it has not yet made them true Christians. There is a certain kind of mysterious power in the faithful preaching of the Gospel, which tells insensibly on multitudes who listen to it without receiving it into their hearts. To hear sin cried down and holiness cried up, to hear Christ exalted and the works of the devil denounced, to hear the kingdom of heaven and its blessedness described, and the world and its emptiness exposed—to hear this week after week, Sunday after Sunday, is seldom without good effect to the soul. It makes it far harder afterwards to run into any excess of riot and profligacy. It acts as a wholesome check upon a man's heart. This, I believe, is one way in which that promise of God is made good, "My word shall not return unto Me void" (Isa 55:11). There is much truth in that strong saying of Whitefield, "The Gospel keeps many a one from the gaol and gallows, if it does not keep him from hell."

The Lord's Day

Let me here name another point which is closely connected with this subject. Let nothing ever tempt you to become a Sabbath-breaker. I press this on your attention. Make conscience of giving all your Sabbath¹⁰² to God. A spirit of disregard for this holy day is growing up amongst us with fearful rapidity, and not least among young men. Sunday traveling by railways and steamboats, Sunday visiting, Sunday excursions, are becoming every year more common than they were, and are doing infinite harm to souls.

Young men, be jealous on this point. Whether you live in town or country, take up a decided line; resolve not to profane your Sabbath. Let not this plausible argument of "needful relaxation for your body," let not the example of all around you, let not the invitation of companions with whom you may be thrown—let none of these things move you to depart from this settled rule, that *God's day shall be given to God*.

Once give over caring for the Sabbath, and in the end you will give over caring for your soul. The steps which lead to this conclusion are easy and regular. Begin with not honoring God's day, and you will soon not honor God's house; cease to honor God's house, and you will soon cease to honor God's book; cease to honor God's book, and by and by you will give God no honor at all. Let a man lay the foundation of having *no Sab-*

¹⁰² **Sabbath** – the Christian observance of the first day of the week as the Lord's Day, to be given to worship, fellowship with God's people, prayer, rest, and Bible reading and study.

bath, and I am never surprised if he finishes with the top-stone of *no God*. It is a remarkable saying of Judge Hale,¹⁰³ “Of all the persons who were convicted of capital crimes while he was upon the bench, he found only a few who would not confess, on inquiry, that they began their career of wickedness by a neglect of the Sabbath.”

Young men, you may be thrown among companions who forget the honor of the Lord’s day; but resolve, by God’s help, that you will always remember to keep it holy. Honor it by a regular attendance at some place where the Gospel is preached. Settle down under a faithful ministry, and once settled, let your place in church never be empty. Believe me, you will find a special blessing following you: “If you call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth” (Isa 58:13, 14). And one thing is very certain: your feelings about the Sabbath will always be a test and criterion of your fitness for heaven. Sabbaths are a foretaste and fragment of heaven. The man who finds them a burden and not a privilege may be sure that his heart stands in need of a mighty change.

5. For another thing, resolve that wherever you are, you will pray.

Prayer is the life-breath of a man’s soul. Without it, we may have a name to live and be counted Christian, but we are dead in the sight of God. The feeling that we must cry to God for mercy and peace is a mark of grace, and the habit of spreading before Him our soul’s wants is an evidence that we have the spirit of adoption. And prayer is the appointed way to obtain the relief of our spiritual necessities; it opens the treasury, and sets the fountain flowing. If we have not, it is because we ask not.

Prayer is the way to procure the outpouring of the Spirit upon our hearts. Jesus has promised the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. He is ready to come down with all His precious gifts, renewing, sanctifying, purifying, strengthening, cheering, encouraging, enlightening, teaching, directing, guiding into all truth. But then He waits to be entreated.

And here it is, I say it with sorrow, here it is that men fall short so miserably. Few indeed are to be found who pray—many who go down on their knees, and say a form perhaps, but few who pray; few who cry unto God, few who call upon the Lord, few who seek as if they wanted to find, few who knock as if they hungered and thirsted, few who wrestle, few who strive with God earnestly for an answer, few who give Him no rest, few who continue in prayer, few who watch unto prayer, few who pray always without ceasing and faint not. Yes: few pray! It is just one of the things assumed as a matter of course, but seldom practiced; a thing, which is everybody’s business, but in fact hardly anybody performs.

Young men, believe me, if your soul is to be saved, you must pray. God has no dumb children. If you are to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil (1Jo 2:16), you must pray.

¹⁰³ **Sir Matthew Hale (1609-1676)** – English jurist and writer. Capital crimes were those punishable by death.

It is in vain to look for strength in the hour of trial, if it has not been sought for beforehand. You may be thrown with those who never do it; you may have to sleep in the same room with some one who never asks anything of God—still, mark my words, you must pray.

I can quite believe you find great difficulties about it, difficulties about opportunities, seasons, and places. I dare not lay down too positive rules on such points as these. I leave them to your own conscience. You must be guided by circumstances. Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed on a mountain; Isaac prayed in the fields; Hezekiah turned his face to the wall as he lay upon his bed; Daniel prayed by the riverside; Peter, the Apostle, on the housetop. I have heard of young men praying in stables and haylofts. All that I contend for is this: you must know what it is to “enter into your closet” (Mat 6:6). There must be stated times when you must speak to God face to face; you must every day have your seasons for prayer. *You must pray.*

Without this, all advice and counsel is useless. This is that piece of spiritual armor, which Paul names last in his catalogue in Ephesians 6, but it is in truth first in value and importance. This is that meat which you must daily eat, if you would travel safely through the wilderness of this life. It is only in the strength of this that you will get onward towards the mount of God. I have heard it said that the needle-grinders of Sheffield sometimes wear a magnetic mouthpiece at their work, which catches all the fine dust that flies around them, prevents it entering their lungs, and so saves their lives. Prayer is the mouthpiece that you must wear continually, or else you will never work on uninjured by the unhealthy atmosphere of this sinful world. *You must pray.*

Young men, be assured of this: no time is so well spent as that which a man spends upon his knees. Make time for this, whatever your employment may be. Think of David, king of Israel: what does he say? “Evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Psa 55:17). Think of Daniel. He had all the business of a kingdom on his hands; yet he prayed three times a day. See there the secret of his safety in wicked Babylon. Think of Solomon. He begins his reign with prayer for help and assistance, and hence his wonderful prosperity. Think of Nehemiah. He could find time to pray to the God of heaven even when standing in the presence of his master, Artaxerxes. Think of the example these godly men have left you, and go and do likewise.

Oh, that the Lord may give you all the spirit of grace and supplication! “Wilt thou not from this time cry unto God, My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?” (Jer 3:4). Gladly would I consent that all this address should be forgotten, if only this doctrine of the importance of prayer might be impressed on your hearts.

V. Conclusion

Are these things true?

And now I hasten towards a conclusion. I have said things that many perhaps will not like, and not receive; but I appeal to your consciences, *Are they not true?*

Young men, you all have consciences. Corrupt and ruined by the fall as we are, each of us has a conscience. In a corner of each heart there sits a witness for God—a witness who condemns when we do wrong and approves when we do right. To that witness I make my appeal this day, *Are not the things that I have been saying true?*

Go then, young men, and resolve this day to remember your Creator in the days of your youth. Before the day of grace is past—before your conscience has become hardened by age and deadened by repeated trampling under foot—while you have strength, time, and opportunities—go and join yourself to the Lord in an everlasting covenant not to be forgotten. The Spirit will not always strive. The voice of conscience will become feebler and fainter every year you continue to resist it. The Athenians said to Paul, “We will hear thee again of this matter,” but they had heard him for the last time (Act 17:32). Make haste and delay not. Linger and hesitate no more.

Comfort to others

Think of the unspeakable *comfort you will give to parents*, relations, and friends, if you take my counsel. They have expended time, money, and health to rear you and make you what you are. Surely, they deserve some consideration at your hands. Who can reckon up the joy and gladness which young people have it in their power to occasion? Who can tell the anxiety and sorrow that sons like Esau (Gen 25-27), Hophni and Phinehas (1Sa 1-4), and Absalom (2Sa 13) may cause? Truly indeed does Solomon say, “A wise son maketh a glad father, but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother” (Pro 10:1). Oh, consider these things and give God your heart! Let it not be said of you at last, as it is of many, that your “youth was a blunder, your manhood a struggle, and your old age a regret.”

Instruments of doing good

Think of the *good you may be as the instrument of doing good to the world*. Almost all the most eminent saints of God sought the Lord early. Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel—all served God from their youth. God seems to delight in putting special honor upon young servants; remember the honor He placed upon our own young king, Edward the Sixth. And what might we not confidently expect if young men in our own day would consecrate the springtime of their lives to God? Agents are wanted now in almost every great and good cause, and cannot be found. Machinery of every kind for spreading truth exists, but there are not hands to work it. Money is more easily got for doing good than men. Ministers are wanted for new churches; missionaries are wanted for new stations; visitors are wanted for neglected districts; teachers are wanted for new schools. Many a good cause is standing still merely for want of agents! The supply of godly, faithful, trustworthy men, for posts like those I have named, is far below the demand.

Young men of the present day, *you are wanted for God*. This is peculiarly an age of activity. We are shaking off some of our past selfishness. Men no longer sleep the sleep of apathy and indifference about others, as their forefathers did. They are beginning to be ashamed of thinking like Cain, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9). A wide field of

usefulness is open before you, if you are only willing to enter upon it. The harvest is great but the laborers are few (Luk 10:2). Be zealous of good works. Come, come to the cause of the Lord against the mighty. This is, in some sort, to be like God: not only “good, but doing good” (Psa 119:68). This is the way to follow the steps of your Lord and Savior: “He went about doing good” (Act 10:38). This is to live as David did: he “served his own generation” (Act 13:36).

And who can doubt that this is the path which most becomes an immortal soul? Who would not rather leave this world like Josiah, lamented by all, than depart like Jehoram, “without being desired” (2Ch 21:20)? Whether is it better to be an idle, frivolous, useless cumberer of the ground, to live for your body, your selfishness, your lusts, and your pride—or to spend and be spent in the glorious cause of usefulness to your fellowmen;—to be like Wilberforce¹⁰⁴ or Lord Shaftesbury,¹⁰⁵ a blessing to your country and the world—to be like Howard,¹⁰⁶ the friend of the prisoner and the captive—to be like Schwartz,¹⁰⁷ the spiritual father of hundreds of immortal souls in heathen lands—to be like that man of God, Robert M’Cheyne,¹⁰⁸ a burning and a shining light, an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men, the quickener of every Christian heart that comes across your path? Oh, who can doubt? Who can for one moment doubt?

Young men, consider your responsibilities. Think of the privilege and luxury of doing good. Resolve this day to be useful. At once, give your hearts to Christ.

Happiness to your own soul

Think, lastly, of the *happiness* that will come to your own soul if you serve God—happiness by the way as you travel through life, and happiness in the end when the journey is over. Believe me, whatever vain notions you may have heard, believe me, there is a reward for the righteous even in this world. Godliness has indeed the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come. There is a solid peace in feeling that God is your friend. There is a real satisfaction in knowing that however great your unworthiness, you are complete in Christ—that you have an enduring portion, that you have chosen that good part which shall not be taken from you.

The backslider in heart may well be filled with his own ways, but “a good man shall be satisfied from himself” (Pro 14:14). The path of the worldly man grows darker and darker every year that he lives; the path of the Christian is as a shining light, brighter

¹⁰⁴ **William Wilburforce (1759-1833)** – English statesman and philanthropist. He labored to abolish the slavery trade among the English and died one month before the legislation passed Parliament officially ending slavery in all the English colonies.

¹⁰⁵ **Anthony A. Shaftesbury (1801-1885)** – a man of God who was committed to reforming many inhumane practices in England.

¹⁰⁶ **John Howard (1726-1790)** – English philanthropist and advocate of prison reform; devoted his life to exposing and improving horribly inhumane conditions in the prisons.

¹⁰⁷ **Christian F. Schwartz (1726-1798)** – a German missionary to southern India whose labors over forty years saw the establishment of many schools and congregations.

¹⁰⁸ **Robert Murray M’Cheyne (1813-1843)** – Scottish pastor known as one of the most godly men of the nineteenth century.

and brighter to the very end. His sun is just rising when the sun of the worldly is setting forever; his best things are all beginning to blossom and bloom forever, when those of the worldly are all slipping out of his hands and passing away.

Young men, these things are true. *Suffer the word of exhortation. Be persuaded. Take up the cross. Follow Christ. Yield yourselves unto God!* ❧

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Appendices

J.C. Ryle Short Biography

John Charles Ryle (1816-1900) served the Lord as a minister of the Gospel in parish churches within the Church of England for almost forty years. He then became Bishop of Liverpool in 1880 and gained international prominence as preacher, Bible expositor, and author. Today he is best known for his plain and lively writings on practical and spiritual themes, reaching ordinary people. The great aim of his ministry was to encourage strong and serious Christian living. His tracts and books sold in the millions in the late 1800s; many have been republished in modern times. Ryle's successor as Bishop of Liverpool commented, "The words of such a man acquire new force as we read them. Ryle lived near God, and God lived through him."

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