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# THE WARNINGS OF GOD'S WORD

by L.R. Shelton, Jr. (1923-2003)

## 1. Christ and His Love

In praying and waiting before God, I have been impressed by the Holy Spirit to bring a series of messages on the warnings of God's Word to those who have not closed in with Christ and looked to Him as the object of true saving faith.

The Scriptures are full of these warnings, and I know of no better time to set the trumpet of Scripture to my lips and sound forth this clear warning: *if we miss Christ, we have missed everything*. Why? For in Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). In Him is found all that God holds dear for sinful man, for Christ is "the way, the truth and the life: no man can come unto the Father by me" (Joh 14:6).

The Scriptures declare that in Christ there is life eternal. In Christ there is pardon for the vilest sinners. In Christ there is sweet peace of conscience and peace with God, for Christ made peace by the blood of His cross. In Christ there is rest for the weary soul. In Christ is found the way to our heavenly Father, and an open door to the fold of God. In Christ is found a fountain of living water, unsearchable, spiritual riches, and a full supply of grace and truth for weak and weary souls.

Only in Christ is there cleansing from all sin. Only in Christ is there to be found perfect righteousness, and a perfect standing before God. Only in Christ is there found true light for our pathway through the dark and dreary wilderness in which we walk. Only in Christ is there to be acquittal at the judgment bar of God. Only those who are in Christ will hear the gracious words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat 25:34). Only in Christ is there deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. Only in Christ will there be joys forevermore, when we shall stand before Him dressed in our new bodies and finally delivered from the very presence of sin.

To miss Christ is to miss all the riches of God, and to abide under His wrath forever. No wonder the apostle Paul wrote saying, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phi 3:8-9).

Let me ask these questions: Do you know Christ Jesus, the Lord? Do you know Him in a true saving way? Do you find in Him your all in all? Is He a living reality to your heart? Do you walk with Him in that living union, because He is your Life, your Head, your Husband, your Lord? Do you know Him in that loving union of fellowship and worship, wherein He means more to you than all the world beside? Are you willing to part with all, that you might be found only in Him?

I ask again, Do you know Christ? The difference between heaven and hell is whether or not you, a poor hell-deserving sinner, have entered by grace through faith into the living salvation which is only in Christ. Do you have Christ or do you have a profession? Do you have Christ or do you have only the hope of baptism? Do you have Christ or do you have only the hope of church membership? Do you have Christ or do you have only the hope of your good works, your prayers, your giving, your doing the best you can? Do you have Christ? Can you say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

The first warning we want to look at is found in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, which tells us that no matter what we have, if we do not have Christ and His love, we have nothing. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [Christ and His love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [Christ and His love], I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [Christ and His love], it profiteth me nothing."

We see in these verses that we might possess all kinds of gifts—gifts that might edify or benefit ourselves and others, benefit ourselves and them, but if we have not the greatest gift of them all, Christ and His love, then all the gifts that men ever possessed are of no value. You see, these professed Corinthian believers made much of gifts. And from a study of the fourteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, we understand that they had greatly abused the gifts. So the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, warned them that though they could speak with tongues, either the language of men or of angels, if they did not have Christ and His love, they were empty, hollow, void of saving grace and sounded as brass or a tinkling cymbal.

What a warning—God’s warning, not mine! Here were professed believers putting their hopes in their gifts instead of in the living God in Christ. How many go astray right here! Their hope is founded upon a gift, not upon Christ, the hope of glory. They are resting upon some experience and not upon Christ, the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. Is that your hope? Is that what consumes your life, your conversation, your testimony; the fact that you have been endowed with a gift? Then let God’s Word warn you. You are deceived as to your hope of heaven if you do not have Christ and His love. To every believer, it is Christ who is precious to his soul, not some gift. It is Christ who is his life, not a gift. It is Christ and what He has done for his never dying that is the subject of the believer’s conversation, not what gift or gifts he may be endowed with.

Let me repeat: This is God’s warning, not mine. I am only to proclaim it. To get mad at me because I call your attention to this warning does not change the fact at all, but only reveals that your gift is more precious to you than Christ, and that you have not come to rest only in Him as the foundation of a good hope through grace.

In verse 2 of 1 Corinthians 13 we are warned that there are those who may even possess the gift of prophecy, the gift of understanding all mysteries, the gift of special faith so that they could even remove mountains, and have all knowledge of the Scriptures, but if they do not possess God’s greatest gift of Christ and His love, then they are nothing, have nothing, and will miss all in heaven.

What a warning this is, that a man or woman or young person can have all of this and still miss Christ! This makes me tremble to know that people can come so close and yet miss heaven.

You ask, “What does all this mean? Why are you warning us?” A person may have the intellectual understanding of all truth, may be able to interpret the prophets’ word, may have an understanding of the mysteries of God’s Word, and yet miss Christ, because he has missed Holy Spirit conviction and the laying of Christ, the Chief Corner Stone, in his heart and life by faith of the operation of God.

I am more and more convinced as I talk with people and attend Bible studies and meet with different groups, that the missing element in professions today is the work of the Holy Spirit—the convicting power of God’s Holy Spirit in opening hearts to see their plague of sin and guilt before God. Missing is the opening of hearts to their rebellion and hatred against God. Missing is the opening of hearts to let people see the emptiness of their lives apart from Christ. Missing is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in bringing a sinner to repentance toward God, enabling him to take the blame for his sinful condition, confessing it and hating it before God. Missing is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in bringing a sinner to true saving faith in Christ. Missing is the revelation to the sinner that he does not possess saving faith in himself, but that the Holy Spirit must work that faith in his heart, because salvation is of the Lord.

If you miss Holy Spirit *conviction*, you miss *repentance*; if you miss repentance, you miss *faith*; if you miss faith, you miss *Christ*; if you miss Christ, you miss *Heaven*; and if you miss Heaven, you are *bound for hell* for eternity because of your sinful rebellion against God (Rom 8:7-9).

Much is made of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the believer, but where can you hear today anyone proclaiming loud and clear, the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the unbeliever? And what are these gifts for the unbelievers?” There is the gift of the *awakening power* of the Holy Spirit, wherefore the Spirit says, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph 5:14). To me this is the greatest gift that God, the Holy Spirit, can give a man, to awaken him from his dead, sleeping state and bring him to Christ, the light of the world.

There is also the gift of the *convicting power* of the Holy Spirit. “And when he [Holy Spirit] is come, he will *reprove* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin because they believe not on me” (Joh 16:8-9). This is another great gift from the Holy Spirit, to convict and convince us of sin, the sin of unbelief, and to show us that we have not savingly closed in with Jesus Christ.

Next, there is the gift of *repentance* given by the Holy Spirit. Look at Acts 5:31, “Him [Christ] hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” And how is this repentance given to us? By the Holy Spirit working repentance in our hearts (Act 11:16-18). This is a prized gift, because a real work of repentance is necessary to salvation, for our Lord said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luk 13:3).

Then there is the gift of *faith* given by the Holy Spirit: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8-9). Since no other grace moves until the grace of faith moves, then what a precious gift this gift of faith is to our souls by the Holy Spirit.

Unless these four gifts are given to us by the Holy Spirit when we are yet unbelievers, then all other gifts are useless because they only build upon a foundation of sand.

And now a few comments about verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 13 where we read, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [Christ and His love], it profiteth me nothing.” Here we find that we can do and have all the outward acts of a Christian, but if we have not Christ and His love dwelling in us, if we are not motivated by the love of Christ, it all profits us nothing. What a warning we then have in these three verses!

I have desired to present this study in love and with a broken heart, to warn all who will heed of the danger of not having Christ within as their hope of glory. My heart goes out to you in love; for I understand your condition. I was there one day, and it was only by the grace and mercy of God that these gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to me as an unbeliever.

May the Holy Spirit be pleased to work these four precious gifts in each and every heart still outside of Christ!

## 2. The Truth about Eternal Security

There are two great basic truths which run through Scriptures, and which are seen on just about every page: *God is sovereign*, and *man is a responsible creature*. It is only as the balance of truth is preserved between these two that we are delivered from error. The divine sovereignty should not be pressed to the exclusion of human responsibility, nor must human responsibility be so stressed that God’s sovereignty is either ignored or denied.

I believe that the Bible teaches divine sovereignty—the right for God to do *as* He pleases, *what* He pleases, *how* He pleases, and *when* He pleases, because He is God. But to this statement we add that the sovereign God of the Bible only acts in accordance with His holy nature; therefore, the Judge of all the earth can only do that which is right and righteous (Deu 32:4).

Being the sovereign God, He has in His sovereignty made us, His creatures, *responsible* to Him for all that we do, say, or think. We are responsible to love God with all our heart, our soul, our mind, our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. As responsible creatures we are to repent and believe; turn to God from sin; walk in the straight and narrow way of holiness; and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, pray and seek God’s face, worship Him in spirit and in truth, and order our lives down here in the fear of the Lord.

On the other hand, we are to understand from Scriptures that God has promised to get us safely home at last, for it is He, by His Spirit, who works in us to do of His good will and pleasure. He has promised that He would present us faultless at the last day; that being in Him, there is nothing that is able to separate us from our Lord, and no one who can pluck a child of God out of the hand of Christ (Joh 10:28).

When we come to the blessed teaching of God’s Word concerning the eternal security of the believer, we find that there is much misunderstanding concerning this blessed truth today. This truth, like every other truth of Scripture, has two sides: there is both *God’s sovereignty* and *human responsibility*. It is the failure to recognize this which has wrought such havoc and confusion, creating the need of God’s warnings to our hearts.

There are those who boldly insisted that if God has eternally elected a certain man to be saved, that man will be saved, no matter what he does or does not do. But this is not what the Word of God teaches. Scripture says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, that “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth,” and if a man does not believe the truth he will never be saved. In Luke 13:3 our Lord declares, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;” therefore, if a sinner does not repent, he will not be saved.

There are also those who say that if a man is a real Christian, no matter how he may live in the future, no matter how far or how long he may backslide, no matter what sins he may commit, he is sure of heaven. But this is not what God’s Word teaches. For a man to get to heaven, he must walk in the only pathway that leads there—the pathway of righteousness and true holiness. God did not save us to give us liberty to walk in the indulgences of the flesh, but the liberty to walk in the pathway of holiness (Heb 12:14).

I have met so many people who profess to be Christians, but whose daily lives differ in nothing from thousands of non-professors all around them. They rarely, if ever, are found at prayer meetings; they have no family worship; they seldom read the Scriptures; they will not talk with you about the things of God; they know nothing of the preciousness of Christ; their walk is thoroughly ungodly, yet they are quite sure they are bound for heaven. If you ask them the basis or ground of their confidence, they will tell you that so many years ago they accepted Christ as their Savior, and “once saved, always saved” is their comfort.

But I declare this firmly and positively, based upon the Word of God: If this is your life and your basis of heaven, then you are on sinking sand. I say it in love: You are lost and need to repent. For God’s Word does not teach that a man can be saved and continue in his sins, his worldliness, and his self-will; for our God gives no such salvation. He saves us *from* our sins, not in them.

It is to combat this false doctrine which gives false hope of security, that the warning of God’s Word in so many places is directed. It is these warnings that we are looking at in this series of messages.

The Scriptures abound in the gracious truth and teaching of the eternal security of the believer; that if indeed we are in Christ, made bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh in that divine union by His Spirit, then we are truly saved and saved for evermore. This I firmly believe and rejoice in. But on the other hand, our living, sovereign God has hedged this blessed truth around with the teaching of the perseverance of the saints, that is, that the believer is responsible to daily walk in the pathways of holiness which gives proof to the fact that he is indeed in Christ and indwelt by His Spirit.

To the law and the testimony, then, is my plea. Let us see what God's Word says! In 2 Timothy 2:19 we read, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." That is eternal security. Yet the last part of that verse reads, "And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." That is Christian perseverance. The proof that I am in Christ is that I am daily departing from sin, not wallowing in it and calling myself a carnal Christian.

In Hebrews 3:6 we read, "Christ as a son over his own house; whose house we are." That is a true statement of where God puts us when He saves us—in Christ. But to evidence this, we read in the last part of that verse, "...if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." The proof of our being in Christ is a daily holding fast our confidence and assurance in Christ, firm unto the end, and while doing this, rejoicing in that hope.

Hebrews 3:14 puts the wording a little stronger: "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." Not only are we to start with Christ, but we are to end with Christ. By His grace we are to hold stedfast unto the end, for it is written in Matthew 24:13, "He that endureth unto the end, the same shall be saved."

If you think for one moment that I am wrong in urging believers to endure unto the end, then you have not read Acts 11:22-23: "They sent forth Barnabas that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." Again, in Acts 13:43 we read, "Paul and Barnabas who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God." And in Acts 14:21-22 we are told, "And when they had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

In 1 Corinthians 10:12, we are warned by what happened to Israel in the wilderness: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Also see Hebrews 3:12: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

Our blessed Lord in His earthly ministry never failed to warn men of the danger of stopping short, of not going on in the life of faith, of not counting the cost of perseverance in the faith. In Luke 9:62 He warns, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." In John 8:31 He says, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." Only as we continue in His Word and follow Him can we show that we are indeed indwelt by His Spirit.

Our Lord told His disciples in John 15:10, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." Also verse 14 reads, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." He kept appealing to their responsibility. Neither our Lord nor His disciples in their epistles ever treated their listeners as robots or sticks or stones, but as responsible creatures. And in the same way the Scriptures appeal to us. We are to keep ourselves in the love of God (Jud 21). We are to make our calling and election sure (2Pe 1:10), by seeing that we are giving all diligence to add to our faith, virtue: and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love] (2Pe 1:5-7). We are to flee fornication (1Co 6:18), idolatry (1Co 10:14), youthful lusts (2Ti 2:22). We are to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world" (Jam 1:27) and put to death "the deeds of the body" (Col 3:5).

What a responsibility! Yet this is the only way we can prove that we are in Christ for our Lord said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Mat 7:20).

So what does the true child of God do when he is faced with this array of Scriptures which plead to his responsibility? He continually, day by day, casts himself upon the Lord by faith, trusting Him to fight the good fight of faith. He cries unto his Lord and Savior to keep him, to give him promises, and to work in him to will and to do according to His good pleasure.

He sees in Christ his only hope and rests in Him; proving every day that he is in Christ by drawing from Him all that he needs for each day. He proves daily, by his continued looking to Christ, that he is indeed more than a conqueror through Him that loved him.

My friend, are you continuing in the love of God by His Spirit working in you? Do these warnings hedge you in and make you daily seek for Christ to provide all of your need?

The life of a true believer is far different than the average professing Christian thinks it is. It is a life of faith, daily drawing all from Christ, and crying unto Him for His Spirit to work in him.

Is this your life?

### **3. Apostasy**

The warnings of God's Word have been needful since Adam's fall, because "the heart [of man] is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). God warned Adam in Genesis 2:17, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." And die he did—both spiritually and physically, when he disobeyed God and followed his own will.

God warned the children of Israel in Leviticus 26:15-39 that if they did not keep His Commandments but despised His Word, He would punish them seven times for their sins and scatter them among the nations. And we know that from the Bible and Jewish history that God cannot lie—He scattered the Jewish nation and turned every man's heart against them, even to this day.

God warned the people through John the Baptist in Matthew 3:8, that if they did not bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, that the Great Judge would come, "Whose fan [winnowing fork] is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner [barn]; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." This warning was not heeded by the religionist of His day, and they put our blessed Lord Jesus to death. But in A.D. 70, the city of Jerusalem was put to the sword, and a million and a half Jews died in judgment.

God warns the Gentiles in Romans 11:21-22 that if He spared not the natural branches, the Jews, that we had better take heed lest He also spare us not. He warns us not to be high-minded, but to fear: "Behold the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward us, goodness," and then He qualifies it, "if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." Here He warns us of our responsibility to keep ourselves in the love of God.

Also God warns us in 1 Corinthians 10:12, after giving the terrible picture of apostasy by the Israelites in the wilderness: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

The Scripture speaks plainly and positively of the perseverance of the *saints*, not unregenerate professors. Therefore, these warnings are given to hedge us about that we might walk in a pathway of righteousness and true holiness (Eph 4:24).

God's divine provision in Christ is a most blessed truth and comforting to the true child of God; but we only know this comfort as we walk in the pathway of righteousness and true holiness. It is in that pathway that we are kept by the power of God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We are kept by His Spirit working in us, in a spirit of entire dependency upon Christ, renouncing our own wisdom and strength. The only place from which we cannot fall is down in the dust at the feet of our blessed Lord, crying unto Him for mercy. It is there that the Lord brings His own people, weaning them from all confidence in the flesh, and letting them experience, "when I am weak, then am I strong" (2Co 12:10).

Therefore these warnings on apostasy—the turning back to sin, Satan, and the world—must be proclaimed (2Pe 1:10, 12-13). You may be asking, "What exactly is apostasy?" Let's look closely at God's Word to see what it means. We find in 1 Timothy 1:19 that it is making shipwreck of faith, abandoning the life of faith in the person of Christ, and not holding it steadfastly unto the end. In Hebrews 3:12, apostasy is spoken of as departing from the living God, because of an evil heart of unbelief. Yes, my dear friend, all apostasy, or turning from God, whether partial or total, originates in unbelief. Unbelief is a damning sin and causes the heart to depart from the living God.

Again, 2 Peter 2:20-22 tells us that apostasy is a returning to and being overcome by the world, after a previous escape from its pollutions through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. "If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true Proverb, 'The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire,' (2Pe 2:20-22).

I tremble every time I read and meditate upon these Scriptures, to see how close a man or woman or young person can come to the Lord and yet not be savingly joined to Christ.

The apostle is not teaching here the false doctrine of "falling from grace," but he is warning us that a man can come so close and yet miss it all, because he turns back to his jealousy, hatred, pride, rebellion, self-righteousness, covetousness, whoremongering, and drunkenness. He turns back to the world because he has missed Christ. He has been overcome by the world and the last state of that man is worse than the first (Mat 12:43-45).

I have preached from the text in 2 Peter twice, and both times after giving forth these warnings, I have seen precious souls turn the warnings aside and go back, ignoring the warnings, because of sin in their lives which they were not willing to let go. Oh, may I warn you of what it means to go back to the world, or back to false religion and therefore to hell (Heb 10:26-29)!

There are several steps which precede apostasy. First, there is a *looking back* (Luk 9:62), like Lot's wife—though she had outwardly left Sodom, her heart was still there. Yes, it is looking back to the world and its pleasures, joys, and riches. It is looking back to the former life of sin, and longing again for the fleshpots of Egypt or the world. It is looking back to old friends and remembering the "good old days" when you were not troubled by the flesh and a guilty conscience. It is looking back to your former religion and wishing you were there again.

Second, we find in Hebrews 10:38 there is a *drawing back*. The requirements of Christ are too exacting to appeal any longer to your heart. The straight and narrow way is no longer pleasant to you.

The third step, according to John 6:66, is a *turning back*. The path of godliness is too narrow to suit the lustings of the flesh, so there is the seeking of an easier way in which to walk.

The fourth, *falling back*, is fatal (see Isa 28:13), and from this there is no return.

These warnings are for everyone who names the Name of Christ. There can be no looking back; there can be no drawing back; there can be no turning back; there can be no falling back, or there will be apostasy. Let me warn you: cease from sin; cease from crying "peace" to your soul by convincing yourself that you are a "carnal Christian." Cease from your bitterness and unforgiving spirit. Cease from harboring hatred and resentment in your heart against others, for all of this will lead to a looking back, a drawing back, a turning back, and then a falling back from which there is no salvation. For God said in Hebrews 10:38, "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

Let me repeat a statement I made previously: The Scriptures abound in the gracious truth and teaching of the eternal security of the believer, that if indeed we are in Christ, made bone of His bone, and flesh of His flesh in that divine union by His Spirit, then we are truly saved, and saved forever. This I firmly believe and rejoice in, for Romans 8:38-39 tells us that nothing is able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. But, on the other hand, our living, sovereign God has hedged this blessed truth around with the teaching of the perseverance of the saints, that is, that the believer is responsible to daily walk in the path of holiness which gives proof to the fact that he is indeed in Christ and indwelt by His Spirit. One way He does this is by giving us these warnings of apostasy so that we may make our calling and election sure, and cry unto Him to hold us and keep us by His Spirit.

These words of warning are found in Luke 17:32: "Remember Lot's wife." Our Lord was referring to Genesis 19:17 and the message of the two angels who had been sent to take Lot, his wife, and his two daughters out of the city of Sodom before judgment fell: "Escape for your life: look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain lest thou be consumed." But verse 26 tells us that while they were fleeing, Lot's wife "looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." What a solemn warning this is to all of us not to look back, but to look straight on to Christ!

*It is a solemn warning indeed* when we think of the person our Lord is speaking of. He does not tell us to remember Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, or Sarah, or Hannah, or Ruth. No! He singles out one whose soul was lost forever. He cries, "Remember Lot's wife," for she turned back and went to hell.

*It is a solemn warning indeed* when we consider the subject our Lord was upon. He was speaking of His own second coming to judge the world. He was describing the awful state of unreadiness in which many will be found. The last day is on His mind when he says, "Remember Lot's wife," for she turned back and went to hell.

*It is a solemn warning indeed* when we think of the person who gave it, the Lord Jesus—who is full of love, mercy, and compassion. He who will not break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax. He who wept over unbelieving Jerusalem and prayed for the men that crucified Him. Yet He deemed it wise to warn us and remind us of the awful judgment that awaits those that look back. He who loves us says, "Remember Lot's wife" for she turned back and went to hell.

*It is a solemn warning indeed* when we consider 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 thought it good to give such a warning. Even to them, and much more to us, He says, "Remember Lot's wife," for she turned back and went to hell.

*It is a solemn warning indeed* when we consider the manner in which it was given. He does not say, "Beware of following; take heed of imitating; do not be like Lot's wife." No, 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 her lost state before our minds. He cries, "Remember Lot's wife," for she turned back and went to hell.

So we cry also, "Remember Lot's wife," for she turned back and lost her never-dying soul. Will you?

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Heb 3:12).

#### **4. The Danger of Neglecting Christ**

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Heb 2:1-3).

In this portion of Scripture, we find the danger of neglecting Christ and His great salvation. The opening word of this second chapter of Hebrews begins with "therefore," which means for us to go back and look at what was given us in the preceding verses.

Christ is set before us in chapter one verse 2 as the Son of God who has been appointed heir of all things; *therefore*, we had better give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard concerning His "so great salvation."

Christ is also declared to be the Creator of all things; *therefore*, we had better give the more earnest heed to Him who now speaks to us from heaven concerning His "so great salvation."

Christ is shown in verse 3 to be the One who by Himself has purged our sins, that is, made atonement for them; *therefore*, we had better give the more earnest heed to His "so great salvation," for how shall we escape the damnation of hell if we are not found in Christ?

Christ is set before us in verse 8 as God the Son, who sits upon the throne of the universe as King over His kingdom; *therefore*, we had better give the more earnest heed to the eternal Word of God and His so great salvation, or we will hear the words of the King in the great day of judgment, "Depart from me, ye despisers of my 'so great salvation': depart into hell and everlasting darkness forever."

Christ is revealed in verse 11 as the eternal Lord of glory who changes not; *therefore*, we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip, and neglect His "so great salvation," and then not escape the wrath of God which is to come.

What a solemn warning this is, that the Gospel of the grace of God, as revealed in His “so great salvation” which is offered in Christ, is no light thing with God! Yes, what a solemn warning; that if we turn away from, treat lightly, and scorn God’s “so great salvation,” we do it to the damnation of our never-dying souls!

In the expression, “we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard,” the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, is appealing to our responsibility. We are given an exhortation to perform a specific duty. The Greek here is very strong and emphatic. It means we *must*. It is a necessity that is laid upon us, and we neglect doing it to the damnation of our never-dying souls. It is not an arbitrary matter that we could take it or leave it, but we *must* do it. We must give heed and close in with Christ and His “so great salvation” or suffer the consequences.

The duty that we are called on to perform is a serious one. It is a firm and fixed setting of the mind upon that which we hear, because “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). It is a bowing and bending of the will to yield unto God’s “so great salvation,” because only in Christ can we be delivered from the wrath to come. It is the applying of the heart and affections unto the things revealed in God’s Word, and bringing the whole man in search of the whole Christ, because He and His “so great salvation” shall be found when we search for Him with all our hearts.

“We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip away,” means also that we are to give prayer, meditation, and personal appropriation to them, because these are the things that are made for our everlasting peace in Christ. We are to follow hard after Christ, believing His precious Word and trusting Him with all the faith He has given us.

We are being warned of a grave danger here, that of neglect God’s gracious invitation of mercy and grace given us in “so great salvation” in Christ. And if we do neglect this invitation, we shall not escape the judgment of God against our sins.

Salvation is no light matter. The greatest thing that can ever happen to us in this life is to know that Christ is the deliverer of our never-dying souls, by His power and blood—applied to our hearts by His Holy Spirit through faith.

The deliverance of Noah from the destruction of the old world by the flood was wonderful, but the deliverance of our never-dying souls from the deluge of God’s wrath is by far a greater deliverance.

The deliverance of Lot from destruction of Sodom was great, but the salvation we obtain in Christ for our never-dying souls from the vengeance of eternal fire, is a far, far greater deliverance.

The deliverance of the three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, from the fiery furnace was indeed a great deliverance, but the salvation in Christ of our never-dying souls from the second death in the lake of fire is a far greater deliverance.

The deliverance of Daniel from the mouth of the lions was indeed a most gracious deliverance, but the deliverance of my never-dying soul from the power of sin and the dominion of Satan, through the great salvation of Christ in the Gospel, is to me a far, far greater deliverance.

So to neglect this salvation, to despise this salvation; to treat it as a thing not worthy of notice or consideration, is to tread under foot the Son of God and to count the blood of the covenant, His blood, wherewith you were sanctified, an unholy thing, and to do despite to [or spit in the face of] the Holy Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29).

The questions asked, “What is this ‘so great salvation’ which was first preached by Christ Himself? Why is it so important to give heed to, embrace, and seek it with all our hearts and affections?” First of all, *it is salvation from the guilt of all our sins*: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Why? Because Christ, who knew no sin, has been made sin for us, that we would have in Him a perfect standing of righteousness, before God the Father and His holy law (2Co 5:21).

By nature we are criminals; guilty of breaking God’s holy law, rebelling against the government of the Holy and righteous Being who sits upon the throne of the universe, who commands love, affection, and obedience. We have turned every one to our own way and have made God our enemy. But Christ, by His perfect obedience and substitutionary death, has come and satisfied the law we have broken. Therefore, when we come in repentance, hating sin, sorrowing over it, turning from it, laying down our arms of rebellion and looking away by faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, then He, by His Spirit, applies His merits to our account in heaven, and we stand delivered in Him from all the guilt and pollution of our sins.

Second, it is “so great salvation” because it is *salvation from the power of sin*. This is to me one of the most gracious truths of God’s Word. In salvation God not only delivered us in Christ from the penalty of sin, but also from its power: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him [Christ], that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin,” (Rom 6:6). Also see verses 14 and 18: “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace...Being made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” Yes, salvation is a deliverance from the power of sin, and I praise the Lord for this.

Third, it is *salvation from the pollution of sin*. Praise the Lord, in salvation He cleanses us from the pollution of sin and gives us a new heart and a new nature, whereby we now desire holy things, holy ways, and holy thoughts. He purges our conscience from dead works that we might serve the true and living God (Heb 9:14).

Fourth, it is *salvation from the fear of death and damnation*; for we are told in Hebrews 2:15 that Christ came to deliver us, “...who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” In 2 Timothy 1:7, we read, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” Romans 8:15 says, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

Fifth, it is *salvation from the power of the grave*, for we read in 1 Corinthians 15:53, “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” Or as Philippians 3:20-21 puts it, “For our conversation [or citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

Sixth, it is *salvation from the wrath to come*, as we read in 1 Thessalonians 1:10. Yes, we have been delivered from the power of darkness, and have been translated by the power of God into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:12-13). We have passed from death unto life, and the second death in hell shall have no dominion over us.

What a great salvation this is which God has prepared for sinners in Christ! And to neglect it, to count it not worthy of searching for with all our heart, will bring the just wrath of God down upon us: “Despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Rom 2:4-6).

Oh, what a warning to your heart today not to neglect “so great salvation” which is given in Christ: “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:6-7).

Look at Hebrews 3:7-8, “Today if ye will hear his voice”—the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to you—“harden not your hearts,” but bow your knees to Christ and crown Him Lord of your life. Look to Him for His “so great salvation;” for He has promised, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved,” (Rom 10:9).

## 5. Our Future State

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house. For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead” (Luk 16:19-31).

In this portion of Scripture our Lord is warning us of *the future state of the dead*. He declares that there is a conscious life beyond the grave for both the righteous and the wicked. He briefly pulls back the veil and lets us look beyond death to see that Revelation 22:11 is true: “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

Knowing that this warning comes from the lips of One who cannot lie, we must ask the Holy Spirit that the illuminating light of the glorious Gospel of Christ may shine into our hearts to give us understanding.

*The future state of the dead is the final state.* We read that there is a great gulf fixed between the abode of the wicked and the righteous, and no man can pass between the two. In Mark 9:43 we read these words: “If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched.”

The Scriptures do not teach a second chance after death. They teach that only in this life does a man have the gracious opportunity to be saved by the grace of God in Christ, based upon His cross-work for us. Where death finds us, there eternity will hold us forever and ever. Therefore, all questions will be settled and all doubts will be resolved. There will be no arguing then as to whether the Bible is indeed the Word of God; for then you shall know of a certainty that it is His Word. Also you shall know that the threatenings of God’s Word, as well as the promises, will be carried out by Him who sits upon the throne.

All arguments as to whether or not there is a hell will be over; for you will find that the soul who dies outside of Christ must live forever beneath the wrath of a sin-avenging God; “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him,” (Joh 3:36).

*The state of the dead is a conscious state.* We find here in Luke 16 that Abraham and the rich man were speaking. The rich man was told to remember his sinful life on earth. He had feeling, for he was tormented with real pain. He had knowledge that his five unsaved were sure to come there, and he asked that someone be sent to warn his five brothers. He had perception, for he could see the righteous Lazarus in peace and quietness in Paradise. He could hear, for he was answering Abraham.



*Life after death is a world of knowledge.* The human spirit, be it holy or sinful, friend or enemy of God, will always and forever in eternity be aware of its condition. If you are made holy in Christ, washed in His precious blood, redeemed by His marvelous grace; you will always be conscious of this in the future state. Also, if you are sinful, unrepenting, and God-hating, you can not for an instant lose the distressing consciousness of sin, as you are made to look upon the Holy God whom you hate, and this throughout eternity.

If we enter eternity as the redeemed of the Lord, there will be no change. The same knowledge and experiences that we have had here in part, we shall have there in completeness and perfection, for heaven begins on earth. Here God's people learn to hate sin and to love holiness through the work of God's grace by the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit works effectually in our hearts, we come to abhor that which God abhors; that is, our sinful will, our sinful ways, and the plague of our hearts, which is our damnable sin nature. Also, our longing to be like Him will one day be fulfilled. We learn to know somewhat of these things while here on earth, and, praise the Lord, we shall one day know as we are known.

But if you enter eternity without Christ, you also will know even as you are known. There you will know, clearly and accurately, your own wicked heart. You will know then that the wages of sin is death. On earth you did not like to retain God in your knowledge, but there you will have no choice. On earth you did not want God's holiness because you hated it, but there you will know it without the capacity to love it. Yes, that which you hated in part will come to full fruitage, and you shall know your own heart even as you have been known of God.

If you could only have a clear understanding of the kind of knowledge which is awaiting you upon the other side of the grave, you would become the most thoughtful and the most anxious of men. If you, my unpardoned friend, should be haunted from this moment on with the thought when you die, you will enter into the light of God's countenance and obtain a knowledge of your own wicked character, that you must pay your own sin debt owed to God's holy law; if you had this knowledge in the light of the Holy Spirit's convicting power, you would find no rest for your never-dying soul until you had obtained an assurance of the living mercy which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But here lies the trouble. The natural man looks on his future state as being like the present one, and therefore judges eternity by time. He feels that there is nothing to be concerned about; for if God has not cut him off by now, surely He will not cut him off in eternity. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:7-8).

The human mind in eternity shall have a distinct and unvarying knowledge of the character of God. The one particular attribute that you shall know above all else is His holiness. Habakkuk 1:13 tells us, "[He is] of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." Yes, God is holy. God hates sin. His holiness and hatred of sin, like every other attribute of His, is living and active and must manifest themselves. His Holy wrath must strike at your sin if it be found upon you, even as it struck at sin when it was found upon Christ Jesus, His Son, when He took the place of His sinful people.

What an awful day that will be, when you are ushered into His divine presence for eternity, to be encircled by a holy and just God whom you hate, and this for eternity! Surely your cry will be like those in Revelation 6:16: "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb"! But, you will not be able to get away from the knowledge of sin and God's holiness. This is what will make hell what it is.

Your future state outside of Christ will be an open and unavoidable view of God, for that is what is taught here in Luke 16. You will never be able to look in any direction in eternity without beholding the One whom you hate, the holy and just God. Because you hate holiness and love sin, you shall gaze at Him and gnaw your tongue for pain. But there will be no repentance in your heart, for there is no repentance in hell—nothing but remorse, that sorrow of the world that worketh death. Revelation 16:10-11 brings this picture out vividly: "They gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds."

But on the other hand, those who love the Lord and die in the Lord, who have come to say like David, "We give thanks and rejoice at the remembrance of thy holiness," shall gaze upon Him and adore Him for His unspeakable gift, He who gave Himself for us, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What a blessing that will be to gaze upon Him whom my soul loves and delights in!

Let me ask you a question: Have you ever been brought by the Holy Spirit to see the holiness of God over against your unholiness? Have you ever been made to see God's holy righteousness over against your sinfulness? Oh, pray that the Lord will show you yourself, that He may show you Himself.

Do not comfort yourself with the thoughts that there will be a second chance after death, or that there is an intermediate place between heaven and hell, where your soul can suffer a little while and then go into heaven. Do not comfort yourself with the thought that someone can pray your soul out of hell. This doctrine is not taught in God's Word. This is one of the many lies that your father, the devil, has taught you. God's Word plainly declares that for the believer to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, and this immediately after death. So also with the unbeliever, the Word plainly declares that in hell he shall lift up his eyes, being in torment, and this immediately after death.

Do not comfort yourself with the thought that just because some preacher or priest says some nice and wonderful things about you after you are dead, that all will be well with your soul. Galatians 2:6 tells us that God accepts no man's person. We also read in Romans 2:11, "For there is no respect of persons with God." Also do not comfort your never-dying soul by believing that

death ends it all. It doesn't matter how many false prophets and teachers twist Scripture to prove otherwise; for surely our Lord did not lie in Luke 16 by telling us the true future state of the righteous and the wicked.

Remember this one thing: Salvation is of the Lord and salvation is *knowing Christ*, having Him revealed to your heart from His precious Word as your only Lord and Savior. Do you know Christ, in that living, loving and lasting union?

To know Christ is, first of all, to know yourself to be a lost, hell deserving sinner, and God the Holy Spirit must work in you that inward work of regeneration, whereby you are made to sorrow for sin, your sin, because it is sin against the Holy Being whom you have hated and against whom you have rebelled. To know Christ is to be made to mourn over sin, turn to God from sin, and to cry unto God for its power to be broken in your heart and life.

When the Holy Spirit works this work of repentance in you, then He will also give you faith to lay hold of the Lord Jesus Christ as God's remedy for your sins. Then when Christ is revealed to your heart out of the Word of God, you will be thankful and grateful that He, in love to your never-dying soul, delivered you from the pit of corruption and cast all your sins behind His back, never to be remembered against you anymore. For the Holy Spirit to so work in your heart is the greatest thing that can ever happen to you—to know yourself experientially and to know Christ in that living union of life.

Remember, your future state will be your final state, and it will be a conscious state. The future state in Christ will be a blessed state, while the future state outside of Christ will be an open and unavoidable view of the Holy God which will make hell what it is.



“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”—*Luke 13:3*

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