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Holiness

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Holiness

For the Will of God Is Your Sanctification
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3

J. C. Ryle

Foreword by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones



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at www.anekopress.com/questions-comments with
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Holiness – J. C. Ryle

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Foreword

One of the most encouraging and hopeful signs I have observed for a while in evangelical circles has been a renewed and increasing interest in the writings of Bishop J. C. Ryle.

In his day he was famous, outstanding, and beloved as a champion and defender of the evangelical and reformed faith. For some reason or other, however, his name and his works are not familiar to modern evangelicals. His books are, I believe, all out of print in this country and very difficult to obtain secondhand.

The differing fates suffered in this respect by Bishop Ryle and his near contemporary, Bishop Moule,¹ have always been to me a matter of great interest. But Bishop Ryle is being rediscovered, and there is a new call for the re-publication of his works.

All who have ever read any of his writings will be grateful for this new edition of his great book on holiness. I will never forget the satisfaction – spiritual and mental – with which I read it some twenty years ago after having stumbled across it in a secondhand book shop.

It really needs no preface or word of introduction. All I will do is urge all readers to read his own introduction to the book. It is invaluable, as it provides the setting in which he felt compelled to write the book.

The characteristics of Bishop Ryle's method and style are obvious. He is preeminently and always scriptural and expository. He never starts with a theory into which he tries to fit various Bible verses, but

¹ Bishop Handley Carr Glyn Moule (1841-1920) was an Anglican bishop of Dunham, England, and was an evangelical pastor, scholar, and author.

he always starts with the Word and expounds it. It is exposition at its very best and highest. It is always clear and logical and invariably leads to a clear declaration of doctrine. It is strong and robust and entirely free from that which is merely emotional or impractical.

The Bishop had drunk deeply from the wells of the great classical Puritan writers of the seventeenth century. Indeed, it would be accurate to say that his books are a distillation of true Puritan theology presented in a highly readable and modern form.

Ryle, like his great masters, has no easy way to holiness to offer us and no routine method by which it can be attained, but he always produces that *hunger and thirst for righteousness* (Matthew 5:6), which is the only indispensable condition for being filled.

May this book be widely read so that God's name may be increasingly honored and glorified.

D. M. Lloyd-Jones²

Westminster Chapel

2 David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) was a Welsh evangelical pastor and author who opposed liberal Christianity and was the pastor at Westminster Chapel for nearly thirty years.

Introduction

The twenty chapters contained in this volume are a humble contribution to a cause – scriptural holiness – that is exciting much interest in the present day. It is a cause that everyone who loves Christ and desires to advance His kingdom in the world should try to promote. Everyone can do something, and I wish to add my small part.

The reader will not find much that is directly controversial in this book. I have carefully refrained from naming modern teachers and modern books. I have been content to give the result of my own study of the Bible, my own private meditations, my own prayers for light, and my own reading of old men of God. If in anything I am still in error, I hope I will be shown it before I leave the world. We all see in part and have a treasure in earthen vessels. I trust I am willing to learn.

I have had a deep conviction for many years that practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not given adequate attention by modern Christians in this country. Politics, controversy, party spirit, or worldliness have eaten out the heart of lively piety in too many of us. The subject of personal godliness has sadly fallen into the background. The standard of holy living has become painfully low in many places. The immense importance of learning to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour* (Titus 2:10) and making it lovely and beautiful by our daily habits and character has been far too much overlooked.

Worldly people sometimes rightly complain that “religious” people are not as kind and unselfish and good-natured as those who make no profession of religion. Yet sanctification, in its place and proportion, is

quite as important as justification. Sound Protestant and evangelical doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless: it causes harm. It is despised by insightful and perceptive men of the world as an invented and empty thing, and it brings Christianity into contempt. It is my firm impression that we need a thorough revival of Scriptural holiness, and I am deeply thankful that attention is being directed to this purpose.

It is, however, of great importance that the whole subject should be placed on a right foundation, and it is important that the movement about it should not be damaged by inaccurate, inconsistent, and one-sided statements. If such statements abound, we should not be surprised. Satan knows well the power of true holiness and the immense injury that increased attention to it will do to his kingdom. It is in his interest, therefore, to promote strife and controversy about this part of God's truth. Just as in time past he has succeeded in perplexing and confusing people's minds about justification, so he is laboring in the present day to make men *darken counsel by words without knowledge* regarding sanctification (Job 38:2). May the Lord rebuke him! I cannot, however, give up the hope that good will be brought out of evil, that discussion will draw out truth, and that a diversity of opinions will lead us all to search the Scriptures more, to pray more, and to become more diligent in trying to find out what is *the desire of the Spirit* (Romans 8:27).

I feel it is a duty, in writing this book, to offer a few introductory hints to those whose attention is specially directed to the subject of sanctification in the present day. I know that I do so at the risk of seeming presumptuous and possibly of giving offense, but something must be ventured in the interests of God's truth. I will therefore put my hints into the form of questions, and I will ask my readers to take them as cautions for our day on the subject of holiness.

I ask, in the first place, whether it is wise to speak of faith as the one thing needful and the only thing required, as many seem to do nowadays in handling the doctrine of sanctification. Is it wise to proclaim in such a direct, blatant, and absolute way, as many do, that the holiness of converted people is by faith only, and not at all by personal exertion? Is it in harmony with God's Word? I doubt it.

- That faith in Christ is the root of all holiness . . .
- That the first step toward a holy life is to believe on Christ . . .
- That until we believe we have not an ounce of holiness . . .
- That union with Christ by faith is the secret of both beginning to be holy and continuing in holiness . . .
- That the life that we live in the flesh we must live by the faith of the Son of God . . .
- That faith purifies the heart . . .
- That faith is the victory that overcomes the world . . .
- That by faith the elders obtained a good report . . .

. . . all these are truths that no well-instructed Christian would ever think of denying. Certainly, though, the Scriptures teach us that in pursuing holiness, the true Christian needs personal exertion and work as well as faith.

The very same apostle who says in one place, *The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God* (Galatians 2:20), also says that he fights, he runs, he keeps his body under subjection (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). The Scriptures also say, *Let us cleanse ourselves* (2 Corinthians 7:1), *Let us therefore make haste* (Hebrews 4:11), *leaving behind all the weight* (Hebrews 12:1).

Moreover, the Scriptures nowhere teach us that faith sanctifies us in the same sense and in the same manner that faith justifies us! Justifying faith is a grace that *does not work*, but simply trusts, rests, and leans on Christ (Romans 4:5). Sanctifying faith is a grace of which the very life is action. It *works by charity* (Galatians 5:6), and like a driving force, it moves the whole inward man.

After all, the precise phrase *sanctified by faith* is only found once in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus said to Saul that He was sending him to the Gentiles, *that they may receive remission of sins and inheritance among those who are sanctified by the faith that is in me* (Acts 26:18). Yet even there I agree with Alford, that *by faith* belongs to the whole sentence and must not be tied to the word *sanctified*. The true sense is

that by faith in Jesus they can receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among those who are sanctified. (Compare Acts 26:18 with Acts 20:32.)

As to the phrase "holiness by faith," I find it nowhere in the New Testament. Without controversy, in the matter of our justification before God, faith in Christ is the one thing needful. All who simply believe are justified. Righteousness is imputed *to him that does not work, but believes* (Romans 4:5). It is thoroughly biblical and right to say that "faith alone justifies," but it is not equally biblical and right to say that "faith alone sanctifies." This saying requires much explanation and refinement.

Let one fact suffice. We are frequently told by the apostle Paul that a man is *justified by faith without the deeds of the law* (Romans 3:28),

but not once are we told that we are "sanctified by faith without the deeds of the law." On the contrary, we are expressly told by James that the faith by which we are visibly and demonstratively justified before man is a faith which *if it does not have works, is dead in and of itself* (James 2:17). I

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might be told in response that no one, of course, means to belittle works as an essential part of a holy life. It would be good, however, to make this plainer than many seem to make it these days.

I ask, in the second place, whether it is wise to emphasize so little, comparatively, as some seem to do, the many practical exhortations to holiness in daily life that are found in the Sermon on the Mount and in most of Paul's epistles. Is it in harmony with God's Word? I doubt it.

No well-taught child of God will dream of disputing that a life of daily self-consecration and daily communion with God should be aimed at by everyone who professes to be a believer, or that we should strive to attain the habit of going to the Lord Jesus Christ with everything we find a burden, whether great or small, and casting it upon Him. But surely the New Testament teaches us that we need something more than generalities about holy living, which often affect no conscience and give no offense.

The details and specific ingredients of which holiness is composed in daily life ought to be fully set forth and urged on believers by all who profess to care about the subject. True holiness does not consist merely

of believing and feeling, but of doing and living. It involves a practical exhibition of active and passive grace.

Our tongues, our natures, our natural passions and inclinations, our conduct as parents and children, masters and servants, husbands and wives, rulers and subjects, our clothing, our use of time, our behavior in business, our attitude in sickness and health, in riches and in poverty – all these are matters that are fully written about by inspired writers. They are not content with a general statement of what we should believe and feel and how we are to have the roots of holiness planted in our hearts, but they dig down lower. They go into specific details. They specify in great detail what a holy man ought to do and be in his own family and in his own home, if he abides in Christ. I doubt whether this sort of teaching is sufficiently attended to in the present day.

When people talk of having received “such a blessing” or of having found “the higher life” after having heard some impassioned promoter of “holiness by faith and self-consecration,” while their families and friends see no improvement and no increased sanctity in their daily tempers and behavior, much harm is done to the cause of Christ. True holiness, we should certainly remember, does not consist merely of inward sensations and impressions. It is much more than tears, sighs, bodily excitement, a quickened pulse, a passionate feeling of attachment to our own favorite preachers and our own religious party, and a readiness to quarrel with everyone who does not agree with us. It is about the image of Christ being seen and observed by others in our private lives, habits, character, work, and activities (Romans 8:29).

I ask, in the third place, whether it is wise to use vague language about perfection and to urge Christians to a standard of holy perfection as attainable in this world, while there is no basis to be shown for this from either Scripture or experience. I doubt it.

No careful reader of the Bible will ever think of denying that believers are exhorted to *[perfect] holiness in the fear of God* (2 Corinthians 7:1), to *go on unto perfection* (Hebrews 6:1), and to *be perfected* (2 Corinthians 13:11), but I have yet to find a single passage in Scripture that teaches that literal perfection, complete and entire freedom from sin in thought, word, or deed is attainable, or ever has been attained, by any child of Adam in this world.

A comparative perfection, a perfection in knowledge, an all-around consistency in every area of life, and a thorough soundness in every point of doctrine may be seen occasionally in some of God's believing people; but as to an absolute literal perfection, the most eminent saints of God in every age have always been the very last to lay claim to it! On the contrary, they have always had the deepest sense of their own utter unworthiness and imperfection. The more spiritual light they have enjoyed, the more they have seen their own countless defects and shortcomings. The more grace they have had, the more they have been *clothed with humility* (1 Peter 5:5).

What saint can be named in God's Word of whose life many details are recorded, who was literally and absolutely perfect? Which one of them, when writing about himself, ever talks of feeling free from imperfection? On the contrary, men like David, Paul, and John declare in the strongest language that they feel weakness and sin in their own hearts. The holiest men of modern times have always been remarkable for deep humility. Have we ever seen holier men than the martyred John Bradford, Richard Hooker, James Ussher, Richard Baxter, Samuel Rutherford, or Robert Murray McCheyne? Yet no one can read the writings and letters of these men without seeing that they felt themselves debtors to mercy and grace every day, and the very last thing they ever laid claim to was perfection!

In the face of such facts, I must protest against the language now used in many places about perfection. I must conclude that those who use such language know very little of the nature of sin, the attributes of God, their own hearts, the Bible, or the meaning of words. When a professing Christian calmly tells me that he has grown beyond such hymns as "Just as I Am," and that they are beneath his current experience, although they suited him when he first professed Jesus Christ, I must conclude that his soul is in a very unhealthy condition!

When a person can talk calmly of the possibility of living without sin while in the body, and when he can actually say that he has not had an evil thought for three months, I can only say that, in my opinion, he is a very ignorant Christian! I protest against such teaching as this. It not only does no good, but it does much harm. It disgusts and alienates perceptive people of the world from Christianity who know that

this kind of talk is incorrect and untrue. It depresses some of the best of God's children who feel they can never attain to perfection of this kind. It puffs up many weak brethren who imagine they are something when they are nothing. Simply put, it is a dangerous delusion.

In the fourth place, is it wise to assert so positively and strongly, as many do, that the seventh chapter of the book of Romans does not describe the experience of the advanced saint, but the experience of the unsaved person or of the weak and recent convert? I doubt it.

I fully admit that the point has been a disputed one for nineteen centuries, ever since the days of Paul. I fully admit that eminent Christians like John and Charles Wesley and John Fletcher, a hundred years ago, to say nothing of some able writers of our own time, maintain firmly that Paul was not describing his own present experience when he wrote this seventh chapter. I fully admit that many cannot see what I and many others see – that Paul says nothing in this chapter that does not exactly match the recorded experience of the most eminent saints in every age, and that he does say several things that no unregenerate person or weak believer would ever think of saying, and cannot say. That is how it appears to me, at least, but I will not enter into any detailed discussion of the chapter.

What I do lay stress upon is the straightforward fact that the best commentators in every era of the church have almost always applied the seventh chapter of Romans to mature Christians. The commentators who do not take this view have been, with a few bright exceptions, the Roman Catholics, the Socinians, and the Arminians.³ Against them is arrayed the judgment of almost all the Reformers, almost all the Puritans, and the best modern evangelical clergymen and theologians.

I will be told, of course, that no man is infallible, that the Reformers, Puritans, and modern leaders to whom I refer may have been entirely mistaken, and the Roman Catholics, Socinians, and Arminians may have been quite right! Our Lord has taught us, no doubt, to call no man master (Matthew 23:10). But while I ask no one to call the Reformers and Puritans masters, I do ask people to read what they say on this subject

3 Socinianism includes beliefs that Jesus was only human, that God does not know the future, that Jesus did not atone for our sins but simply gave us an example to follow, and that all doctrine should be able to be understood by our human reason. Arminianism is often contrasted with Calvinism. Arminianism emphasizes man's free will rather than God's sovereignty.

and answer their arguments, if they can. This has not been done yet! To say, as some do, that they do not want human dogmas and doctrines is no reply at all. The whole point at issue is, "What is the meaning of a passage of Scripture? How is the seventh chapter of Romans to be interpreted? What is the true sense of its words?" At any rate, let us remember that there is a great fact that cannot be ignored. The opinions and interpretation of Reformers and Puritans stand on one side, while on the other stand the opinions and interpretations of Roman Catholics, Socinians, and Arminians. Let that be distinctly understood.

In the face of such a fact as this, I must express my disapproval of the insulting, ridiculing, and contemptuous language that has been frequently used lately by some of the proponents of what I must call the Arminian view of Romans 7, in speaking of the opinions of their opponents. To say the least, such language is improper and only defeats its own end. A cause that is defended by such language is deservedly suspicious. Truth does not need such weapons. If we cannot agree with others, we do not need to speak of their views with discourtesy and contempt. An opinion that is backed and supported by such men as the best Reformers and Puritans may not carry conviction to everyone in this century, but it would still be good to speak of it with respect.

In the fifth place, is it wise to use the language that is often used today about the doctrine of "Christ in us"? I doubt it. Is not this doctrine often exalted to a position that it does not occupy in Scripture? I am afraid that it is. No careful reader of the New Testament would think of denying for a moment that a true believer is one with Christ and Christ is in him. There is, no doubt, a mystical union between Christ and the believer. With Him we died, with Him we were buried, with Him we rose again, and with Him we sit in heavenly places.

We have five plain Bible verses that clearly teach that Christ is "in us."

If Christ is in you, the body is truly dead because of sin, but the Spirit is alive because of righteousness. (Romans 8:10)

I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives 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. (Galatians 2:20)

My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ is formed in you. (Galatians 4:19)

That the Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in charity. (Ephesians 3:17)

Christ is all and in all. (Colossians 3:11)

We must be careful, though, that we understand what we mean by the expression “in us.” That Christ dwells in our hearts by faith and carries on His inward work by His Spirit is clear and plain; but if we say that in addition to this and more than this and above this there is some mysterious indwelling of Christ in a believer, we must be careful what we are discussing.

Unless we are careful, we will find ourselves ignoring the work of the Holy Spirit. We will forget that in the divine providence of man’s salvation, election is the special work of God the Father; atonement, mediation, and intercession are the special work of God the Son; and sanctification is the special work of God the Holy Spirit. We will forget that before our Lord went away, He said that He would send us another Comforter who would abide with us forever and, as it were, take His place. *I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever (John 14:16)*. Essentially, under the idea that we are honoring Christ, we will find that we are dishonoring His special and distinctive gift – the Holy Spirit.

Christ, no doubt, as God, is everywhere – in our hearts, in heaven, in the place where two or three meet together in His name (Matthew 18:20). But we really must remember that Christ, as our risen Head and High Priest, is at God’s right hand for the special purpose of interceding for us until He comes the second time, and that He carries on His work in the hearts of His people by the special work of His Spirit, whom He promised to send when He left the world. *When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father, he shall testify of me (John 15:26)*.

A comparison of the ninth and tenth verses of Romans 8 seems to me to show this plainly. It convinces me that “Christ in us” means Christ in us “by His Spirit.”

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, because the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person is not of him. But if Christ is in you, the body is truly dead because of sin, but the Spirit is alive because of righteousness. (Romans 8:9-10)

Above all, the words of St. John are most distinct and revealing: *And in this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us* (1 John 3:24).

In saying all this, I hope no one will misunderstand me. I do not say that the expression “Christ in us” is unscriptural, but I do say that I see much danger in giving an extreme and unscriptural importance to the idea contained in the expression, and I do fear that many use it these days without exactly knowing what they mean, and unintentionally, perhaps, dishonor the mighty work of the Holy Spirit.

If any readers think that I am needlessly conscientious about this point, I recommend to their notice a curious book by Samuel Rutherford (author of the well-known letters⁴), called *The Spiritual Antichrist*. They will see there that a few centuries ago, the wildest heresies arose out of an extravagant teaching of this very doctrine of the “indwelling of Christ” in believers. They will find that Saltmarsh, Dell, Towne, and other false teachers, against whom good Samuel Rutherford contended, began with strange notions of “Christ in us,” and then proceeded to build on that doctrine the heresy of antinomianism and fanaticism of the worst description and vilest tendency. They maintained that the separate, personal life of the believer was so completely gone that it was Christ living in him who repented, believed, and acted!

The root of this huge error was a forced and unscriptural interpretation of such texts as *I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me* (Galatians 2:20). The natural result was that many of the unhappy followers of this school of teaching came to the comfortable conclusion that believers were not responsible for their words and actions, no matter what they might do!

⁴ Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) was a Scottish Presbyterian pastor and author and was one of the members of the Westminster Assembly. A collection of his letters has been published (*Letters of Samuel Rutherford*) and has become a Christian classic. Charles Spurgeon said that Rutherford's *Letters* were “the nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men.” Richard Baxter said of them that except for the Bible, “such a book as Mr. Rutherford's *Letters* the world never saw the like.”

Believers, they taught, were undoubtedly dead and buried, and only Christ lived in them and undertook everything for them! The ultimate consequence was that some thought they could sit still in a carnal security with absolutely no personal accountability, and they believed that they could commit any kind of sin without fear!

Let us never forget that if truth is distorted and exaggerated, it can become the mother of the most dangerous heresies. When we speak of Christ being in us, let us take care to explain what we mean. I fear that some neglect this in the present day.

In the sixth place, is it wise to draw such a deep, wide, and distinct line of separation between conversion and consecration, or the “higher life,” as many do today? Is this in harmony with God’s Word? I doubt it.

There is, unquestionably, nothing new in this teaching. It is well known that Roman Catholic writers often maintain that the church is divided into three classes – sinners, penitents, and saints. The modern teachers of this day who tell us that professing Christians are of three sorts – the unconverted, the converted, and the partakers of the “higher life” of complete consecration – appear to me to occupy very much the same ground! But whether the idea is old or new, Roman Catholic or Protestant, I am utterly unable to see that it has any basis in Scripture.

The Word of God always speaks of two great divisions of mankind, and only two. It speaks of the living and the dead in sin, the believer and the unbeliever, the converted and the unconverted, the travelers in the narrow way and the travelers in the broad, the wise and the foolish, the children of God and the children of the devil. Within each of these two great classes there are, doubtless, various degrees of sin and of grace, but these various degrees are only the difference between the higher and lower ends of an inclined plane.

However, between the two great classes there is an enormous gulf; the two classes are as distinct as life and death, light and darkness, heaven and hell. But of a division into three classes, the Word of God says nothing at all! I question the wisdom of making new divisions that the Bible has not made, and I thoroughly dislike the idea of a second conversion.

I fully concede that there is a vast difference between one degree of grace and another, that one should grow in one’s spiritual life, and that

believers should be continually urged in all things to grow in grace; but the theory of a sudden, mysterious transition of a believer into a state of blessedness and entire consecration, all at once, I cannot accept. It appears to me to be a man-made invention, and I do not see a single plain text to prove it in Scripture. Gradual growth in grace, growth

I openly confess that I
prefer the old paths.

in knowledge, growth in faith, growth in love, growth in holiness, growth in humility, growth in spiritual-mindedness – all this I see clearly taught and urged in Scripture and clearly exemplified in the lives of many of God’s saints; but I fail to

see in the Bible sudden, instantaneous leaps from conversion to consecration. I doubt, indeed, whether we have any biblical basis for saying that someone can possibly be converted without being consecrated to God! He can doubtless be more consecrated, and will be as his grace increases, but if he was not consecrated to God in the very day that he was converted and born again, I do not know what conversion means.

Are not people in danger of undervaluing and underrating the immense blessedness of conversion? Are they not, when they urge on believers the “higher life” as a second conversion, underrating the length, breadth, depth, and height of that great first change that Scripture calls the new birth, the new creation, and the spiritual resurrection? I may be mistaken, but I have sometimes thought, while reading the strong language used by many about “consecration” in the last few years, that those who use it must have previously had an exceptionally low and inadequate view of conversion, if indeed they knew anything about conversion at all. I have almost suspected that when they were consecrated, they were in reality converted for the first time!

I openly confess that I prefer the old paths. *Thus hath the LORD said, Stand ye in the ways and see and ask for the old paths, where the good way is and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls* (Jeremiah 6:16). I think it is wiser and safer to insist to all converted people the possibility of continual growth in grace and the absolute necessity of going forward, increasing more and more, and every year dedicating and consecrating themselves more in spirit, soul, and body to Christ.

By all means, let us teach that there is more holiness to be attained and more of heaven to be enjoyed upon earth than most believers now

experience, but I decline to tell any converted person that he needs a second conversion and that he may some day move in one enormous step into a state of entire consecration. I decline to teach it because I cannot see any basis for such teaching in Scripture. I decline to teach it because I think the tendency of the doctrine is thoroughly harmful, depressing the humble-minded and meek, and puffing up the shallow, the ignorant, and the self-conceited to a most dangerous extent.

In the seventh and last place, is it wise to teach believers that they should not think so much of fighting and struggling against sin, but ought rather to “yield themselves to God” and be passive in the hands of Christ? Is this in harmony with God’s Word? I doubt it.

It is a simple fact that the expression “yield yourselves” is only found in one place in the New Testament as a duty urged upon believers. That place is in Romans 6:13-19, and there within those six verses the expression occurs five times. But even there, the term does not have the sense of placing ourselves passively in the hands of another. Any Greek student can tell us that the sense is rather that of actively presenting ourselves for use, employment, and service, similar to Romans 12:1: *Therefore, I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies in living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing unto God, which is your rationale worship.*

The expression to yield yourselves in this way, therefore, stands alone in Scripture. On the other hand, it would not be difficult to point out at least twenty-five or thirty distinct passages in the Epistles where believers are plainly taught to use active personal exertion, are addressed as being responsible for doing energetically what Christ would have them do, and are told to arise and work rather than “yield themselves” up as passive agents and sit still. Holy violence, conflict, warfare, fight, a soldier’s life, and wrestling are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian.

The account of the armor of God in the sixth chapter of Ephesians settles the question, one might think. Again, it would be easy to show that the doctrine of sanctification without personal effort, by simply “yielding ourselves to God,” is precisely the doctrine of the antinomian fanatics of the seventeenth century (to whom I have referred already,

described in Rutherford's *Spiritual Antichrist*), and that the tendency of it is evil in the extreme.

Again, it would be easy to show that the doctrine is utterly subversive of the whole teaching of such tried and approved books as *Pilgrim's Progress*, and that if we accept such doctrine, we ought to put Bunyan's old book in the fire! If Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* simply yielded

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himself to God and never fought, struggled, or wrestled, I have read the famous allegory in vain. But the plain truth is, that people will persist in confusing two things that differ – that is, justification and sanctification. In justification, the word to be addressed to us is “believe” – only believe; in sanctification, we must “watch, pray, and fight.” What God has divided, let us not mingle and confuse.

I leave the subject of my introduction here and hurry to a conclusion. I confess that I lay down my pen with feelings of sorrow and anxiety. There is much in the attitude of professing Christians in this day that fills me with concern and makes me full of fear for the future.

There is an amazing ignorance of Scripture among many, and a consequent lack of established, solid Christianity. In no other way can I account for the ease with which people are, like children, *tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Ephesians 4:14). There is an Athenian love of anything new, and an unhealthy aversion for anything old, regular, and in the beaten path of our forefathers. (*For all the Athenians and strangers who were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.*) (Acts 17:21).

Thousands will gather together to hear a new voice and a new doctrine, without considering for a moment whether what they hear is true. There is an incessant craving after any teaching that is sensational, exciting, and stirs up emotion. There is an unhealthy appetite for a sort of intermittent and emotional Christianity. The religious life of many is little better than spiritual taste testing, and the *agreeable spirit and peaceful* that Peter commends is completely forgotten (1 Peter 3:4). Crowds, crying, feelings, entertaining singing, and an incessant stirring up of the emotions are the only things that many people care for.

Inability to distinguish differences in doctrine is spreading far and

wide, and as long as the preacher seems clever and earnest, people seem to think it must be all right, and they call you dreadfully narrow and unloving if you hint that the preacher is unsound! Preachers with opposing doctrines, such as Moody and Haweis, Dean Stanley and Canon Liddon, Mackonochie and Pearsall Smith all seem to be alike in the eyes of such people.⁵ All this is very sad. But if in addition to this, the true-hearted advocates of increased holiness are going to fight with each other along the way and misunderstand one another, it will be sadder still. We will indeed be in a bad situation.

For myself, I am aware that I am no longer a young minister. My mind perhaps is more rigid, and I cannot easily receive any new doctrine. "The old is better." I suppose I belong to the old school of evangelical theology, and I am therefore content with such teaching about sanctification as I find in the *Life of Faith* by Richard Sibbes, *The Life of Faith* by Thomas Manton, and in *The Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith* by William Romaine.

I must express a hope that my younger brethren who have taken up new views of holiness will beware of multiplying causeless divisions. Do they think that a higher standard of Christian living is needed in the present day? So do I. Do they think that clearer, stronger, fuller teaching about holiness is needed? So do I. Do they think that Christ ought to be more exalted as the root and author of sanctification as well as justification? So do I. Do they think that believers should be urged more and more to live by faith? So do I. Do they think that a very close walk with God should be urged more on believers as the secret of happiness and usefulness? So do I. In all these things we agree. But if they want to go further than this, then I ask them to be careful where they tread and to explain very clearly and distinctly what they mean.

Finally, I must express my disapproval, and I do it in love, of the use of unrefined and newly made-up terms and phrases in teaching sanctification. I believe that a movement in favor of holiness cannot be advanced by new phraseology or by disproportioned and one-sided statements. It cannot be advanced by overstraining and isolating particular texts, by exalting one truth at the expense of another, by allegorizing

5 Ryle seems to be comparing biblical preachers to non-biblical preachers or moralists, saying that many people do not seem able to distinguish between biblical and unbiblical preaching.

and accommodating texts and squeezing out of them meanings that the Holy Spirit never put in them, or by speaking scornfully and bitterly of those who do not see things entirely as we do and who do not work exactly as we think they should. These things do not make for peace, but they repel many and keep them at a distance. The cause of true sanctification is not helped, but hindered, by such weapons as these. A movement in aid of holiness that produces strife and dispute among God's children is somewhat suspicious. For Christ's sake, and in the name of truth and charity, let us endeavor to follow after peace as well as holiness. *What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate* (Matthew 19:6).

It is my heart's desire and daily prayer to God that personal holiness may increase greatly among professing Christians, but I hope that all who attempt to promote it will adhere closely to the harmony of Scripture, will carefully distinguish things that differ, and will separate *the precious from the vile* (Jeremiah 15:19).

Chapter 1

Sin

Sin is the transgression of the law. (1 John 3:4)

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

The plain truth is that a proper knowledge of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it, such doctrines as justification, conversion, and sanctification are only words and names that convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes anyone a new creation in Christ is to send light into his heart and show him that he is a guilty sinner. The physical creation in Genesis began with light, and so also does the spiritual creation. God shines into our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit, and then spiritual life begins. *For the God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to bring forth the light of the knowledge of the clarity of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 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 person does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul's disease, you cannot wonder that he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of

the main needs of the church in this century has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin.

I will begin the subject by supplying the 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 people committing “sins.” But what do we mean by these terms? Do we really know? I am afraid that there is much mental confusion and haziness on this point. Let me try, as briefly as possible, to provide an answer.

Speaking generally, sin is, as the Ninth Article of the Church of England declares, “the fault and corruption of the nature of every person who is naturally born of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh always lusts against the spirit; therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserves God’s wrath and damnation.” Sin is simply that vast moral disease that affects the whole human race, of every status, class, title, nation, people, and language. It is a disease from which there was only one born of woman who was not afflicted. Needless to say, that One was Christ Jesus, the Lord.

I say furthermore that sin, to speak more specifically, consists in doing, saying, thinking, or imagining anything that is not in perfect conformity with the mind and law of God. As the Scripture simply says, *Sin is the transgression of the law* (1 John 3:4). The slightest outward or inward departure from absolute mathematical parallelism with God’s revealed will and character constitutes a sin and instantly makes us guilty in God’s sight.

Of course, I do not need to tell anyone who reads his Bible with attention that a person can break God’s law in heart and thought, even when there is no plain and visible act of wickedness. Our Lord has settled that point beyond dispute in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-28). Even a poet of our own has truly said that “one may smile and smile, and be a villain.”⁶

Again, I do not need to tell a careful student of the New Testament that there are sins of omission as well as commission, and that we sin, as our *Book of Common Prayer* justly reminds us, by “leaving undone the things we ought to do,” as certainly as by “doing the things we ought

6 From William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

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 from me, ye cursed, into eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and ye gave me no food; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink* (Matthew 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 especially my sins of omission.”

I think it is necessary in these times to remind my readers that a person can commit sin and yet be ignorant of it, and can imagine himself innocent when he is guilty. I fail to see any scriptural basis for the modern assertion that “Sin is not sin to us until we recognize it and are conscious of it.” On the contrary, in the fourth and fifth chapters of that inappropriately neglected book, Leviticus, and in the fifteenth chapter of Numbers, the children of Israel were distinctly taught that there were sins of ignorance that caused people to be unclean and in need of atonement (Leviticus 4:1-35; 5:14-19; Numbers 15:25-29).

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Also, I find our Lord distinctly teaching that the servant who did not know his master’s will and did it not was not excused on account of his ignorance, but was beaten, or punished (Luke 12:48). We would do well to remember that when we measure our own sinfulness by our own miserably imperfect knowledge and consciousness, we are on very dangerous ground. A deeper study of Leviticus might do us much good.

The Origin and Source of Sin

I must say something concerning the origin and source of this vast moral disease called sin. 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 settled 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 that we all inherit from our first parents, Adam and Eve, and with which we are born.

Created *in the image of God* (Genesis 1:27), innocent and righteous at first, our parents fell from original righteousness and became sinful and corrupt. 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. *Sin entered into the world by one man* (Romans 5:12). *That which is born of the flesh is flesh* (John 3:6). We are *by nature the children of wrath* (Ephesians 2:3). *The prudence of the flesh is enmity against God* (Romans 8:7). *Out of the heart of men [naturally as out of a fountain], come forth the evil thoughts, the adulteries, and the like* (Mark 7:21).

The sweetest baby that has entered life this year and has become the sunbeam of a family is not, as its mother perhaps fondly calls it, a little “angel” or a little “innocent one,” but is a little “sinner.” Sadly, as it lies smiling and cooing in its cradle, that little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness! Just watch her carefully as she grows in stature and her mind develops, and you will soon detect in her an incessant tendency to that which is bad, and a backwardness to that which is good. You will see in her the buds and germs of deceit, evil temper, selfishness, self-will, stubbornness, greediness, envy, jealousy, anger, and more, which if indulged and let alone, will increase 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. He is not what he ought to be, but he has fallen into bad company. Public schools are bad places. The teachers neglect the boys, but he has a good heart.” The truth, unhappily, is completely the opposite. The first cause of all sin lies in the natural corruption of the boy’s own heart, and not in the school.

The Extent of Sin

Concerning the extent of this vast moral disease of man called sin, let us be careful that we do not make a 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 only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked* (Jeremiah 17:9).

Sin is a disease that pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds. The understanding, the affections, the reasoning powers, and 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 it is as likely to lead people wrong as right, unless it is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. In summary, *from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness* about us (Isaiah 1:6). The disease may be veiled under a thin covering of courtesy, politeness, good manners, and outward decorum, but it lies deep down inside.

Sin is a disease that pervades and runs through every part of our moral constitution and every faculty of our minds.

I fully admit that man has many grand and noble abilities left about him, and that in arts and sciences and literature he shows immense capacity. But the fact remains that in spiritual things he is utterly dead and has no natural knowledge, love, or fear of God. His best things are so interwoven and intermingled with corruption that the contrast only brings into sharper view the truth and extent of the fall.

Those who ridicule God's written Word and mock those who believe and love the Bible do not understand that one and the same creature can be in some things so high and in others so low, so great and yet so little, so noble and yet so insignificant, so impressive in his planning and execution of material things and yet so depraved and debased in his passions. The godless do not understand how man is able to plan and erect buildings like those of Karnak and Luxor in Egypt and the Parthenon at Athens, and yet worship monstrous gods and goddesses, and birds, beasts, and creeping things. The wicked do not see how man is able to produce such plays like those of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and histories like that of Thucydides, and yet be a slave to abominable wickedness like that described in the first chapter of Romans.

This alleged mystery, though, 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 which is now in utter ruins, a temple in which a shattered window

here and a doorway 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 has fallen from its once lofty position. 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, in addition to 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 region in the four quarters of the earth. Search every group and class in our own country from the highest to the lowest under every circumstance and condition – and the report will always be 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, technology, and modern weapons, uncontaminated by the vices of modern civilization – these very islands have always been found, when first discovered, the home of the most wicked forms of lust, cruelty, deceit, and superstition. If the inhabitants have known nothing else, they have always known how to sin!

Everywhere in the world, the human heart is naturally *deceitful above all things and desperately wicked* (Jeremiah 17:9). For my part, I know no stronger proof of the inspiration of Genesis and Moses’ account of the origin of man than the power, extent, and universality of sin. If you understand that all of mankind has come from one couple, and that this man and woman fell (as Genesis 3 tells us), then the condition of human nature everywhere is easily accounted for. If you deny it, as most do, you are at once involved in unexplainable difficulties; that is, the uniformity and universality of human corruption provide one of the most unanswerable instances of the enormous “difficulties of infidelity.”⁷

After all, I am convinced that the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin is the tenacity with which it cleaves to man even after he is converted and has become the subject of the Holy Spirit’s operations. To use the language of the Ninth Article, “This infection of nature does

7 *The Difficulties of Infidelity* was a book written in 1824 by George Stanley Faber (1773-1854) to address those who claimed that there were too many difficulties with the Bible to believe it. Faber wrote that the Bible provided the answers, while the difficulties of infidelity, or unbelief, were far greater and more difficult than those of which they accused Christianity.

remain – yes, even in those who 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 (Leviticus 14:33-57).

Sin, no doubt, in the believer’s heart, no longer has 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 that go on within his heart, 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, and the inward groanings that no one knows except he who has experienced them all testify to the same great truth: they 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 to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 15:57), he never forgets to watch and pray so he does not fall into temptation (Mark 14:38)!

The Sinfulness of Sin

Concerning the guilt, vileness, and offensiveness of sin in the sight of God, my words will 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 charged His angels *with folly* (Job 4:18), and in whose sight *not even the heavens are clean* (Job 15:15). He is One who reads thoughts and motives as well as actions, and requires *truth in the inward parts* (Psalm 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 notion of the hideousness of evil. We have no

tools to measure its depth and breadth. 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 they are not offensive to one another.

Fallen man, I believe, can have no real 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.

Nevertheless, let us settle it firmly in our minds that sin is the abominable thing that God hates (Jeremiah 44:4); that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon that which is evil (Habakkuk 1:13); that the least transgression of God’s law makes us *guilty of all* (James 2:10); that the soul that sins will die (Ezekiel 18:4); that *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23); that *God shall judge that which men have covered up* (Romans 2:16); that there is a worm that never dies and a fire that is not quenched (Mark 9:44); that *the wicked shall be put into Sheol* (Psalm 9:17); that they *shall go away into eternal punishment* (Matthew 25:46); and that nothing that defiles will ever enter heaven (Revelation 21:27). These are indeed tremendous words, especially when we consider that they are written in the Book of a most merciful God!

No proof of the fullness 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 dreadful 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 that made Jesus groan and sweat drops of blood in agony at Gethsemane, and caused Him to cry out at Golgotha, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* (Matthew 27:46).

Nothing, I am convinced, will astonish us so much, when we awake in the resurrection day, as the view we will have of sin and the retrospect we will take of our own countless shortcomings and defects. Not until

the hour when Christ comes the second time will we fully realize the “sinfulness of sin.”⁸ Well might George Whitefield say, “The anthem in heaven will be, *What has God made!*” (Numbers 23:23).

The Deceitfulness of Sin

Only one point 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 think that it does not receive the attention it deserves. You can see this deceitfulness in the awful tendency of people to regard sin as less sinful and dangerous than it is in the sight of God and in their readiness to pardon it, make excuses for it, and minimize its guilt. They say, “It is just a little sin! God is merciful! God is not so extreme as to keep track of these little things that we do wrong! We mean well! One cannot be so critical! Where is the great harm? We only do as others do! There is no need to make such a big deal over such a little thing.” Who is not familiar with this kind of language?

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Judas, with a kiss.

You can see it in the long string of smooth words and phrases that people have used in order to designate things that God calls downright wicked and ruinous to the soul. What do such expressions as “mistake,” “choice,” “wild,” “unsteady,” “thoughtless,” “fun,” or “not hurting anyone” mean? They show that people try to deceive themselves into the belief that sin is not quite as sinful as God says it is, and that they are not so bad as they really are.

You can even see it in the tendency 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 playing with temptation, and of allowing a low standard of family religion. I fear that we do not sufficiently realize the extreme deception of our soul’s disease. We are too apt to forget that temptation to sin will rarely present itself to us in its true colors, saying, “I am your deadly enemy, and I want to ruin you forever in hell.” Oh, no! Sin comes to us, like Judas, with

⁸ Some of the Puritans wrote much about the sinfulness of sin. For examples, see Thomas Watson’s *The Mischief of Sin*, Jeremiah Burroughs’ *The Evil of Evils: The Exceeding Sinfulness of Sin*, and Ralph Venning’s *The Sinfulness of Sin*.

a kiss (Matthew 26:48-49), and like Joab, with an outstretched hand and flattering words (2 Samuel 20:9-10). The forbidden fruit seemed good and desirable to Eve, yet it got her cast out of Eden. Walking idly on his palace roof seemed harmless enough to David, yet it ended in adultery and murder.

Sin rarely seems to be sin at first. Let us then watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation (Matthew 26:41). We may give wickedness smooth names, but we cannot alter its nature and character in the sight of God. Let us remember Paul's words: *Exhort one another daily, . . . lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin* (Hebrews 3:13). It is a wise prayer that we pray: "From the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, good Lord, deliver us."

Before I go further, let me briefly mention two thoughts that appear to me to rise with irresistible force out of the subject. On the one hand, I ask my readers to observe what strong reasons we all have for examining and humbling ourselves. 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 great weakness and imperfection clings to the very best of us at our very best! What a solemn thought it is that without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

When we think of our sins of omission as well as our sins of commission, we have much reason to cry with the publican every night of our lives, *God, reconcile me, a sinner* (Luke 18:13). How admirably suited are the general and communion confessions of our prayer book to the actual condition of all professing Christians! How well that language suits God's children that the prayer book puts in the mouth of every church member 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 in his humanness is a miserable sinner and a debtor to mercy and grace to the last moment of his existence!

With my whole heart I endorse that passage in Richard Hooker's sermon on justification that 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,” God had set us a very burdensome task?

It may seem somewhat extreme, which I will speak; therefore, let every one judge of it, 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, yes, or if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes this city should not be destroyed; but if He should make us an offer this generous, to search all the generations of men since the fall of our father Adam, find one man that has done one action that has passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all, and for that one man’s only action neither man nor angel should feel the torments that 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 that we do have something in them to be pardoned.⁹

That witness is true. For my part, I am persuaded that 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. If you will read Christian biographies, you will find it true that in every age of the church, the most eminent saints – men like Bradford, Rutherford, and McCheyne – have always been the humblest men.

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

9 This is from a sermon by Richard Hooker (1554-1600) called “Learned Discourse of Justification.”

man's disease. We do not need to 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 remedy provided for us in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded (Romans 5:20). Yes, there is a full, perfect, and complete cure for the hideous disease of sin in the everlasting covenant of redemption, to which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are parties. The cure is to be found in the Mediator of that covenant, Jesus Christ the righteous, perfect God and perfect man in one Person. The remedy is in the work that He did by dying for our sins and rising again for our justification.

It is found in the offices that He fills as our Priest, Substitute, Physician, Shepherd, and Advocate; in the precious blood He shed that 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 the chief of sinners to the uttermost; in His willingness to receive and pardon the vilest; in His readiness to sustain the weakest; and in the grace of the Holy Spirit that 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 – there is a full, perfect, and complete cure for the hideous disease of sin.

As dreadful and immense as the right view of sin undoubtedly is, no one needs to faint and despair if he will take a right view of Jesus Christ at the same time. No wonder that old John Flavel ends many chapters of his admirable *Fountain of Life* with the touching words, "Blessed be God for Jesus Christ."¹⁰

In bringing this mighty subject to a close, I feel that I have only touched its surface. It is one that cannot be thoroughly handled in a book like this. If you want to read more fully and exhaustively about this subject, you must turn to such masters of practical 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

10 John Flavel (c. 1627-1691) was an English Puritan pastor and author. His book, *The Fountain of Life*, contains forty-two of his sermons.

Puritans. It only remains for me to point out some practical uses to which the whole doctrine of sin can be profitably turned in the present day.

First, a scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to that vague, dim, misty, hazy kind of theology that is so painfully current in the present age. It is vain to shut your eyes to the fact that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity today that you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nevertheless, is not quite accurate or biblical. It is a Christianity in which there is undeniably something about Christ, something about grace, something about faith, 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 Hugh Latimer would have said, it is a kind of “mingle-mangle,” and it does no good.¹¹ It does not influence one’s daily conduct, does not provide comfort in life, and does not give peace in death. Those who hold these beliefs often awake too late to see that they have got nothing solid under their feet. I believe the most likely way to cure and fix 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 toward 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 to our young children, our older children, and in our schools, colleges, and universities.

Let us not forget that *the law is good, if a man uses it legitimately* (1 Timothy 1:8), and that *by the law is the knowledge of sin* (Romans 3:20). Let us bring the law to the front and strongly bring it to people’s attention. Let us expound and explain the Ten Commandments, showing the length, breadth, 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 can depend upon it that people will never come to

We can depend upon it that people will never come to Jesus and stay with Jesus and live for Jesus unless they really know why they are to come and what their need is.

11 Hugh Latimer (1487-1555) was a former Roman Catholic priest who converted to Protestantism and supported many Reformation teachings. He was burned at the stake as a martyr during the reign of Roman Catholic Queen Mary for refusing to recant his beliefs.

Jesus and stay with Jesus and live for Jesus unless they really know why they are to come and what their need is. Those whom the Spirit draws to Jesus are those whom the Spirit has convinced of sin. Without thorough conviction of sin, people may seem to come to Jesus and follow Him for a little while, but they will soon fall away and return to the world.

Next, a scriptural view of sin is one of the best antidotes to the extravagantly broad and liberal theology that is so popular at the present time. The tendency of modern thought is to reject dogmas, creeds, and every kind of boundary in Christianity. It is thought great and wise to condemn no opinion whatsoever and to pronounce all sincere and clever teachers to be trustworthy, however mixed and mutually destructive their opinions may be.

Everything is considered 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, and the reality and eternity of future punishment are all calmly tossed overboard like lumber in order to lighten the ship of Christianity and enable it to keep pace with modern liberal views.

If you stand up for these great truths of the Bible, you are called narrow, intolerant, old-fashioned, and theologically outdated! Quote a biblical 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!

I know nothing as likely to counteract this modern plague as constant clear statements about the nature, reality, vileness, power, and guilt of sin. We must charge home into the consciences of these people 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 favorite opinions comfort them in the day of sickness, in the hour of death, by the bedside of dying parents, and by the grave of a beloved wife or child. We must ask them whether a vague earnestness without definite doctrine gives them peace at times like these. We must challenge them to tell us whether they do not sometimes feel a gnawing "something" within that all the free thought and philosophy and science in the world cannot satisfy. Then we must tell them that this gnawing "something" is

the sense of sin, guilt, and corruption that they are leaving out of their calculations. Above all, we must tell them that nothing will ever allow them to find rest except submission to the old doctrines of man's ruin and Christ's redemption – and simple childlike faith in Jesus.

Next, a correct view of sin is the best antidote to that sentimental, ceremonial, formal kind of Christianity that has swept over our land like a flood in the last twenty-five years and has 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 type of mind, as 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 sentimental ceremonial Christianity will thoroughly satisfy us. A little child is easily quieted and amused with bright toys, dolls, and rattles as long as he is not hungry; but once he feels the cravings of nature within, we know that nothing will satisfy him but food.

This is the same way 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-Roman-Catholic character may do well enough for him under certain conditions; but once he awakes and arises from the dead (Ephesians 5:14), he will not rest content with these things. They will seem to him to be mere meaningless ceremonies and a waste of time. Once he sees his sin, he will know that he must see his Savior. 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 claim that four-fifths of the semi-Roman Catholicism of the last quarter of a century would never have existed if people had been taught more fully and clearly the nature, vileness, and sinfulness of sin.

Next, a proper view of sin is one of the best antidotes to the overstrained theories of perfection that we hear so much about in these times. I will only say a little about this, and in saying it I hope I will not give offense. If those who urge perfection on us mean nothing more than a general consistency and a careful attention to all the graces that make up the Christian character, we would not only bear with them, but we would agree with them entirely. By all means, let us aim high.

But if people 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 for months at a time not even have one sinful thought, I must honestly say that such an opinion appears to me very unscriptural.

I will go even further. I say that the opinion is very dangerous to those who hold it, and is very likely to depress, discourage, and hold people back from inquiring after salvation. I cannot find the slightest basis 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 are 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 that the best preservative against this temporary delusion about perfection that clouds some minds – I hope I may call it that – is a clear, full, and distinct understanding of the nature, sinfulness, and deceitfulness of sin.

Finally, a scriptural view of sin will prove to be an admirable antidote to those low views of personal holiness that 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 Christlike charity, kindness, good character, unselfishness, humility, gentleness, patience, self-denial, zeal to do good, and separation from the world are

far less appreciated than they ought to be, and they are far less common than they used to be in the days of our fathers.

I cannot pretend to enter fully into the causes of this state of things, and can only suggest speculation for consideration. It might be that professing religion has become so fashionable and comparatively easy in the present age that the streams that were once narrow and deep have become wide and shallow, and what we have gained in outward show we have lost in quality.

It might be that the vast increase of wealth in the last fifty years has insensibly introduced a plague of worldliness, 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 (2 Timothy 2:3). It might be that the enormous amount of contention that marks this age has insensibly dried up our spiritual lives. We have too often been content with zeal for orthodoxy and have neglected the strict realities of daily practical godliness.

**We must simply *repent*
and do our *first works*
(Revelation 2:5).**

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

As to the best remedy for the state of things I have mentioned, I will dare to give an opinion. Other schools of thought in the churches must judge for themselves. The cure for evangelical Christians, I am convinced, is to be found in a clearer understanding of the nature and sinfulness of sin. We do not need to go back to Egypt and borrow semi-Roman-Catholic practices in order to revive our spiritual lives. We do not need to restore the confessional or return to monasticism or asceticism. Nothing of the kind!

We must simply *repent* and do our *first works* (Revelation 2:5). We must return to first principles. We must go back to *the old paths* (Jeremiah 6:16). We must sit down humbly in the presence of God, look the whole subject in the face, and 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 very possible to live a careless, easy-going, half-worldly life, while at the same time maintaining evangelical principles and calling ourselves evangelical people!

Once we see that sin is far viler, far nearer to us, and sticks more closely to us than we had supposed, we will be led, I believe, to get nearer to Christ. Once we are drawn nearer to Christ, we will drink more deeply out of His fullness and learn more thoroughly to live the life of faith in Him, as Paul did. Once we have been taught to live the life of faith in Jesus and abide in Him, we will bear more fruit and will find ourselves stronger for duty, more patient in trial, more watchful over our poor weak hearts, and more like our Master in all our little daily ways.

In the same proportion that we realize how much Christ has done for us, we will labor to do much for Christ. Much forgiven, we will love much (Luke 7:47). As the apostle Paul says, *beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord with uncovered face, [we] are transformed from glory to glory into the same likeness, even as by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Whatever some may choose 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 Christian platforms almost every year. It has awakened an amount of interest and general attention throughout the land, for which we ought to be thankful.

Any movement based on sound principles that helps to deepen our spiritual lives 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 might bring down some fresh outpouring of the grace of the Spirit and be *life from the dead* in these later times (Romans 11:15). But as certain as I am, as I said earlier, that we must dig deep if we want to build high, I am convinced that the first step towards attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Chapter 2

Sanctification

Sanctify them in thy truth. (John 17:17)

For the will of God is your sanctification. (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

The subject of sanctification is one that many Christians, I am afraid, greatly dislike. Some even turn from it with scorn and disdain. The very last thing they would like is to be a “saint,” or a “sanctified” person. 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 is true, it is certain that unless we are sanctified, we will not be saved. There are three things that, according to the Bible, are absolutely necessary to the salvation of every man and woman in Christendom. These three things are justification, regeneration, and sanctification. All three meet in every child of God; he is born again, justified, and sanctified. He who lacks any one of these three things is not a true Christian in the sight of God, and will not be found in heaven and glorified in the last day if he dies in that condition.

It is a subject that is especially relevant in our day. Strange doctrines have lately arisen upon the subject of sanctification. Some people appear to confuse it with justification. Others dismiss it as almost nothing, under the pretense 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 moving from church to church and denomination to denomination in the vain hope that they will find what they want.

In a day like this, a calm examination of the subject as a main doctrine of the gospel may be of great use to our souls.

First, let us consider the true nature of sanctification.

Second, let us consider the visible marks of sanctification.

Finally, let us consider how justification and sanctification agree and are similar to one another, and how they differ and are unlike one another.

If, unhappily, you care for nothing except this world, making no profession of Christianity, I cannot expect you to take much interest in what I am writing. You will probably think that it is a matter of words and names and nice questions about which it does not matter what you hold and believe. But if you are a thoughtful, reasonable, and sensible Christian, I venture to say that you will find it worthwhile to have some clear ideas about sanctification.

The True Nature of Sanctification

First, we must consider the nature of sanctification. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of a sanctified person? Sanctification is that inward spiritual work that the Lord Jesus Christ works in a person by the Holy Spirit 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 a word* (1 Peter 3:1). A sanctified person according to Scripture is one upon whom Christ Jesus works in this way by His Spirit.

He who thinks that Jesus Christ only lived and died and rose again in order to provide justification and forgiveness of sins for His people

has much yet 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 also to deliver them from the dominion of their sins by placing the Holy Spirit in their hearts, not only to justify them, but also to sanctify them. He is, thus, not only their righteousness, but their sanctification. *Of him ye are reborn in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption* (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Let us hear what the Bible says: *For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified in the truth* (John 17:19). *Christ also loved the congregation and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her* (Ephesians 5:25-26). *Christ gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a people of his own, zealous of good works* (Titus 2:14). *Christ bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness* (1 Peter 2:24). *You, that were in another time alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now he has reconciled you in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight* (Colossians 1:21-22).

Let the meaning of these five texts be carefully considered. If these words mean anything, they teach that Christ undertakes the sanctification of His believing people, just as He undertakes their justification. Both are alike provided for in that *everlasting covenant . . . ordered in all things, and it shall be kept* (2 Samuel 23:5), of which the Mediator is Christ. In fact, Christ in one place is called *he that sanctifies*, and His people are called *those who are sanctified* (Hebrews 2:11).

The subject before us is of such deep and vast importance that it requires fences, guarding, clearing up, and marking out on every side. A doctrine that is needful for salvation can never be too sharply developed or brought too fully into light. To clear away the confusion between one doctrine and another, which is so unhappily common among Christians, and to map out the precise relationship between one truth and another in Christianity is one way to attain accuracy in our theology. I will therefore not hesitate to lay before my readers a series

of connected propositions or statements, drawn from Scripture, that I think will be found useful in defining the exact nature of sanctification.

Sanctification, then, is the unchanging result of that vital union with Christ that true faith gives to a Christian. *He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit* (John 15:5). The branch that bears no fruit is not a living branch of the vine. The union with Christ that produces no effect on one's heart and life is a mere formal union, and it is worthless before God. The faith that does not have a sanctifying influence on one's character is no better than the faith of demons. *Faith, if it does not have works, is dead in and of itself* (James 2:17). It is not the gift of God. It is not the faith of God's elect.

Simply put, where there is no sanctification of life, there is no real faith in Christ. True faith works by love. It compels a person 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 who died for him. Being forgiven much, he loves much. He whom the blood cleanses walks in the light (1 John 1:7). He who has real lively hope in Christ *purifies himself, even as he is pure* (1 John 3:3).

Sanctification is the outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration. He who is born again and is made a new creation receives a new nature and a new creed, and he always lives a new life. If someone claims to be regenerated yet lives carelessly in sin or worldliness, it is a regeneration invented by uninspired theologians, but is never mentioned in Scripture. On the contrary, John directly says that he who is born of God does not commit sin, does righteousness, loves the brethren, keeps himself, and overcomes the world (1 John 2:29; 3:9-14; 5:4-18).

Basically, 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 difficult saying to many people, but difficult or not, it is simple Bible truth. It is written plainly, that he who is born of God is one whose *seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God* (1 John 3:9).

Sanctification is the only certain evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is essential to salvation. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person is not of him (Romans 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 Paul, *is this: Charity, joy, peace, tolerance, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*, and such like (Galatians 5:22-23). Where these qualities are to be found, the Spirit is there. Where these qualities are lacking, people are spiritually dead before God.

The Holy Spirit is compared to the wind, and like the wind, He cannot be seen by our human eyes. But just as we know there is a wind by the effect it produces on waves and trees and smoke, so we can know that the Holy Spirit is in a person by the effects He produces in the person's conduct. It is foolish to think that we have the Spirit if we do not also *walk in the Spirit* (Galatians 5:25). We can depend on it as an absolute certainty that where there is no holy living, there is no Holy Spirit. The seal that the Spirit stamps on Christ's people is sanctification. As many as are actually *led by the Spirit of God, the same are sons of God* (Romans 8:14).

Sanctification is the only certain sign 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 has 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 declared about election, it is that elect men and women can be known and distinguished by holy lives. It is expressly written that they are elect through sanctification (1 Peter 1:2), chosen unto salvation through sanctification (2 Thessalonians 2:13), predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Romans 8:29), and chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world that they should be holy (Ephesians 1:4).

He who 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.

Therefore, when Paul saw the working faith and laboring love and patient hope of the Thessalonian believers, he said that he knew their election of God (1 Thessalonians 1:3-4). He who 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 difficult to know what people really are, and many who make a fair show outwardly in religion might 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 that there is no election. The church catechism correctly and wisely teaches that the Holy Spirit “sanctifies all the elect people of God.”

Sanctification is something that will always be seen. Like the great Head of the church from whom it springs, it *cannot be hid* (Matthew 5:14). *Every tree is known by its own fruit* (Luke 6:44). A truly sanctified person can be so clothed with humility that he can see in himself nothing but infirmity and defects. Like Moses when he came down from the mountain, he might not be aware that his face shines (Exodus 34:29). Like the righteous in the mighty parable of the sheep and the goats, he might not see that he has done anything worthy of his Master’s notice and commendation: *Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee? or thirsty and give thee drink?* (Matthew 25:37). But whether he sees it himself or not, others will always see in him a tone, taste, character, and habit of life unlike that of other people.

The very idea of a person being sanctified while no holiness can be seen in his life is flat nonsense and is 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 person:¹² 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 beast not recognized in the Bible!

Sanctification is something for which every believer is responsible. I would not be mistaken in saying this. I hold as strongly as anyone that everyone on earth is accountable to God and that all the lost will be speechless and without excuse at the last day. Everyone has power to *lose his own soul* (Matthew 16:26). But while I believe this, I maintain that believers are particularly and especially responsible, and have a specific responsibility, to live holy lives.

12 There is mention in Scripture of a twofold sanctification, and consequently of a twofold holiness. The first is common unto persons and things, consisting in the peculiar dedication, consecration, or separation of them unto the service of God, by 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 there is a peculiar dedication and separation unto God. But in the sense mentioned, this was solitary and alone. No more belonged unto it but this sacred separation, nor was there any other effect of this.

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 except their own if they are not holy? Who can they blame except themselves if they are not sanctified? 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 that is far too often forgotten.

A person who professes to be a true Christian, while sitting still, content with a very low degree of sanctification (if indeed he has any at all), and calmly telling you he can do nothing, is a very pitiful sight and a very ignorant person. 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 can be sure that He expects us to use our grace and not to go to sleep. It is forgetfulness of this that causes many believers to *grieve the Holy Spirit* (Ephesians 4:30) and makes them very useless and uncomfortable Christians.

Sanctification is something that occurs by growth and degrees.

Sanctification is something that occurs by growth and degrees. A person may climb from one step to another in holiness and be far more sanctified at one period of his life than another. He cannot be more pardoned and more justified than he is when he first believes, though he may feel it more, but he can certainly be more sanctified, because every grace in his new character can 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* (John 17:17), and of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians, *The very God of peace sanctify you* (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

In both cases, the expression plainly implies the possibility of increased sanctification, while such an expression as "justify them" is never once applied to a believer in Scripture, because he cannot be more justified than he is. I can find no basis in Scripture for the doctrine of "imputed sanctification." It is a doctrine that seems to me to confuse things that differ and to lead to very evil consequences. Not least, it is a doctrine that is directly contradicted by the experience of all the most

eminent Christians. If there is any point on which God's holiest saints agree, it is that they see more, know more, feel more, do more, repent more, and believe more as they continue in their spiritual lives, and in proportion to the closeness of their walk with God. They *grow in grace*, as Peter exhorts believers to do (2 Peter 3:18), and *they continue to grow*, according to the words of Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

Sanctification depends greatly on a diligent use of scriptural means. When I speak of "means," I am referring to 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 that He has begun in the inward man. Let people call this legal doctrine if they want to, but I will never back away from declaring my belief that there are no spiritual gains without pains. I would as soon expect a farmer to prosper in business who was content with sowing his fields and never looking at them until harvest, as to expect a believer to attain much holiness who was not diligent about his Bible reading, prayer, and the use of his Sundays. Our God is a God who works by means, and He will never bless the soul of that person who pretends to be so superior and spiritual that he can get along without them.

Sanctification is not something that keeps a person from having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict. By conflict, I mean a struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, between the flesh and the spirit, which are to be found together in every believer (Galatians 5:17). A deep sense of that struggle and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it are no proof that a person is not sanctified. Rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition, and they prove that we are not dead, but alive.

A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but has 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. I recommend that all my readers carefully study that chapter. I am quite satisfied that it does not describe the experience of an unconverted person or of a young and unestablished Christian, but that of an old experienced saint in close communion with God.

No one except such a person could say, *I delight in the law of God after the inward man* (Romans 7:22). I believe, furthermore, that what I say is proven by the experience of all the most eminent servants of Christ who have ever lived. The full proof is to be seen in their journals, their autobiographies, and their lives. Believing all this, I will never hesitate to tell people that inward conflict is no proof that a person is not holy, and that they must not think they are not sanctified because they do not feel entirely free from inward struggle. We will doubtless have such freedom in heaven, but we will 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 *a multitude of tabernacles* (Song of Solomon 6:13). Let the words of the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Articles be well considered by all: “The infection of nature remains in those who are regenerated,” and “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.”

Sanctification is not something that will justify anyone, and yet it pleases God. This may seem wonderful, and it is true. The holiest actions of the holiest saints who 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 deserve heaven is simply absurd. *By the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified in his sight* (Romans 3:20). *We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law* (Romans 3:28). The only righteousness in which we can appear before God is the righteousness of another – 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 that we should be ready to die to maintain.

For all this, however, the Bible distinctly teaches that the holy actions of a sanctified person, although imperfect, are pleasing in the sight of God. *With such sacrifices God is well pleased* (Hebrews 13:16). *Obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord* (Colossians 3:20). *We . . . do those things that are pleasing in his sight* (1 John 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, even though it is only by picking a daisy or walking across a room, so our Father in heaven is 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 purpose of obeying and glorifying Him, He is very pleased. Those who dispute this would do well to study the Twelfth Article of the Church of England.

Sanctification is something that will be absolutely necessary as a witness to our character in the great day of judgment. It will be utterly useless to plead that we believe in Christ unless our faith has had some sanctifying effect and has been seen in our lives. Evidence, evidence, evidence, will be the one thing needed when the great white throne is set, when the books are opened, when the graves give up their tenants, and when the dead are arraigned before the judgment seat of God. Without some evidence that our faith in Christ Jesus was real and genuine, we will 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 one 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 our works and actions will be considered and examined in it (John 5:29; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:13). Anyone who thinks that 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 harm, that if he goes to the judgment seat of God without some evidence of grace, it would have been better for him to have never been born.

Sanctification is absolutely necessary in order to train and prepare

us for heaven. Most people hope to go to heaven when they die, but few, it may be feared, take the trouble to consider whether or not they would enjoy heaven if they got there. Heaven is essentially a holy place. Its inhabitants are all holy. Its activities 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 idea of a purgatory after death that will 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 afterward in glory. The treasured idea of many that dying people need nothing except a quick confession and forgiveness of sins to make them ready 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.

What could an unsanctified person do in heaven if he did get there? Let that question be fairly considered and fairly answered. No one can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element and where all around him is not pleasing 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 until then, will I admit that an unsanctified person could be happy in heaven.

I lay down these twelve statements about sanctification with a firm persuasion that they are true, and I ask all who read these pages to consider them well. Each point could be 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 proven untrue. I only ask for them a fair and impartial hearing. I believe in my conscience that they are likely to assist people in attaining clear views of sanctification.

The idea of a purgatory after death that will turn sinners into saints is a lying invention of man and is nowhere taught in the Bible.

The Visible Marks of Sanctification

I now proceed to take up the second point that I proposed to consider. That point is the visible evidence of sanctification. What are the visible marks of a sanctified person? What should we expect to see in him?

This is a very wide and difficult part of our subject. It is wide because it necessitates the mention of many details that cannot be handled fully in the limits of a book like this. It is difficult because it cannot possibly be presented without giving offense. No matter what, truth ought to be spoken, and this is one truth that especially needs to be spoken in the present day.

True sanctification does not consist in merely talking about Christianity and the Bible. This is a point that should never 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 preaching and Christian beliefs that they acquire an unholy familiarity with its words and phrases, and sometimes talk so fluently about its doctrines that you might think they are true Christians. In fact, it is sickening and disgusting to hear the indifferent and superficial language that many pour out about conversion, the Savior, the gospel, finding peace, free grace, and more, 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 instructs us to give to His service. God does not want His people to be mere empty vessels, sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals (1 Corinthians 13:1). We must be sanctified not in word only, *but in deed and in truth* (1 John 3:18).

True sanctification does not consist in temporary religious feelings. This is another point about which a warning is greatly needed. Mission services and revival meetings are attracting great attention in every part of the land and are producing a great sensation. Some churches seem to have taken a new lease on life and exhibit new activity, and we ought to thank God for it, but these things have accompanying dangers as well as advantages.

Wherever wheat is sown, the devil is sure to sow tares (Matthew 13:36-43). Many, it may be feared, appear moved and touched and

stirred up under the preaching of the gospel, while their hearts are not really changed at all. A kind of emotional excitement from the contagion of seeing others weeping, rejoicing, or affected is really what has happened. 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 (Matthew 13:20), but after a little while they fall away and return to the world, and their hearts are harder and worse than before. Like Jonah's gourd, they come up suddenly in a night and perish in a night (Jonah 4:6-7).

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* (Jeremiah 8:11). Let us urge on everyone who exhibits new interest in true Christianity to be content with nothing short of the deep, solid, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Reaction, after false religious excitement, is a most deadly disease of soul. When the devil is only temporarily cast out of a person in the heat of a revival and soon returns to his house, the last state becomes *worse than the first* (Matthew 12:45).

True sanctification does not consist in outward formalism and external devoutness.

It is a thousand times better to begin more slowly and "continue in the word" steadfastly (John 8:31) than to begin in a hurry without counting the cost (Luke 14:28) and later look back with Lot's wife and return to the world (Genesis 19:26). I know no condition of the soul that is more dangerous than to imagine we are born again and sanctified by the Holy Spirit because we have picked up a few religious feelings.

True sanctification does not consist in outward formalism and external devoutness. This is an enormous deception, but sadly, it is a very common one. Thousands appear to imagine that true holiness is found in an excessive quantity of external 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 minor self-denials; in wearing distinctive clothing; and in the use of religious pictures and crosses.

I freely admit that some people take up these things from conscientious

motives, and they 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, ornamental, formal style of Christianity are absorbed in worldliness and plunge headlong into its ceremonies and vanities, I believe that there is need to speak very plainly on the subject. There may be an immense amount of outward service while there is not a bit of real sanctification.

Sanctification does not consist in getting away from our responsibilities in life and renouncing our social duties. In every age it has been a snare with many to attempt to get away from their duties in this world 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 futile 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 charitable organization is not the high road to sanctification. True holiness does not make a Christian evade difficulties, but it allows him to face and overcome them. Jesus wants His people to show that His grace is not a mere greenhouse plant that can only thrive under shelter, but is a strong, hardy thing that can flourish in every circumstance of life. It is doing our duty in that condition to which God has called us – like salt in the midst of corruption and light in the midst of darkness – that is a primary element in sanctification.

It is not the person who hides himself in a cave, but the person who glorifies God as employer or employee, parent or child, in the family and in the street, in business and in trade, who is the biblical version of a sanctified person. Our Master Himself said in His last prayer, *I do not pray that thou should take them out of the world, but that thou should keep them from the evil* (John 17:15).

Sanctification does not consist in the occasional performance of right actions. It is the habitual working of a new heavenly principle within the heart that runs through all of a person'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, that only sends forth water when worked upon from without, but it is 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 (Mark 6:20). In the same way, there are many people today who seem to have occasional 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 moment of conscience. Yet the whole time, any intelligent observer can see plainly that they are not converted and they know nothing of sanctification. A true saint, like Hezekiah, will be wholehearted (2 Chronicles 31:21). He will count God’s commandments *concerning all things to be right*, and he will hate *every false way* (Psalm 119:128).

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 Spirit 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 explained them and showed the searching nature of their requirements. The apostle Paul never made light of the law; on the contrary, he says, *The law is good, if a man uses it legitimately* (1 Timothy 1:8), and *I delight with the law of God with the inward man* (Romans 7:22). He who pretends to be a saint while ignoring the Ten Commandments and thinking nothing of lying, hypocrisy, cheating, ill-temper, slander, taking God’s name in vain, drunkenness, and violating the seventh commandment is under a fearful delusion. He will find it hard to prove that he is a “saint” in the last day!

Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitually trying to do Christ’s will and to live by His practical precepts. These precepts are

found scattered everywhere throughout the four Gospels, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount. He who supposes they were spoken without the intention of promoting holiness and that a Christian does not need to listen to them in his daily life is really little better than a madman, and is at the least a very ignorant person.

To hear some people talk and to read some people's writings, one might think that our blessed Lord, when He was on earth, never taught anything but doctrine, leaving 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 our Lord's disciples ought to be and do is continually brought forward in our Lord's teaching. A truly sanctified person will never forget this. He serves a Master who said, *Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you* (John 15:14).

Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitually desiring to live up to the standard that the apostle Paul set before the churches in his

writings. That standard is to be found in the closing chapters of nearly all his letters. The common idea of many people 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 it is a sad proof of the ignorance of Scripture that prevails in our day.

*Ye are my friends if
ye do whatsoever
I command you
(John 15:14).*

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 area of life, and about our daily habits, temperament, and behavior to one another. These directions were written down by inspiration of God for the perpetual guidance of professing Christians. He who does not adhere to them may possibly become a member of a church, but he certainly is not what the Bible calls a sanctified person.

Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the active graces that our Lord so beautifully exemplified – especially the grace of love. *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 everyone know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another* (John 13:34-35). A sanctified person will try to do good in the world. He

will try to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will strive to be like his Master, full of kindness and love to everyone – not in word only, by calling people “dear,” but by deeds and actions and self-denying work, according as he has opportunity.

The selfish person who professes to be a Christian, wrapping himself up in his own conceit of superior knowledge, seeming not to care whether others sink or swim or go to heaven or hell as long as he goes to church and is respected and is called a “faithful member” – such a person 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 to be the Savior of those who know nothing of following His example. Saving faith and real converting grace will always produce some conformity to the image of Jesus. *Being clothed with the new man, who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one that created him* (Colossians 3:10).

Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the passive graces of Christianity. When I speak of passive graces, I mean those graces that are especially shown in submission to the will of God, being Christlike within, and being patient and kind toward one another. Few people, perhaps, unless they have examined the point, have any 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 that Peter dwells upon in commending our Lord Jesus Christ’s example to our notice: *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps who did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth, who, when he was cursed, did not return the curse; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but committed himself to him that judges righteously* (1 Peter 2:21-23). This is the one profession that the Lord’s prayer requires us to make and the one point that is commented upon at the end of the prayer: *Set us free from our debts, as we set free our debtors* (Matthew 6:12). This is the point that occupies a third of the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Nine are named, and three of these, longsuffering, gentleness, and meekness, are unquestionably passive graces (Galatians 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 that have the greatest influence on the world. Of one thing I feel very sure – it is nonsense to pretend to desire 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 irritable and grouchy tempers in daily life and are constantly harsh with their tongues and disagreeable to all around them – spiteful people, vindictive people, revengeful people, malicious people – of whom, sadly, the world is only too full – they do not know much about sanctification.

Such are the visible signs of a sanctified person. I do not say that they are all to be seen equally in all God's people. I freely admit that in the best people they are not fully and perfectly exhibited. But I do say confidently that the things of which I have been speaking are the biblical marks of sanctification, and that those who know nothing of them may well doubt whether they have any grace at all. Whatever others may say, I will never back away from saying that genuine sanctification is something that can be seen, and that the characteristics I have tried to describe are more or less the characteristics of a sanctified person.

The Similarities and Differences of Sanctification and Justification

I now propose to consider the distinction between justification and sanctification. Where do they agree and where do they differ? This is a matter of great importance, though I fear it will not seem so to all my readers. I will discuss it briefly, but I dare not pass it over completely. Too many are inclined to look at nothing but the surface of things in Christianity and regard nice distinctions in theology as simply questions of words and names that are of little real value. But I warn all who are sincere about their souls that the discomfort that 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. Justification 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 ways are justification and sanctification alike?

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

Both are part of that great work of salvation that 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.

Both are to be found in the same people. Those who are justified are always sanctified, and those who are sanctified are always justified. God has joined them together, and they cannot be divided.

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.

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, and without being made ready for eternal glory as well as being given a right to be there. The one is just as necessary as the other.

Those are the points on which justification and sanctification agree.

Let us now reverse the picture and see where they differ.

Justification is regarding and judging a person to be righteous for the sake of another, even Jesus Christ the Lord. Sanctification is actually making a person inwardly righteous, though it may be in a very small degree.

The righteousness we have by our justification is not our own, but is 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 worked in us by the Holy Spirit, but mingled with much infirmity and imperfection.

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 great importance, and God instructs us to fight, watch, pray, strive, try, and work.

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

Justification allows no growth or increase; a person is as much justified the hour he first comes to Christ by faith as he will be to all eternity. Sanctification is very much a progressive work, and it allows continual growth and enlargement as long as a man lives.

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.

Justification gives us our claim to heaven and boldness to enter in. Sanctification makes us suitable for heaven and prepares us to enjoy it when we dwell there.

Justification is the act of God concerning us, and it is not easily perceived by others. Sanctification is the work of God within us, and it cannot be hidden in its outward manifestation from the eyes of men.

I present these distinctions to the attention of all my readers, and I ask you to consider them well. I am convinced that one substantial reason for the darkness and uncomfortable feelings of many well-meaning people in the matter of Christianity is their habit of mixing together, and not distinguishing, justification and sanctification. It can never be too strongly impressed on our minds that they are two separate things. There is no doubt that they cannot be divided, and everyone who is a partaker of one is a partaker of both. But they should never, never be confounded, and the distinction between them should never be forgotten.

It only remains for me now to bring this subject to a conclusion by a few plain words of application. The nature and visible signs of sanctification have been discussed. What practical reflections should this matter raise in our minds?

For one thing, let us all awake to a sense of the perilous condition of many professing Christians. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord; without sanctification, there is no salvation (Hebrews 12:14). What an enormous amount of so-called Christianity, then, is perfectly useless! What an immense proportion of church attenders are on the broad

road that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13)! The thought is dreadful, crushing, and overwhelming. Oh, that preachers and teachers would open their eyes and realize the condition of souls around them! Oh, that people could be persuaded to *flee from the wrath to come* (Luke 3:7)! 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!

For another thing, let us be certain of our own condition and never rest until we feel and know that we are sanctified ourselves. What are our tastes, choices, likings, and inclinations? This is the great test question. It matters little what we wish and hope and 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.

For another thing, if we desire sanctification, our course is clear and plain – we must begin with Christ. We must go to Him as sinners, with no plea but that of absolute 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 toward sanctification, no less than justification, is to come with faith to Christ. We must first live and then work.

What are our tastes, choices, likings, and inclinations? This is the great test question.

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

For another thing, let us not expect too much from our own hearts here below. At our best, we will find in ourselves daily cause for

humbling ourselves, discovering that we are needy debtors to mercy and grace every hour. The more light we have, the more we will see our own imperfection. We were sinners when we began, and we will find ourselves to be sinners still as we go on; we may be renewed, pardoned, and justified, yet we remain sinners to the very end. Our absolute perfection is yet to come, and the expectation of it is one reason why we should long for heaven.

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 holy living, and while others are not ashamed to live without any holiness at all – content with a mere routine of church attendance, but never getting anywhere, 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 be convinced, no matter what others may say, that holiness is happiness, and that the person who gets through life most comfortably is the one who is sanctified. No doubt there are some true Christians who, because of poor health, family trials, or other secret causes, enjoy little sensible comfort and go mourning all their days on the way to heaven, but these are uncommon 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 that the world can neither give nor take away. The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness (Proverbs 3:17). *Those who love thy law have great peace* (Psalm 119:165). It was said by One who cannot lie, *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light* (Matthew 11:30), but it is also written that *There is no peace for the wicked* (Isaiah 48:22).

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The subject of sanctification is of such deep importance, and the mistakes made about it so many and great, that I strongly recommend reading *Owen on the Holy Spirit* for all who want to study more thoroughly the whole doctrine of sanctification. No single book like mine can embrace it all.

Chapter 3

Holiness

*Holiness, without which no one shall
see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14)*

The text above opens up a subject of deep importance. That subject is practical holiness. It suggests questions that demand the attention of all professing Christians: Are we holy? Will we see the Lord?

Those questions can never be out of season. The wise man tells us that there is *a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak* (Ecclesiastes 3:4, 7); but there is no time, no, not even a day, in which we ought not to be holy. Are we holy?

That question concerns all classes and conditions of people. Some are rich and some are poor, some learned and some unlearned, some employers and some employees; but there is no class or condition in life in which we should not be holy. Are we?

How does your account stand between your soul and God? In this hurrying, bustling world, let us stand still for a few minutes and consider the matter of holiness. I could have chosen a subject more popular and pleasant. I am sure I might have found one easier to handle, but 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 to us that without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

I will try, by God's help, to examine what true holiness is and the reason why it is so needful. Then I will try to point out the only way in

which holiness can be attained. I have already approached this subject from a doctrinal side. Let me now try to present it in a more plain and practical point of view.

True practical holiness: What type of people are they whom God calls holy?

A person may go great lengths and yet never reach true holiness. It is not knowledge, for Balaam had that. It is not a bold profession of following Jesus, for Judas Iscariot had that. It is not doing many things, for Herod had that. It is not just having zeal for certain aspects of God's Word, for Jehu had that. Holiness is not morality and outward respectability of conduct, for the young ruler told about in John 3 had that. It is not simply taking pleasure in hearing preachers, for the Jews in Ezekiel's time had that. It is not even in keeping company with godly people, for Joab and Gehazi and Demas had that. Yet none of these people were holy! These things alone are not holiness. A person 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 lack of scriptural instruction on the subject, but I fear that I might give a defective view of holiness and not say all that should be said, or that I might say things about it that should not be said, and so do harm. Let me, however, try to draw a picture of holiness so that we can see it clearly before the eyes of our minds. Only let it never be forgotten that my account is but a poor imperfect outline at best.

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 with 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 is the one who is the most holy.

A holy man or woman will strive to avoid every known sin and to keep every known commandment. He will have a decided inclination of mind toward God and a strong desire to do His will. He will have a greater fear of displeasing God than of displeasing the world, and he will have a love for all of God's ways. He will feel what Paul felt when

he said, *For I delight with the law of God with the inward man* (Romans 7:22), and what David felt when he said, *I have esteemed all thy precepts concerning all things to be right and I have hated every false way* (Psalm 119:128).

A holy person 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 labor to have the mind that was in Him (Philippians 2:5) and to be conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). It will be his goal to bear with and forgive others, even as Christ forgave us (Colossians 3:13). He will desire to be unselfish, even as Christ pleased not Himself (Romans 15:3). He will want to walk in love, even as Christ loved us (Ephesians 5:2). He will aim to be lowly-minded and humble, even as Christ made Himself of no reputation and humbled Himself (Philippians 2:7).

He will remember that Christ was a faithful witness for the truth (Revelation 1:5), that He came not to do His own will (John 6:38), that it was His meat and drink to do His Father's will (John 4:34), that He would continually deny Himself in order to minister to others (Matthew 16:24), that He was meek and patient under undeserved insults (Isaiah 53:7), that He thought more of godly poor men than of kings (Luke 6:20), that He was full of love and compassion to sinners (Matthew 9:36), that He was bold and uncompromising in denouncing sin (Matthew 23:13-37), that He did not seek the praise of men when He might have had it (John 5:41), that He went about doing good (Acts 10:38), that He was separate from worldly people (John 17:16-19), that He continued instant in prayer (Luke 6:12), and that He would not let even His nearest relations stand in His way when God's work was to be done (Luke 2:48-49).

Happy is he who has
learned to make Christ
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and for example!

A holy person will try to remember these things. He will try to shape his course in life by them. He will lay to heart the saying of John, *He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked* (1 John 2:6), and the saying of Peter, that Jesus *suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps* (1 Peter 2:21). Happy is he who has learned to make Christ his all, both for salvation

and for example! Much time would be saved and much sin prevented if people would more often ask themselves the question, “What would Jesus Christ have said and done if He were in my place?”

A holy person will follow after meekness, longsuffering, gentleness, patience, a kind attitude, and control of his tongue. He will bear much, forbear much, overlook much, and be slow to talk of standing on his rights. We see bright examples of this in the behavior of David when Shimei cursed him (2 Samuel 16:10-12), and of Moses when Aaron and Miriam spoke against him (Numbers 12).

A holy person will follow after moderation and self-denial. He will labor to subdue the desires of his body – to crucify *the flesh with its affections and lusts* (Galatians 5:24) and to restrain his passions and his carnal inclinations, lest at any time they break loose. Oh, what a message that is of the Lord Jesus to the apostles, *Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with excess and drunkenness and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares* (Luke 21:34); and that of the apostle Paul, *I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection, lest preaching to others, I myself should become reprobate* (1 Corinthians 9:27).

A holy person will pursue love and brotherly kindness. He will endeavor to observe the golden rule of doing as he would want others to do to him and speaking as he would want others to speak to him (Matthew 7:12). He will be full of affection towards his brethren – towards their bodies, their property, their characters, their feelings, and their souls. *He that loves his neighbour*, says Paul, *has fulfilled the law* (Romans 13:8). He will abhor all lying, slandering, backbiting, cheating, dishonesty, and unfair dealing, even in the smallest things. He will strive to adorn his Christian life by all his outward appearance and conduct and to make it lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all around him. What condemning words are 1 Corinthians 13 and the Sermon on the Mount when laid alongside the conduct of many professing Christians!

A holy person will desire a spirit of mercy and benevolence toward others. He will not stand idle all day long. He will not be content with doing no harm, but he will try to do good. He will strive to be useful in his day and generation, and to lessen the spiritual needs and misery around him, as much as he can. This is how Dorcas was, *full of good*

works and alms-deeds which she did (Acts 9:36). She did not merely plan and talk about doing good things, but she did good things. This is how Paul was, too. *I will very gladly spend and be utterly spent for your souls*, he says, *though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved* (2 Corinthians 12:15).

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

A holy person 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 lazy if he did not fear being discovered. 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 could have required money from the Jews there and required them to support him. The former governors had done so. No one would have blamed him if he did, but he said, *I did not do so because of the fear of God* (Nehemiah 5:15).

A holy person
will follow after
purity of heart.

A holy person will seek humility. He will desire, in lowliness of mind, to esteem all others better than himself (Philippians 2:3). 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 said he was *but dust and ashes* (Genesis 18:27); of Jacob's feeling when he said, *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies* (Genesis 32:10); of Job's feeling when he said, *I am vile* (Job 40:4); and of Paul's feeling when he said that he was the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Holy Bradford, that faithful martyr of Christ, would sometimes finish his letters with these words, "A most miserable sinner, John Bradford."¹³ Good old Mr.

¹³ John Bradford (1510-1555) was an English Reformer, preacher, and author who was burned

Grimshaw's last words, when he lay on his deathbed, were these, "Here goes an unprofitable servant."¹⁴

A holy person will seek to be faithful in all the duties and relations in life. He will not merely try to do as well as others who take no thought for their souls, but he will try to do 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 to the Lord* (Colossians 3:23), and *not slothful in earnest care, but fervent in the Spirit, serving the Lord* (Romans 12:11).

Holy people should aim at doing everything well. They should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything poorly if they can help it. Like Daniel, they should seek to give no *occasion against* themselves, except *in the law of his God* (Daniel 6:5). They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good employers and good employees, good neighbors, good friends, good citizens, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good at home. Holiness is worth little indeed if it does not bear this kind of fruit. The Lord Jesus put a searching question to His people when He asked, *What do ye more than others?* (Matthew 5:47).

Last, but not least, a holy person will desire to be spiritually minded. He will endeavor to set his affections entirely on things above (Colossians 3:2), and to hold things on earth with a very loose hand. He will not neglect the business of the life that now is, but his mind and thoughts will give priority to the life to come. He will aim to live like one whose treasure is in heaven, and he will want to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim traveling to his home. To commune with God in prayer, in the Bible, and in the assembly of His people will be the holy person's main enjoyments. He will value every place and thing and company in proportion to how they draw him nearer to God. He will enter into something of David's feeling when he says, *My soul has followed hard after thee* (Psalm 63:8) and *My portion, O LORD, . . . will be to keep thy words* (Psalm 119:57).

That is the outline of holiness that I want to present. That is the

at the stake on July 1, 1555.

14 William Grimshaw (1708-1763) was an English evangelical preacher and a friend of the Wesleys.

character which those who are called “holy” follow after. Those are the main features of a holy person.

Let me say that I hope no one will misunderstand me. I am not without fear that my meaning will be mistaken or 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.

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 (Romans 7:24); that often when he wants to do good, evil is present with him (Romans 7:21); that the old nature is blocking all his movements and, as it were, trying to prevent every step he takes. It is the excellence of a holy man, though, 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* (Daniel 9:25).

I do not say that holiness comes to maturity and perfection all at once, or that these graces I have touched on must be found in full bloom and vigor before you can call someone holy. No – far from it. Sanctification is always a progressive work. Some people’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 beginnings* (Zechariah 4:10).

Sanctification at its very best is an imperfect work. The history of the brightest saints who ever lived will contain many an “although,” “but,” and “notwithstanding” before you reach the end. The gold will never be without some dross. The light will never shine without some clouds until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem. The sun itself has spots upon its face. The holiest people have many blemishes and defects when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. Their life is a continual warfare with sin, the world, and the devil. Sometimes you will see them being overcome rather than overcoming. The flesh is always fighting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh (Galatians 5:17), and in many things they offend all (James 3:2).

But still, despite all this, I am sure that to have such a character as I

have vaguely drawn is the heart's desire and prayer of all true Christians. They press toward it, even 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, even if it is not yet what they are.

I boldly and confidently say that true holiness is a great reality. It is something in a person that can be seen, known, described, 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 would all be ready to make allowance for much backsliding and for much occasional deadness in professing Christians. I know that a road may lead from one point to another and yet have many winding turns. A person can be truly holy and yet be drawn aside by many weaknesses. Gold is not less gold if it is mingled with alloy, nor is light less light if it is faint and dim, nor is grace less grace because it is young and weak. But after every allowance, I cannot see how anyone deserves to be called holy who willfully allows himself to sin and is not humbled and ashamed because of sin. I dare not call anyone holy who makes a habit of willfully neglecting known duties or willfully doing what he knows God has commanded him not to do. The Puritan John Owen well said, "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.

Some Reasons Why Practical Holiness Is So Important

Can holiness save us? Can holiness put away sin, cover iniquities, make satisfaction for transgressions, or pay our debt to God? No – not a single bit. God forbid that I should ever say so. Holiness can do none of these things. The brightest saints are all *unprofitable slaves* (Luke 17:10). Our purest works are no better than filthy rags when tried by the light of God's holy law (Isaiah 64:6). The white robe that Jesus offers and faith puts on must be our only righteousness, the name of Jesus Christ must

be our only confidence, and the Lamb's Book of Life must be our only claim 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 motive or defective in performance. *For by the deeds of the law, no flesh shall be justified in his sight* (Romans 3:20). *For 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* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Why, then, is holiness so important? Why does the apostle Paul say that without it *no man shall see the Lord*? Let me give a few reasons.

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 the heavens* (Matthew 5:20), and *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in the heavens is perfect* (Matthew 5:48). Paul tells the Thessalonians, *For the will of God is your sanctification* (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Peter says, *As he who has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; for it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy* (1 Peter 1:15-16). "In this," says Leighton, "law and Gospel agree."¹⁵

Christ also loved the congregation and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her in the washing of water by the word (Ephesians 5:25-26)

We must be holy because this is one main objective and purpose for which Christ came into the world. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *He died for all that those who live should not live from now on unto themselves, but unto him who died and rose again for them* (2 Corinthians 5:15). To the Ephesians, Paul said, *Christ also loved the congregation and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her in the washing of water by the word* (Ephesians 5:25-26). Paul wrote to Titus that Jesus *gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a people of his own, zealous of good works* (Titus 2:14).

Basically, to speak of people being saved from the guilt of sin without

¹⁵ Archbishop Robert Leighton (1611-1684) was an ordained minister in Scotland and a professor at the University of Edinburgh. He tried to reconcile the Presbyterians and Episcopalians in Scotland, but was unsuccessful in this.

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* (1 Peter 1:2). Are they predestined? It is to *be conformed to the image of his son* (Romans 8:29). Are they chosen? It is that they *should be holy* (Ephesians 1:4). Are they called? It is *with a holy calling* (2 Timothy 1:9). Are they afflicted? It is that they may be *partakers of his holiness* (Hebrews 12:10). Jesus is a complete Savior. He does not merely take away the guilt of a believer's sin. He does more – He breaks its power.

We must be holy because this is the only solid evidence that we have a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Twelfth Article of our Church rightly says 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 that goes no further than the profession of the lips and has no influence on a person’s character (James 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, and it will purify the heart.

I know that people are fond of talking about deathbed experiences. They will rest on words spoken in the hours of fear, pain, and weakness, as if they might take comfort in them about the friends they lose. But I am afraid that in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases, such experiences are not to be depended on. I suspect that, with rare exceptions, people die just as they have lived. A holy life is the only safe evidence that we are one with Christ and that Christ is in us. Those who live unto the Lord are generally the only people who die in the Lord. If we want to 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 Trail’s, “That man’s state is naught, and his faith unsound, that find not his hopes of glory purifying to his heart and life.”¹⁶

We must be holy because this is the only proof that we love the Lord

16 Robert Trail (1642-1716) was a Presbyterian church leader in Scotland.

Jesus Christ in sincerity. This is a point on which He has spoken most plainly. In the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of John, He says, *If ye love me, keep my commandments* (John 14:15); *He that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me* (John 14:21); *He who loves me will keep my words* (John 14:23); and *Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you* (John 15:14).

It would be difficult to find plainer words than these, and woe to those who neglect them! Certainly that person 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 occurred. It was sin that wove the crown of thorns; it was sin that pierced our Lord's hands, feet, and side; it was sin that brought Him to Gethsemane and Calvary, to the cross and to the grave. Our hearts must be cold if we do not hate sin and labor to get rid of it, even though we may have to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye in doing it (Matthew 5:29-30).

We must be holy because this is the only solid 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 see a kind of family likeness. It is much the same with the children of God. The Lord Jesus says, *If ye were Abraham's sons, ye would do the works of Abraham. If God were your Father, ye would surely love me* (John 8:39, 42).

If people have no likeness to the Father in heaven, it is pointless to talk of their being His children. If we know nothing of holiness, we can flatter ourselves as much as we please, but we do not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We are dead and must be brought to life again; we are lost and must be found. *For all that are led by the Spirit of God, they, and only they, are sons of God* (Romans 8:14). We must show to which family we belong by our lives. We must let others see by our good lives that we are indeed the children of the Holy One, or calling ourselves children of God is but an empty name. "Do not say," says Gurnall, "that you have royal blood in your veins and are born of God unless you can prove your pedigree by daring to be holy."¹⁷

We must be holy because this is the most likely way to do good to others. We cannot live only for ourselves in this world. Our lives will

17 William Gurnall (1616-1679) was an English author and Anglican clergyman.

always be doing either good or harm to those who see them. They are a silent sermon that everyone 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 aware of. There is a reality about such living that makes people see and compels them to think. It carries a weight and influence with it that nothing else can give. It makes Christianity beautiful and draws people to consider it, like a lighthouse seen afar off. The day of judgment will prove that many besides husbands have been won *without a word* by a holy life (1 Peter 3:1).

You can talk to people about the doctrines of the gospel, but few people will listen, and still fewer will understand. But your life is an argument that none can escape. There is a meaning about holiness that even the most unlearned can take in. They may not understand justification, but they can understand love. I believe there is far more harm done by unholy and inconsistent Christians than we are aware of. Such people are among Satan's best allies. They pull down by their lives what pastors build with their sermons. 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 trying to be holy," said an irreligious businessman not long ago. "I notice that some of my customers are always talking about the gospel, faith, election, the promises of God, and so forth, and yet these same people think nothing of being unfair or cheating me out of money when they have an opportunity. If Christians can do such things, I don't see what good there is in Christianity."

I am sad to write such things, but I am afraid 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 unholy living, good Lord, deliver us! Oh, for the sake of others, if for no other reason, let us strive to be holy!*

We must be holy because our present comfort depends much upon it. We cannot be reminded of this too often. We are sadly apt to forget that there is a close connection between sin and sorrow, holiness and happiness, sanctification and consolation. God has wisely arranged that

our well-being and our well-doing are linked together. He has mercifully provided that even in this world it is in our 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 an active sense of his justification or an assurance of his calling as long as he neglects good works or does not strive to live a holy life. *And in this we do know that we have known him if we keep his commandments* (1 John 2:3). *And in this we know that we are of the truth and have our hearts certified before him* (1 John 3:19). A believer may as soon expect to feel the sun's rays on 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 that they rejoiced *that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name* (Acts 5:41). Oh, for our own sakes, if there were no other reason, let us strive to be holy! He who follows Jesus most fully will always follow Him most comfortably.

Holiness is written on everything in heaven.

Lastly, we must be holy because without holiness on earth we will 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 specifically, *There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean or that works abomination or makes a lie* (Revelation 21:27).

I appeal solemnly to everyone who reads these pages. How will we ever be at home and happy in heaven if we die unholy? Death does not bring about any change in us. The grave makes no alteration. Each person 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 the saints would you join yourself, and by whose side would you sit down? Their pleasures are not your pleasures, their tastes are not your tastes, and their character is not your character. How could you possibly be happy there if you had not been holy on earth?

Maybe you love the company of the superficial and the careless, the worldly-minded and the covetous, the partygoer and the pleasure-seeker, the ungodly and the profane. There will be no one like this in heaven.

Maybe you think the saints of God are too strict and disciplined and serious. You like to avoid them. You do not like to spend time with them, but there will be no other people in heaven.

Maybe you think praying, Bible reading, and hymn singing are dull and boring and meaningless work – a thing to be tolerated now and then, but not enjoyed. You consider the Lord's Day 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 of heaven *did not cease day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God Almighty* and singing the praise of the Lamb (Revelation 4:8). How could an unholy person find pleasure in spending his time like this?

Do you think that such a person would delight to meet David, Paul, and John after a life spent in doing the very things they spoke against? Would he speak with them and find that he and they had much in common? Above all, do you think that he would rejoice to meet Jesus, the Crucified One, face to face, after holding on 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 the Lord for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation* (Isaiah 25:9 NASB)?

Do you not think instead 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 like a stranger in a land he did not know, a black sheep among 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 do not know what others may think, but to me it seems clear that heaven would be a miserable place to an unholy person. It cannot be otherwise.

People may say in a vague way that they hope to go to heaven, but they do not consider what they say. There must be a certain preparation for the *inheritance of the saints in light* (Colossians 1:12). 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 this life, or we will never find ourselves in heaven in the life to come.

Before I go any further, let me say a few words by way of application.

For one thing, let me ask everyone who may read these pages, Are you holy? Please listen to the question I ask you now. Do you know anything of the holiness of which I have been speaking?

I do not ask whether you attend church regularly, whether you have been baptized and receive the Lord's Supper, or whether you call yourself a Christian; I ask something more than 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 talk of holy things and have religious books on your bookshelves, or whether you want to be holy and hope you will be holy some day. I ask something more than this: Are you yourself holy this very day, or are you not?

Why do I ask so directly and so strongly? I do it because the Bible says that without holiness, no one will see the Lord. It is written. It is not my imagination. It is the Bible. It is not my personal opinion. It is the word of God, not of man, that without holiness, *no one shall see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14).

What searching, examining words these are! 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 one will see the Lord."

Certainly it is a text that ought to make us consider our ways and search our hearts. Certainly it should raise within us solemn thoughts and cause us to pray.

You might try to brush me aside by saying that I feel and think about these things much more than most people do. 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 feel, but what you do."

You might say that God never intended for all Christians to be holy, and that holiness is only for great saints and people of extraordinary

gifts. I answer, "I cannot see that in the Bible. I read that everyone who has hope in Christ purifies himself (1 John 3:3), and that without holiness, no one will see the Lord" (1 John 3:3; Hebrews 12:14).

You might say that it is impossible to be so holy and to handle our responsibilities in this life at the same time – that it 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 Caesar's household are all examples that go to prove it." *All the saints greet you, chiefly those that are of the Caesar's household* (Philippians 4:22).

You might say that if you were so holy, you would be unlike other people. I answer, "You are right. You ought to be different from other people. Christ's true servants always were unlike the world around them – a separate nation, a peculiar people – and you must be, too, if you would be saved!"

You might say that 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 two thousand years ago. *Narrow is the gate, and confined is the way which leads unto life, and there are few that find it* (Matthew 7:14). Few will be saved because few will take the trouble to seek salvation. Most people will not deny themselves the pleasures of sin and their own way for a little season. They turn their backs on *the incorruptible inheritance that cannot be defiled and that does not fade away* (1 Peter 1:4). *Ye will not come to me*, says Jesus, *that ye might have life* (John 5:40).

That which costs
nothing is worth
nothing.

You might say that what I am saying is difficult to follow and that the way is very narrow. I answer, "I know it. Jesus said the same in the Sermon on the Mount." The Lord Jesus said so two thousand years ago. He always said that we must take up the cross daily and that we must be ready to cut off hand or foot if we would be His disciples. It is the same with Christianity as it is in other things, that there are no gains without pains. That which costs nothing is worth nothing.

No matter what we might want to say, we must be holy if we want to see the Lord. Where is our Christianity if we are not? We must not merely have a Christian name and Christian knowledge, but we must

have a Christian character also. We must be saints on earth before we can be saints in heaven. God has said it, and He will not take it back, that without holiness *no one shall see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14).

“The Pope’s calendar,” says Jenkyn, “only makes saints of the dead, but Scripture requires sanctity in the living.”¹⁸ “Let not men deceive themselves,” says John 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 do not need to wonder that Scripture says, *Ye must be born again* (John 3:7). Surely it is clear as noonday that many professing Christians need a complete change – new hearts, new natures – if they are ever to be saved. *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are made new* (2 Corinthians 5:17). No matter who you are, without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

Let me now 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 admit that I fear the spirit of the times about this subject. I very much doubt whether it holds the place that 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. We do not sufficiently consider how very far a person may go in professing to be a Christian, and yet have no grace, being dead in God’s sight, despite his claim to be a Christian. I believe that Judas Iscariot seemed very much like the other apostles. When the Lord warned them that one would betray Him, no one asked, “Is it Judas?” We had better spend more time thinking 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 sincerely say that I wish sanctification was more thought of in this day than it seems to be. I therefore want to take the opportunity to press the subject on all believers into whose hands these pages may fall. I fear it is sometimes forgotten that God has joined justification and sanctification together.

18 William Jenkyn (1613-1685) was an English clergyman who was imprisoned for participating in a plot to restore Charles II as the king of England. Toward the end of his life, he was again imprisoned for being a Nonconformist.

Beyond question, they are distinct and different things, but one is never found without the other. All justified people are sanctified, and all sanctified people are justified. *Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate* (Mark 10:9).

Do not tell me about your justification unless you also have some evidence of your sanctification. Do not boast of Christ's work for you unless you can show us the Spirit's work in you. Do not think that Christ and the Spirit can ever be divided. I do not doubt that many believers know these things, but I think it is good for us to be reminded of them. Let us prove that we know them by our lives. Let us try to keep this verse in mind more often: *Follow peace with everyone and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14).

I must openly say that I wish Christians were not so excessively sensitive about the subject of holiness as many seem to be. The topic is so cautiously touched that one might really think it was a dangerous subject to handle! Yet certainly when we have exalted Christ as *the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14:6), we cannot do wrong in speaking strongly about what the character of His people should be. Samuel Rutherford well says, "The way that cries down duties and sanctification is not the way of grace. Believing and doing are blood-friends."

I say it with all reverence, but I must say it: I sometimes fear that if Jesus were on earth now, many people would think His preaching to be legalistic. If Paul were writing his letters now, there are some who would think that he should 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 the epistle to the Ephesians does contain six chapters and not four. I am sad that I feel I must speak in this way, but I have reason to do so.

That great minister and theologian, John Owen, the Dean of Christ Church, used to say, more than three 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 three centuries the same thing might be said with truth of some of Christ's professing people today. I know there are texts in Scripture that 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 reasons to suspect, 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!* (Romans 7:24), let us also be able to say with him, *I press toward the mark* (Philippians 3:14). Let us not quote his example in one thing while we do not follow him in another.

I do not consider myself to be better than other people, and some might ask, “Who do you think you are that you write in this way?” I answer, “I am a very poor creature indeed.” I say, though, that I cannot read the Bible without desiring to see many believers more spiritual, more holy, more single-eyed, more heavenly-minded, and more whole-hearted than they are in this current generation. I want to see among believers more of a pilgrim spirit, a more distinct separation from the world, a lifestyle more evidently in heaven, and a closer walk with God – and that is why I have written as I have.

Is it not true that we need a higher standard of personal holiness in our day? Where is our patience? Where is our zeal? Where is our love? Where are our works? Where is the power of Christianity to be seen as it was in previous days? Where is that unmistakable tone that used to distinguish the saints of old and shake the world?

Truly our silver has become dross, our wine is mixed with water, and our salt has very little savor. We are all more than half asleep. *The night is past, and the day is come* (Romans 13:12). Let us awake and sleep no more (Ephesians 5:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:6). Let us open our eyes more widely than we have done so far. *Leaving behind all the weight of the sin which surrounds us* (Hebrews 12:1). *Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* (2 Corinthians 7:1).

“Did Christ die,” John Owen said, “and shall sin live? Was He crucified in the world, and shall our affections to the world be fast 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?” *But in no wise should I glory, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world* (Galatians 6:14).

A Word of Advice to All Who Desire to Be Holy

Do you want to be holy? Do you desire to become a new person? Then you must begin with Christ. You will do nothing at all and make no progress until 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 go to Him by faith and be joined to Him. Christ is not just wisdom and righteousness to His people, but He is sanctification also. *Of him ye are reborn in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption* (1 Corinthians 1:30).

People sometimes try to make themselves holy first, and they do not do too well. They toil and labor, turn over new leaves, and make many changes; yet like the woman with the issue of blood before she came to Christ, they were *nothing bettered, but rather grew worse* (Mark 5:26). They run in vain and labor in vain, and we do not need to wonder why, for they are beginning at the wrong end. They are building up a wall of sand; their work falls down as fast as they put it up. They are bailing water out of a leaky vessel: the leak gains on them rather than they gain on the leak.

No other foundation of holiness can be laid than that which Paul laid, even Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). Without Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5). It is a strong but true saying of Robert Trail: "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 be holy? Do you have a strong desire for holiness? Do you want to partake of the divine nature? Then go to Christ. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Do not linger. Do not try 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.¹⁹

19 From "Rock of Ages" by Augustus M. Toplady (1740-1778).

There is not a brick nor a stone laid in the work of our sanctification until 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 as *Prince and Saviour, to give repentance as well as forgiveness of sins* (Acts 5:31). *As many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name* (John 1:12).

Holiness is not inherited – parents cannot give it to their children: nor is it of the will of the flesh – man cannot produce it in himself: nor yet is it of the will of man – pastors cannot give it to you 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 You promised, and save me from the power of sin. Make me holy. Teach me to do Your will.”

Do you desire to continue in holiness? Then abide in Christ. He Himself says, *Abide in me, and I in you. . . . He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit* (John 15:4-5).

It pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell – a full supply for all a believer’s needs. He is the Physician to whom you must go daily if you want to keep well. He is the Manna that you must eat daily, and the Rock of which you must drink daily. His arm is the arm on which you must lean daily as you come up out of the wilderness of this world. You must not only be rooted in Him, but you must also be built up in Him.

Holiness is not inherited.

Paul was a man of God indeed. He was a holy man – a growing, thriving Christian – and what was the secret of it all? He was one to whom Christ was *all and in all* (Colossians 3:11). He was ever having his *eyes fixed on Jesus* (Hebrews 12:2). *I can do all things*, he says, *through Christ who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13). *I live; yet not I, but Christ lives 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* (Galatians 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 so far! May our years be holy years with our souls, and then they will be happy ones! If we live, may we live unto the Lord. If we die, may we die unto the Lord (Romans 14:8). If He comes for us, may we be found in peace, without spot, and blameless!

Chapter 4

The Fight

Fight the good fight of faith. (1 Timothy 6:12)

It is an interesting fact that “fighting” is a topic about which most people have a deep interest. Young men and women, old men and little children, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all seem to have a deep interest in learning about wars, battles, and fighting.

This is a simple fact, no matter how we may try to explain it. We would call that Englishman a boring person who did not care about the story of Waterloo, Inkermann, Balaclava, or Lucknow. We would think an American was cold and dull who was not moved by the struggles at Bunker Hill, Lexington and Concord, Yorktown, Trenton, or Gettysburg.

There is another warfare, though, of far greater importance than any war that was ever waged by man. It is a warfare that concerns not just two or three nations, but every Christian man and woman born into the world. The warfare I speak of is spiritual warfare. It is the fight that everyone who would be saved must fight about his soul.

I am aware that this warfare is something about which many know nothing. Talk to them about it, and they are ready to regard you as a madman, an enthusiast, or a fool; yet it is as real and true as any war the world has ever seen. It has its hand-to-hand conflicts and its wounds. It has its times of weariness and of fighting through the night. It has its sieges and assaults. It has its victories and its defeats. Above all, it has consequences that are serious, monumental, and most remarkable. In

earthly warfare, the consequences to nations are often temporary and reparable. In spiritual warfare, it is very different. Of that warfare, the consequences, when the fight is over, are unchangeable and eternal.

It is in regard to this warfare that Paul spoke to Timothy, when he wrote those burning words, *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life* (1 Timothy 6:12). It is about this warfare that I will write. I hold the subject to be closely connected with that of sanctification and holiness. He who desires to understand the nature of true holiness must know that the Christian is a man of war. If we want to be holy, we must fight.

True Christianity Is a Fight

True Christianity! Let us keep in mind that word “true.” There is a whole lot of that which is called Christianity today that is not true, genuine Christianity. It is adequate to most people. It satisfies sleepy consciences, but it is not the true thing. It is not the real thing that was called Christianity two thousand years ago. There are hundreds of thousands of men and women who go to church every Sunday and call themselves Christians. Their names are in the baptismal register. They are considered to be Christians while they live. They are married with a Christian marriage service. They intend to be buried as Christians when they die; but you never see any “fight” about their religion!

Of spiritual strife, exertion, conflict, self-denial, keeping watch, and battle, they know literally nothing at all. Such Christianity may satisfy people, and those who say anything against it may be considered to be very harsh and uncharitable, but it certainly is not the Christianity of the Bible. It is not the religion that the Lord Jesus founded and His apostles preached. It is not the religion that produces real holiness. True Christianity is a “fight.”

The true Christian is called to be a soldier, and must behave as such from the day of his conversion to the day of his death. He is not meant to live a life of religious ease, inactivity, and comfort. He must never imagine for a moment that he can sleep and rest along the way to heaven, like one travelling in luxury. If he takes his standard of Christianity from the children of this world, he may be content with such foolish ideas, but he will find no support for them in the Word of God. If the

Bible is the rule of his faith and practice, he will find his course laid down very plainly in this matter. He must "fight."

With whom is the Christian soldier meant to fight? Not with other Christians. Sad indeed is that person's idea of religion who thinks that it consists in perpetual controversy! He who is never satisfied unless he is engaged in some strife between church and church, sect and sect, faction and faction, denomination and denomination, knows nothing yet as he ought to know. No doubt it may be absolutely needful sometimes to engage in controversy or dispute, but as a general rule, the cause of sin is never helped as much as when Christians waste their strength in quarrelling with one another and spend their time in meaningless arguments.

With whom is the
Christian soldier meant
to fight? Not with
other Christians.

No, indeed! The main fight of the Christian is with the world, the flesh, and the devil. These are his never-dying foes. These are the three main enemies against whom he must wage war. Unless he gets the victory over these three, all other victories are useless and vain. If he had a nature like an angel and were not a fallen creature, the warfare would not be so essential; but with a corrupt heart, a busy devil, and an ensnaring world, he must either fight or be lost.

He must fight the flesh. Even after conversion, he carries within him a nature inclined to evil and a heart as weak and unstable as water. That heart will never be free from imperfection in this world, and it is a miserable delusion to expect it to be so. To keep that heart from going astray, the Lord Jesus tells us to *watch and pray*. He says that *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak* (Matthew 26:41). There is need of a daily struggle and daily wrestling in prayer. *I keep my body under*, Paul says, *and bring it into subjection* (1 Corinthians 9:27). *I see another law in my members which rebels against the law of my mind, bringing captive unto the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Romans 7:23-24). *For those that are of the Christ have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts* (Galatians 5:24). *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth* (Colossians 3:5).

He must fight the world. The cunning influence of that mighty

enemy must be resisted daily, and without a daily battle can never be overcome. The love of the world's good things, the fear of the world's laughter or condemnation, the secret desire to remain in the world, the secret desire to do as others in the world do, and not wanting to be extreme in following God are all spiritual foes that assail the Christian continually on his way to heaven, and they must be conquered.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore that desires to be a friend of the world, makes himself the enemy of God (James 4:4). If anyone loves the world, the charity of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15). The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world (Galatians 6:14). Whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). Be not conformed to this age (Romans 12:2).

He must fight the devil. That old enemy of mankind is not dead. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, he has been *going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it* (Job 1:7), striving to reach one main goal – the ruin of man's soul. Never slumbering and never sleeping, he is always going about as a lion *seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8). An unseen enemy, he is always near us, close by our path, nearby our bed, and spying out all our ways. A murderer and a liar from the beginning (John 8:44), he labors night and day to cast us down to hell. Sometimes by deceiving us, sometimes by suggesting unbelief or unfaithfulness to God, sometimes by one kind of tactic and sometimes by another, he is always carrying on a campaign against our souls. *Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat* (Luke 22:31). This mighty adversary must be resisted daily if we want to be saved. But *this lineage of demons does not go out* (Matthew 17:21) except by watching, praying, fighting, and putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11). The strong man armed will never be kept out of our hearts without a daily battle.

Some people might think these statements are too strong. You think that I am going too far and saying too much about this. You are secretly saying to yourself that men and women in this land can certainly get to heaven without all this trouble and warfare and fighting. Listen to me for a few minutes and I will show you that I have something to say on God's behalf. Remember the proverb of the wisest general who ever

lived in England: “In time of war, it is the worst mistake to underrate your enemy and try to make a little war.” This Christian warfare is no light matter.

Give me your attention and consider what I say. What does the Bible say?

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.

(1 Timothy 6:12)

Work hard as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 2:3)

Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand firm against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the lords of this age, rulers of this darkness, against spiritual wickedness in the heavens. Therefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and stand fast. (Ephesians 6:11-13)

Strive to enter in at the narrow gate. (Luke 13:24)

Labour not for the food which perishes, but for the food which abides unto eternal life. (John 6:27)

Think not that I have come to introduce peace into the land; I came not to introduce peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34)

He that has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. (Luke 22:36)

Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

(1 Corinthians 16:13)

War a good warfare; holding fast faith and a good conscience.

(1 Timothy 1:18-19)

Words such as these appear to me to be clear, plain, and unmistakable. They all teach one and the same great lesson, if we are willing to receive it. That lesson is that true Christianity is a struggle, a fight, and a warfare. He who pretends to condemn “fighting” and teaches that we

ought to sit still and passively “yield ourselves to God” appears to me to misunderstand his Bible and to make a great mistake.

What does the baptismal service of the Church of England say? No doubt that service is uninspired and, like every uninspired composition, has its defects; but to the millions of people all over the globe who profess and call themselves English Churchmen, its voice ought to speak with some weight. And what does it say? It tells us that over every new member who is admitted into the Church of England, the following words are used: “I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. . . . I sign this child with the sign of the cross, in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto his life’s end.”²⁰

Of course, we all know that in many, many cases baptism is a mere ceremony, and that parents sometimes bring their children to be baptized without faith or prayer or thought, and consequently receive no blessing. The person who thinks that baptism in such cases acts mechanically, like a medicine, and that godly and ungodly, praying and prayerless parents, all alike get the same benefit for their children, must be in a strange state of mind. But one thing is very certain: every baptized Churchman is by his profession a soldier of Jesus Christ, and is pledged “to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil.” He who doubts it had better take up his *Book of Common Prayer* and read, mark, and learn its contents. The worst thing about many very zealous Churchmen is their total ignorance of what their own prayer book contains.

Whether we are Churchmen or not, one thing is certain – this Christian warfare is a great reality and a subject of vast importance. It is not a matter like church government and ceremony, about which people might differ and yet still reach heaven. Necessity is laid upon us. We must fight. There are no promises in the Lord Jesus Christ’s epistles to the seven churches, except to those who “overcome.” Where there is

20 This, of course, was the wording at the time J. C. Ryle wrote this book, but has since changed.

grace there will be conflict. The believer is a soldier. There is no holiness without warfare. Saved souls will always be found to have fought a fight.

It is a fight of absolute necessity. Let us not think that we can remain neutral in this war and sit still. Such a line of action may be possible in the strife of nations, but it is utterly impossible in this conflict that concerns the soul. The boasted policy of noninterference that pleases so many politicians – the plan of keeping quiet and letting things alone – will never suffice in Christian warfare. In Christian warfare, no one can avoid serving under the argument that he is “a man of peace.” To be at peace with the world, the flesh, and the devil is to be at enmity with God and in the broad way that leads to destruction. We have no choice or option. We must either fight or be lost.

Let us not think that we
can remain neutral in
this war and sit still.

It is a fight of universal necessity. No rank, class, or age, can plead exemption or escape the battle. Ministers and people, preachers and hearers, old and young, high and low, rich and poor, gentle and simple, kings and subjects, landlords and tenants, learned and unlearned – all alike must carry arms and go to war. All have by nature a heart full of pride, unbelief, sloth, worldliness, and sin. All are living in a world filled with snares, traps, and pitfalls for the soul. All have near them a busy, restless, malicious devil. Everyone from the queen in her palace to the poor in the workhouse must fight if they would be saved.

It is a fight of perpetual necessity. It allows no time to rest and catch your breath, no armistice, no truce. On weekdays as well as on Sundays, in private as well as in public, at home by the family fireside as well as abroad, in little things like management of tongue and temper as well as in great things like the government of kingdoms – the Christian’s warfare must unceasingly go on. The enemy we fight keeps no holidays, never slumbers, and never sleeps. As long as we have breath in our bodies we must keep our armor on and remember that we are on an enemy’s ground. “Even on the brink of Jordan,” said a dying saint, “I find Satan nibbling at my heels.” We must fight until we die.

Let us consider well these propositions. Let us take care that our own personal religion is real, genuine, and true. The saddest symptom about many so-called Christians is the utter absence of anything like

conflict and fight in their Christianity. They eat, drink, dress, work, amuse themselves, get money, spend money, and sit through a little formal religious service once or twice every week; but the great spiritual warfare – its watchings and strugglings, its agonies and anxieties, its battles and contests – of all this they seem to know nothing at all. Let us be careful that this is not the case with us. The worst state of soul is *when an armed strong man keeps his palace, [and] his goods are in peace* (Luke 11:21) – when he leads men and women captive at his will (2 Timothy 2:26), and they make no resistance. The worst chains are those that are neither felt nor seen by the prisoner.

We can take comfort about our souls if we daily experience anything of an inward fight and conflict. It is the invariable companion of genuine Christian holiness. It is not everything, I know, but it is something. Do we find in our heart of hearts a spiritual struggle? Do we feel anything of the flesh lusting against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, so that we cannot do the things we want to (Galatians 5:17)? Are we conscious of two sets of standards within us contending for control? Do we feel anything of war in our inward man? Well, let us thank God for it! It is a good sign. It is strongly probable evidence of the great work of sanctification.

All true saints are soldiers. Anything is better than apathy, stagnation, deadness, and indifference. We are in a better condition than many. Most so-called Christians have no feeling at all. We are evidently no friends of Satan. Like the kings of this world, he wars not against his own subjects. The very fact that he assaults us should fill our minds with hope. I say again, let us take comfort. The child of God has two great characteristics about him: he can be known by his inward warfare, and he can be known by his inward peace.

True Christianity Is the Fight of Faith

In this respect, the Christian warfare is utterly unlike the conflicts of this world. It does not depend on the strong arm, the sharp eye, or the swift foot. It is not waged with carnal weapons, but with spiritual. Faith is the hinge on which victory turns. Success depends entirely on believing.

A general faith in the truth of God's written Word is the primary

foundation of the Christian soldier's character. He is what he is, does what he does, thinks as he thinks, acts as he acts, hopes as he hopes, and behaves as he behaves for one simple reason: he believes certain statements that are revealed and laid down in Holy Scripture. *He that comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him* (Hebrews 11:6).

A type of Christianity without doctrine or dogma is a thing that many people like to talk about today. It sounds very fine at first. It looks very pretty at a distance. But the moment we sit down to examine and consider it, we will find it a simple impossibility. We might as well talk of a body without bones and sinews. No one will ever be anything or do anything in Christianity unless he believes something. Even those who profess to hold the miserable and uncomfortable views of the deists are forced to confess that they believe something. Despite all their bitter sneers against dogmatic theology and Christian blind faith, they themselves have a kind of faith.

As for true Christians, faith is the very backbone of their spiritual existence. No one ever fights earnestly against the world, the flesh, and the devil unless he has engraved on his heart certain main principles that he believes. He might hardly know what they are, and may certainly not be able to define or write them down, but they are there, and consciously or unconsciously, they form the roots of his Christianity. Wherever you see someone, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, wrestling bravely with sin and trying to overcome it, you can be sure there are certain great principles that person believes.

The poet who wrote the famous lines, "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight; his can't be wrong whose life is in the right," was a clever man, but a poor theologian.²¹ There is no such thing as right living without faith and believing.

A special faith in our Lord Jesus Christ's person, work, and office is the life, heart, and mainspring of the Christian soldier's character. He sees by faith an unseen Savior, who loved him, gave Himself for him, paid his debts for him, bore his sins, carried his transgressions, rose again for him, and appears in heaven for him as his advocate at the

21 The poet was Alexander Pope (1688-1744), and the quote is from his poem called "An Essay on Man."

right hand of God. He sees Jesus and clings to Him. Seeing this Savior and trusting in Him, he feels peace and hope, and he willingly battles against the foes of his soul.

He sees his own many sins. He sees his weak heart, a tempting world, and a busy devil; and if he looked only at them, he might rightly despair. But he also sees a mighty Savior, an interceding Savior, a sympathizing Savior – His blood, His righteousness, His everlasting priesthood – and he believes that all this is his own. He sees Jesus, and he casts his whole weight on Him. Seeing Him, he cheerfully fights on, with full confidence that he and others like him will prove to be *more than conquerors through him that loved us* (Romans 8:37).

Habitual active faith in Christ's presence and readiness to help is the secret of the Christian soldier fighting successfully. It must never be forgotten that faith can come in degrees. All people do not believe alike, and even the same person has his ebbs and flows of faith and believes more fully at one time than another. According to the degree of his faith, the Christian fights well or poorly, wins victories or suffers occasional defeats, comes off triumphant or loses a battle. He who has the most faith will always be the happiest and most comfortable soldier. Nothing makes the anxieties of warfare sit so lightly on a man as the assurance of Christ's love and continual protection. Nothing enables him to bear the fatigue of watching, struggling, and wrestling against sin like the indwelling confidence that Christ is on his side and success is sure.

It is the *shield of faith* that quenches *all the fiery darts of the wicked* one. It is the person who can say, *I know whom I have believed*, who can say in time of suffering, *I am not ashamed* (2 Timothy 1:12). He who wrote those glowing words, *We faint not* (Galatians 6:9), and *Our tribulation, which is momentary and light, prepares an exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, was the man who wrote with the same pen, *We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). The apostle Paul, who said, *I live by the faith of the Son of God* (Galatians 2:20), said in the same epistle, *The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world* (Galatians 6:14). The man who said, *To me to live is Christ* (Philippians 1:21), said in the same epistle,

I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content (Philippians 4:11), and *I can do all things through Christ* (Philippians 4:13). The more faith, the more victory! The more faith, the more inward peace!

I think it is impossible to overrate the value and importance of faith. Well may the apostle Peter call it *precious faith* (2 Peter 1:1). Time would fail me if I tried to recount even a hundredth part of the victories that Christian soldiers have obtained by faith.

Let us take our Bibles and attentively read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Let us notice the long list of worthy people whose names are recorded there, from Abel down to Moses, even before Christ was born of Mary and brought life and immortality into full light by the gospel. Let us notice well what battles they won against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Then let us remember that believing did it all. These men looked forward to the promised Messiah. They saw Him who is invisible. By faith *the elders obtained a good report* (Hebrews 11:2).

I think it is impossible to overrate the value and importance of faith.

Let us turn to the pages of early church history. Let us see how the early Christians firmly held to their Christian beliefs even unto death, and were not shaken by the fiercest persecutions of heathen emperors. For centuries, men like Polycarp and Ignatius were not lacking, who were ready to die rather than deny Christ. Fines, prisons, torture, fire, and sword were unable to crush the spirit of the noble army of martyrs. The whole power of imperial Rome, the mistress of the world, proved unable to stamp out the religion that began with a few fishermen and tax collectors in Israel! Let us remember that believing in an unseen Jesus was the church's strength. They won their victory by faith.

Let us examine the story of the Protestant Reformation. Let us study the lives of its leading champions – men such as Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Ridley, Latimer, and Hooper. Let us see how these gallant soldiers of Christ stood firm against a host of adversaries and were ready to die for their principles. What battles they fought! What controversies they maintained! What contradiction they endured! What tenacity of purpose they exhibited against a world in arms! Let us remember that believing in an unseen Jesus was the secret of their strength. They overcame by faith.

Let us consider the men who have had the greatest influence in church history in the last couple hundred years. Let us observe how men like Wesley, Whitefield, Venn, and Romaine stood alone in their day and generation and revived English religion in the face of opposition from men high in office, and in the face of slander, ridicule, and persecution from nine-tenths of professing Christians in the land.

Let us observe how men like William Wilberforce, Henry Havelock, and Hedley Vicars have witnessed for Christ in the most difficult positions and displayed a banner for Christ even as they served in the military or in politics. Let us observe how these noble witnesses never flinched to the end, winning the respect even of their worst adversaries. Let us remember that believing in an unseen Christ was the key to their character. By faith they lived, walked, stood, and overcame.²²

Do any of you want to live the life of a Christian soldier? Then pray for faith. It is the gift of God, and it is a gift for which those who ask will never ask in vain. You must believe before you do. If people do nothing in Christianity, it is because they do not believe. Faith is the first step toward heaven.

Do any of you want to fight the fight of a Christian soldier successfully and prosperously? Then pray for a continual increase of faith. Abide in Christ, get closer to Christ, tighten your hold on Christ every day that you live. Let your daily prayer be that of the disciples: *Lord, Increase our faith* (Luke 17:5). Watch jealously over your faith, if you have any. It is the stronghold of the Christian character on which the safety of the whole fortress depends. It is the point that Satan loves to attack. All lies at his mercy if faith is overthrown. If we love life, we must especially stand on our guard.

True Christianity Is a Good Fight

“Good” is a strange word to apply to any warfare. All worldly war is more or less evil. No doubt it is an absolute necessity in many cases – to procure the liberty of nations and to prevent the weak from being trampled down by the strong – but still it is an evil. It involves an

²² These paragraphs show the importance of reading and learning about men and women of the past who served God faithfully and fully that we might be motivated and encouraged to follow Jesus fully and to be surrendered to Him and used by Him.

awful amount of bloodshed and suffering. It hurries large numbers of people into eternity who are completely unprepared for their change. It calls forth the worst passions of man. It causes enormous waste and destruction of property. It fills peaceful homes with mourning widows and orphans. It spreads poverty, taxation, and national distress far and wide. It disarranges the entire order of society. It interrupts the work of the gospel and the growth of Christian missions.

In short, war is an immense and incalculable evil, and every praying person should cry night and day, "Give us peace in our time." Yet there is one warfare that is emphatically "good," and there is one fight in which there is no evil. That warfare is the Christian warfare. That fight is the fight of the soul.

What are the reasons why the Christian fight is a "good fight"? What are the points in which this warfare is superior to the warfare of this world? Let me examine this matter and discuss it in order. I do not want to pass by the subject and leave it unnoticed. I do not want anyone to begin the life of a Christian soldier without counting the cost. I want all people to know that if they want to be holy and see the Lord, they must fight, and that the Christian fight, though spiritual, is real and severe. We need courage, boldness, and perseverance to fight this war, but I want my readers to know that there is abundant encouragement, if they will only begin the battle. The Bible does not call the Christian fight a *good fight* without reason and cause. Let me try to show what I mean.

The Christian's fight is good because it is fought under the best of generals. The leader and commander of all believers is our divine Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ – a Savior of perfect wisdom, infinite love, and almighty power. The Captain of our salvation never fails to lead His soldiers to victory. He never makes any useless movements, never errs in judgment, and never commits any mistake. His eye is on all His followers, from the greatest of them even to the least. The humblest servant in His army is not forgotten. The weakest and most frail is cared for, remembered, and kept unto salvation. The souls whom He has purchased and redeemed with His own blood are far too precious to be wasted and thrown away. Surely this is good!

The Christian's fight is good because it is fought with the best of helps. Even though each believer is weak on his own, the Holy Spirit

dwells in him, and his body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). Chosen by God the Father, washed in the blood of the Son, and renewed by the Spirit, he does not go to war at his own command, and he is never alone. God the Holy Spirit daily teaches, leads, guides, and directs him. God the Father guards him by His almighty power. God the Son intercedes for him every moment, like Moses on the mount, while he is fighting in the valley below. A threefold cord like this can never be broken! His daily provisions and supplies never fail. His provisions are never defective. His food and water are certain. As weak as he seems in himself, like a worm, he is strong in the Lord to do great exploits. Surely this is good!

The Christian fight is a good fight because it is fought with the best of promises. To every believer belongs exceeding great and precious promises – all yea and amen in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20) – promises sure to be fulfilled, because they are made by One who cannot lie and has the power as well as the will to keep His word. *Sin shall have no dominion over you* (Romans 6:14). *Let the God of peace bruise Satan under your feet quickly* (Romans 16:20). *He who has begun a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ* (Philippians 1:6). *When thou dost pass through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee* (Isaiah 43:2). *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand* (John 10:27-28). *He that comes to me I will in no wise cast out* (John 6:37). *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee* (Hebrews 13:5). *Therefore I am certain that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any creature shall be able to separate us from the charity of God, which is in Christ, Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38-39).

Words like these are worth their weight in gold! Who does not know that promises of coming aid have cheered the defenders of besieged cities, like Lucknow, and raised them above their natural strength? Have we never heard that the promise of “help before night” had much to contribute to the mighty victory of Waterloo? Yet all such promises are as nothing compared to the rich treasure of believers – the eternal promises of God. Surely this is good!

The Christian's fight is a good fight because it is fought with the best of issues and results. No doubt it is a war in which there are tremendous struggles, agonizing conflicts, wounds, bruises, watchings, fastings, and fatigue. But still, all believers, without exception, are *more than conquerors through him that loved him* (Romans 8:37). No soldiers of Christ are ever lost, missing, or left dead on the battlefield. No mourning will ever be needed and no tears will ever need to be shed for either private or officer in the army of Christ. The list of active soldiers, when the last evening comes, will be found precisely the same as it was in the morning.

The English Guards marched out of London to the Crimean campaign a magnificent body of men, but many of those brave men laid their bones in a foreign grave and never saw London again. Far different will be the arrival of the Christian army in the *city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Hebrews 11:10). Not one will be found lacking. The words of our great Captain will be found true: *Of those whom thou gavest me I have lost none* (John 18:9). Surely this is good!

The Christian's fight is good because it does good to the soul of him who fights it. All other wars have a bad, lowering, and demoralizing tendency. They bring out the worst passions of the human mind. They harden the conscience and sap the foundations of religion and morality. The Christian warfare alone tends to bring out the best things that are left in man. It promotes humility and charity, it lessens selfishness and worldliness, and it convinces people to set their affections on things above. The old, the sick, and the dying are never known to repent of fighting Christ's battles against sin, the world, and the devil. Their only regret is that they did not begin to serve Christ much earlier. The experience of that eminent saint Philip Henry does not stand alone. In his last days he said to his family, "I take you all to record that a life spent in the service of Christ is the happiest life that a man can spend upon earth."²³ Surely this is good!

No soldiers of Christ are ever lost, missing, or left dead on the battlefield.

The Christian's fight is a good fight because it does good to the

23 Philip Henry (1631-1696) was an English Nonconformist clergyman. His *Diaries and Letters* was published after his death. Matthew Henry, clergyman and author of the famous Bible commentaries, was Philip's son.

world. All other wars have a devastating, ravaging, and injurious effect. The march of an army through a land is a terrible scourge to the inhabitants. Wherever it goes, it impoverishes, wastes, and does harm. Injury to people, property, feelings, and morals invariably accompanies it. Far different are the effects produced by Christian soldiers. Wherever they live they are a blessing. They raise the standard of religion and morality. They invariably check the advance of drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, immorality, and dishonesty. Even their enemies are bound to respect them. No matter where you go, you will rarely find that barracks and garrisons do good to the neighborhood. But no matter where you go, you will find that the presence of a few true Christians is a blessing. Surely this is good!

The Christian's fight is good because it ends in a glorious reward for all who fight it. Who can tell the wages that Christ will pay to all His faithful people? Who can estimate the good things that our divine Captain has laid up for those who confess Him before men? A grateful country can give medals to her successful warriors. It can give Medals of Honor, Victoria Crosses, pensions, and other honors and titles, but it can give nothing that will last and endure forever, nothing that can be carried beyond the grave.

Palaces like Blenheim and Stratfield Saye can only be enjoyed for a few years. The bravest generals and soldiers must kneel one day before the King of Terrors. Better, far better, is the position of him who fights under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil. He may not receive much praise of man while he lives, and he may go down to the grave without much honor, but he will have that which is far better, for it is far more enduring. He will have *the incorruptible crown of glory* (1 Peter 5:4). Surely this is good!

Let us settle it in our minds that the Christian fight is a good fight – really good, truly good, emphatically good. We see only part of it as yet. We see the struggle, but not the end. We see the campaign, but not the reward. We see the cross, but not the crown. We see a few humble, broken-spirited, penitent, praying people enduring hardships and despised by the world, but we do not see the hand of God over them, the face of God smiling on them, and the kingdom of glory prepared for them.

These things are yet to be revealed. Let us not judge by appearances. There are more good things about the Christian warfare than we see.

Now let me conclude this topic with a few words of practical application. We live at a time when the world seems to think of little else but battles and fighting. The iron is entering the soul of more than one nation, and the lightheartedness that was once found in many lands is completely gone. Surely in times like these a minister may justly call on people to remember their spiritual warfare. Let me say a few parting words about the great fight of the soul.

You may be struggling hard for the rewards of this world. Perhaps you are straining every nerve to obtain money, position, power, or pleasure. If that is your case, be cautious. Your sowing will lead to a crop of bitter disappointment. Unless you begin to take care, your end will be to lie down in sorrow.

Thousands have travelled the path you are pursuing, and they have awoken too late, only to find that the path ends in misery and eternal ruin. They have fought hard for wealth, honor, power, and promotion, and have turned their backs on God, Christ, heaven, and the world to come. What has their end been? Often, far too often, they have found out that their whole life has been a grand mistake. They have tasted by bitter experience the feelings of the dying statesman who cried aloud in his last hours, "The battle is fought; the battle is fought, but the victory is not won."

For the sake of your own happiness, resolve this day to join the Lord's side. Shake off your past carelessness and unbelief. Come out from the ways of a thoughtless, unreasoning world. Take up the cross and become a good soldier of Christ. *Fight the good fight of faith*, that you may be happy as well as safe.

Think what the children of this world will often do for liberty, without any Christian motivation. Remember how the Greeks, Romans, Swiss, and Tyrolese have endured the loss of all things, and even life itself, rather than bend their necks to a foreign yoke. Let their example provoke you to emulation. If people can do so much for a corruptible crown, how much more should you do for a crown that is incorruptible! Awake to a sense of the misery of being a slave. For life, happiness, and liberty – arise and fight.

Fear not to begin and enlist in Christ's army. The great Captain of your salvation rejects no one who comes to Him. Like David in the cave of Adullam, He is ready to receive all who are ready to join with Him, however unworthy they may feel themselves to be. None who repent and believe are too bad to be enrolled in Christ's army. All who come to Him by faith are admitted, clothed, armed, trained, and at last led on to complete victory. Fear not to begin this very day. There is still room for you.

Fear not to go on fighting once you enlist. The more thorough and wholehearted you are as a soldier, the more comfortable you will find your warfare. There is no doubt that you will often meet with trouble, fatigue, and difficult fighting before your warfare is accomplished, but let none of these things move you. Greater is He who is for you than all they who are against you. Everlasting liberty or everlasting captivity are the alternatives before you. Choose liberty, and fight to the end.

You might know something of the Christian warfare and are already a tried and proven soldier. If that is your case, accept a parting word of advice and encouragement from a fellow soldier. Let me speak to myself as well as to you. Let us stir up our minds by way of remembrance. There are some things that we cannot remember too well.

Let us remember that if we want to fight successfully, we must put on the whole armor of God and never lay it aside until we die. Not a single piece of the armor can be dispensed with. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, and the helmet of hope are all needed (Ephesians 6:10-18). We cannot dispense with any part of this armor for even a single day. Well says an old veteran in Christ's army, who died a few hundred years ago, "In heaven we shall appear, not in armor, but in robes of glory. But here our arms are to be worn night and day. We must walk, work, sleep in them, or else we are not true soldiers of Christ."²⁴

Let us remember the solemn words of an inspired warrior who went to his rest two thousand years ago: *No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier* (2 Timothy 2:4). May we never forget that saying!

Let us remember that some have seemed to be good soldiers for

24 This is from *The Christian in Complete Armour* by William Gurnall (1616-1679).

a little while and have talked loudly of what they would do, yet they turned back disgracefully in the day of battle.

Let us never forget Balaam, Judas, Demas, and Lot's wife. Whatever we are and however weak we are, let us be real, genuine, true, and sincere.

Let us remember that the eye of our loving Savior is upon us morning, noon, and night. He will never allow us to be tempted more than we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for *He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin* (Hebrews 4:15). He knows what battles and conflicts are, for He Himself was assaulted by the prince of this world. Having such a High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, *let us hold fast this profession* (Hebrews 4:14).

Let us remember that thousands of soldiers before us have fought the same battle that we are fighting, and have come off more than conquerors through Him who loved them (Romans 8:37). They overcame *by the blood of the Lamb* (Revelation 12:11), and so also may we. Christ's arm is quite as strong as ever, and His heart is just as loving as ever. He who saved men and women before us never changes. He is able to save *to the uttermost* all who come unto God by Him (Hebrews 7:25). Then let us cast doubts and fears away. Let us follow them *who by faith and patience inherit the promises* and are waiting for us to join them (Hebrews 6:12).

Then let us cast doubts
and fears away.

Finally, let us remember that the time is short and *the coming of the Lord draws near* (James 5:8). A few more battles, and the last trumpet will sound and the Prince of Peace will come to reign on a renewed earth. A few more struggles and conflicts, and then we will utter an eternal good-bye to warfare, sin, sorrow, and death. Let us, then, fight on to the last and never surrender. The Captain of our salvation says, *He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son* (Revelation 21:7).

Let me conclude this section with the words of John Bunyan, from one of the most beautiful parts of *Pilgrim's Progress*. He is describing the end of one of his best and holiest pilgrims:

After this it was widely announced that Valiant-for-Truth

received a summons by the hand of the same messenger. He also received a token that the summons was true. “That his pitcher was broken at the fountain.” (*Before the silver chain is broken, and the golden bowl is broken, and the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel is broken at the cistern.* – Eccles. 12:6) When Valiant-for-Truth understood the message was true, he called for his friends. He let them know he had received a summons. “I am going to my Father’s. Even though I arrived here with great difficulty, I don’t regret any of the trouble I had to live through to get here.

“I give my sword to the one who follows me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to the one who can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me as a witness that I have fought His battles and now He will be my rewarder.” When the day came for him to cross the river, many accompanied him to the riverbank. He stepped into the water and said, *O death, where is thy sting?* (1 Cor. 15:55) And as he went deeper he said, *O Hades, where is thy victory?* (1 Cor. 15:55) So he passed over the river to the sound of trumpets welcoming him to the other side.²⁵

May our end be like this! May we never forget that without fighting there can be no holiness while we live, and no crown of glory when we die!

25 *Pilgrim’s Progress* (Updated Edition), ANEKO Press, 2014

Chapter 5

The Cost

Which of you intending to build a tower does not sit down first and count the cost? (Luke 14:28)

The text above is one of great importance. Few are the people who are not compelled to ask themselves, “What does it cost?”

In buying property, building houses, furnishing rooms, forming plans, changing dwellings, or educating children, it is wise and prudent to look forward and consider the cost. Many people would save themselves much sorrow and trouble if they would only remember the question, “What does it cost?”

But there is one subject on which it is especially important to count the cost. That subject is the salvation of our souls. What does it cost to be a true Christian? What does it cost to be a truly holy person? This, after all, is the great question. For lack of thought about this, thousands of people, after seeming to begin well, turn away from the road to heaven and are lost forever in hell.

Let me try to say a few words that might throw light on the subject. First, I will show what it costs to be a true Christian. Secondly, I will explain why it is so important to count the cost. Lastly, I will give some hints that will help people to properly count the cost.

We are living in strange times. Events are hurrying on remarkably quickly. We never know *what a day may bring forth* (Proverbs 27:1); how much less do we know what may happen in a year! We live in a

day when many people profess to be Christians. Professing Christians in every part of the land are expressing a desire for more holiness and a higher degree of spiritual life, yet it is very common to see these people receiving the Word with joy, and then after two or three years falling away and going back to their sins. They had not considered what it costs to be a really consistent believer and holy Christian. Certainly these are times when we should sit down and *count the cost* and consider the condition of our souls. We must pay attention to how we are. If we desire to truly be holy, it is a good sign. We may thank God for putting the desire into our hearts, but still, the cost should be counted. No doubt Christ's way to eternal life is a way of pleasantness, but it is foolish to shut our eyes to the fact that His way is narrow and the cross comes before the crown.

I will show what it costs to be a true Christian.

Let there be no mistake about my meaning. I am not examining what it costs to save a person's soul. I know well that it costs nothing less than the blood of the Son of God to provide an atonement and to redeem us from hell. The price paid for our redemption was nothing less than the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary. We are *bought with a price* (1 Corinthians 6:20). Christ *gave himself in ransom for all* (1 Timothy 2:6). This, though, is not the topic of my discussion. The point I want to consider is another one entirely. I want to consider what a person must be ready to give up if he wants to be saved. It is the amount of sacrifice a person must submit to if he intends to serve Christ. It is in this sense that I raise the question, "What does it cost?" I firmly believe that this is a most important question.

I freely admit that it costs little to be a mere outward Christian. A person only has to attend a church on Sunday and to be fairly moral during the week, and he has gone as far as thousands around him ever go in religion. All this is cheap and easy work; it involves no self-denial or self-sacrifice. If this is saving Christianity and this is what will take us to heaven when we die, we must change the description of the way of life and write, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to heaven!"

According to the standard of the Bible, it does cost something to be

a real Christian. There are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made, Egypt to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a cross to be carried, and a race to be run. Conversion is not putting a man in an armchair and taking him easily to heaven. It is the beginning of a mighty conflict in which it costs much to win the victory. Therefore arises the unspeakable importance of counting the cost.

Let me try to show precisely and specifically what it costs to be a true Christian. Let us suppose that someone is motivated to serve Christ and feels drawn and inclined to follow Him. Let us suppose that some affliction, or some sudden death, or an awakening sermon has stirred his conscience and made him feel the value of his soul so that he desires to be a true Christian. No doubt there is everything to encourage him. His sins may be freely forgiven, however many and great. His heart may be completely changed, however cold and hard. Christ and the Holy Spirit, mercy and grace, are all ready for him. But still he should count the cost. Let us see specifically, one by one, the things that his Christian religion will cost him.

It will cost him his self-righteousness. He must cast away all pride and prideful thoughts and any conceit of his own goodness. He must be content to go to heaven as a poor sinner saved only by free grace, owing all to the merit and righteousness of another. He must really feel the words of the prayer book that he has “erred and gone astray like a lost sheep,” that he has “left undone the things he ought to have done, and done the things he ought not to have done, and that there is no health in him.” He must be willing to give up all trust in his own morality, respectability, praying, Bible reading, church-going, and sacraments, and he must trust in nothing but Jesus Christ.

This sounds difficult to some. I do not wonder why. “Sir,” said a godly farmer to the well-known James Hervey,²⁶ “it is harder to deny proud self than sinful self, but it is absolutely necessary.” Let us remember

There are enemies to be overcome, battles to be fought, sacrifices to be made, Egypt to be forsaken, a wilderness to be passed through, a cross to be carried, and a race to be run.

²⁶ James Hervey (1714-1758) was an English clergyman and author and was a member of the famous “Holy Club” of Oxford that included John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield.

this first and foremost. It will cost us our self-righteousness to be a true Christian.

It will cost him his sins. He must be willing to give up every habit and practice that is wrong in God's sight. He must set his face against it, quarrel with it, break off from it, fight with it, crucify it, and labor to keep it under subjection, no matter what the world around him may say or think. He must do this honestly and fairly. There must be no separate truce with any special sin that he loves. He must consider all sins to be his deadly enemies, and he must hate every false way. Whether little or great, whether open or secret, all his sins must be thoroughly renounced. They may struggle hard with him every day and may sometimes almost get the mastery over him, but he must never give in to them. He must keep up a perpetual war with his sins. It is written, *Cast away from you all your iniquities* (Ezekiel 18:31), *Redeem thy sins . . . and thine iniquities* (Daniel 4:27), and *Cease to do evil* (Isaiah 1:16).

This also seems difficult. Our sins are often as dear to us as our children: we love them, hug them, cleave to them, and delight in them. To part with them is as hard as cutting off a right hand or plucking out a right eye, but it must be done. The parting must come. *If wickedness was sweet in [the sinner's] mouth, if he hid it under his tongue, if it seemed good unto him, and he did not forsake it*, yet it must be given up if he wants to be saved (Job 20:12-13). He and sin must quarrel if he and God are to be friends. Christ is willing to receive any sinners, but He will not receive them if they will cling to their sins. To be a Christian will cost us our sins.

It will cost him his love of ease. He must take pains and trouble if he intends to run a successful race toward heaven. He must daily watch and be on his guard, like a soldier on the enemy's ground. He must take heed to his behavior every hour of the day, in every company and in every place, in public as well as in private, among strangers as well as at home. He must be careful with his time, his tongue, his temper, his thoughts, his imagination, his motives, and his conduct in every relation of life. He must be diligent about his prayers, his Bible reading, and his use of Sundays, with all their means of grace. In attending to these things, he may come far short of perfection, but he cannot safely

neglect any of them. *The soul of the sluggard desires, and attains nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat* (Proverbs 13:4).

This also sounds difficult. There is nothing we naturally dislike as much as trouble in living our religion. We hate trouble. We secretly wish we could have a vicarious Christianity and could be good by having someone else be good for us, having everything done for us. Anything that requires exertion and labor is entirely against the grain of our hearts, but the soul can have no gains without pains. To be a Christian will cost us our love of ease.

It will cost him the favor of the world. He must be content to be thought poorly of by others if he pleases God. He must not think it is a strange thing to be mocked, ridiculed, slandered, persecuted, and even hated. He must not be surprised to find his beliefs and Christian lifestyle despised and held up to scorn. He must accept that many people will consider him to be foolish, fanatical, and overzealous. He must understand that his words will be twisted and his actions misrepresented. In fact, he must not be surprised if some call him crazy. The Master says, *Remember the word that I said unto you, The slave is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my word, they will keep yours also* (John 15:20).

The soul can have no gains without pains.

I must say that this also sounds difficult. We naturally dislike unjust dealing and false accusations, and we find it very difficult to be accused without cause. We would not be flesh and blood if we did not want to have the good opinion of our neighbors. It is always unpleasant to be spoken against, forsaken, lied about, and left standing alone, but there is no help for it. The cup that our Master drank must be drunk by His disciples. They must be *despised and rejected among men* (Isaiah 53:3). To be a Christian will cost us the favor of the world.

This is the account of what it costs to be a true Christian. I admit that the list is a heavy one, but what item could be removed? Bold indeed must that person be who would dare to say that we may keep our self-righteousness, our sins, our laziness, and our love of the world and yet be saved!

I admit that it costs much to be a true Christian, but who in his right

mind can doubt that it is worth any cost to have one's soul saved? When the ship is in danger of sinking, the crew thinks nothing of casting overboard the precious cargo. When an arm or leg is affected by gangrene, one will submit to any severe operation, even to amputation, to save one's life. Surely a Christian should be willing to give up anything that stands between him and heaven. A Christianity that costs nothing is worth nothing! A cheap Christianity without a cross will prove in the end to be a useless Christianity without a crown.

I will now explain why counting the cost is of such great importance to a person's soul.

I could easily settle this question by laying down the principle that no duty established by Jesus Christ can ever be neglected without damage. I could show how many close their eyes throughout life to the nature of saving Christianity and refuse to consider what it really costs to be a Christian. I could describe how at last, when life is flowing away, they wake up and make a few erratic efforts to turn to God. I could tell you how they find, to their amazement, that repentance and conversion are not such easy matters as they had supposed, and that it costs a great deal to be a true Christian. They discover that habits of pride, sinful indulgence, love of ease, and worldliness are not as easily laid aside as they had thought. And so, after a small struggle, they give up in despair and leave the world without hope, without grace, and unfit to meet God! They had flattered themselves all their days that Christianity would be easy work when once they took it up seriously. But they open their eyes too late and discover for the first time that they are ruined because they never counted the cost.

There is one group of people to whom I especially want to address myself regarding this topic. It is a large group – a growing group – and a group that in these days is in specific danger. Let me try to describe this group in a few plain words. This deserves our utmost attention.

The people I speak of are not thoughtless about Christianity; they think much about it. They are not ignorant of Christianity; they know the basic beliefs pretty well. Their great defect, though, is that they are not rooted and grounded in their faith. They have too often picked up

their knowledge secondhand – from being in religious families or from being trained in religious ways – but they have never worked it out by their own inward experience. Too often they have quickly taken up a profession of Christianity under the pressure of circumstances – from emotional feelings, from physical excitement, or from a general desire to do like others around them – but without any solid work of grace in their hearts. People like this are in a place of great danger. They are precisely those, according to Bible examples, who need to be exhorted to count the cost.

Due to neglecting to count the cost, large numbers of the children of Israel perished miserably in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan. They left Egypt full of zeal and fervor, as if nothing could stop them, but when they found dangers and difficulties in the way, their courage soon cooled down. They had never imagined that there would be trouble. They had thought they would be safely in the promised land in a few days. So when enemies, difficulties, hunger, and thirst began to make their presence known, the Israelites murmured against Moses and God, and would gladly have gone back to Egypt. They had not counted the cost, and so they lost everything and died in their sins.

Because they neglected to count the cost, many of our Lord Jesus Christ's hearers went back after a time and *walked no more with him* (John 6:66). When they first saw His miracles and heard His preaching, they thought that the kingdom of God would immediately appear. They cast in their lot with His apostles and followed Him without thinking of the consequences, but when they found that there were difficult doctrines to be believed, hard work to be done, and harsh treatment to be endured, their faith gave way entirely and proved to be nothing at all. They had not counted the cost, and so made shipwreck of their profession of following Jesus.

For failing to count the cost, King Herod returned to his old sins and destroyed his soul. He liked to hear John the Baptist preach. He observed and honored him as a just and holy man. He even did many things that were right and good (Mark 6:20), but when he found that he must give up his darling Herodias, his religion entirely broke down. He had not considered this. He had not counted the cost.

For lack of counting the cost, Demas left the company of Paul,

rejected the gospel, turned his back on Christ, and renounced heaven. For a long time he had journeyed with the great Apostle to the Gentiles and was actually a *fellowlabourer* (Philemon 1:24), but when he realized that he could not have the friendship of this world as well as the friendship of God, he gave up his Christianity and clung to the world. *Demas has forsaken me*, Paul said, *having loved this present world* (2 Timothy 4:10). He had not counted the cost.

Because they do not count the cost, the hearers of powerful evangelical preachers often come to miserable ends. They are stirred and excited into professing what they have not really experienced. They receive the Word with a joy so extravagant that it almost startles mature Christians. They continue for a time with such zeal and fervor that they seem likely to outgain all others. They talk and work for spiritual purposes with such enthusiasm that they make older believers feel ashamed, but when the novelty and freshness of their feelings is gone, a change comes over them. They prove to have been nothing more than stony-ground hearers.

The description the great Master gives in the parable of the sower is exactly demonstrated. Temptation or persecution arises because of the Word, and they are offended (Matthew 13:21). Little by little their zeal melts away and their love becomes cold. In time their seats are empty in the assembly of God's people, and they are heard of no more among Christians. Why? They had never counted the cost.

Because they never counted the cost, hundreds of professed converts under religious revivals go back to the world after a time and bring disgrace on Christianity. They begin with a sadly mistaken notion of what true Christianity is. They imagine that it consists in nothing more than a so-called "coming to Christ" and having strong inward feelings of joy and peace. So when they find after a while that there is a cross to be carried, that our hearts are deceitful, and that there is a busy devil always near us, they cool down in disgust and return to their old sins. Why? Because they never really knew what Bible Christianity is. They had never learned that they had to count the cost.

For failure to count the cost, the children of religious parents often do not turn out well, and they bring disgrace on Christianity. Familiar from their earliest years with the form and theory of the gospel, taught even from infancy to repeat the most common Bible verses, being used

to being instructed in the gospel every week, or even to instruct others in Sunday school, they often grow up professing Christianity without knowing why or without ever having thought seriously about it. Then when the realities of grown-up life begin to press upon them, they often astound everyone by dropping all their Christian ways and plunging right into the world. Why? Because they had never thoroughly understood the sacrifices that Christianity involves. They had never been taught to count the cost.

These are serious and painful truths, but they are truths. They all help to show the immense importance of the subject I am now considering, and they help us realize the absolute necessity of pressing this subject on all who profess a desire for holiness. They urge us to cry aloud in all the churches: "Count the cost."

I will boldly say that it would be good if the duty of counting the cost were more frequently taught than it is. Impatient hurry is the order of the day with many professing Christians. Instantaneous conversions and immediate peace are the only results they seem to care for from the gospel. Compared with these, all other things are tossed aside. To produce them is the main goal and purpose, apparently, of all their labors. I say without hesitation that such a weak, one-sided mode of teaching Christianity is troublesome in the extreme.

They should not be moved into the ranks of Christ's army without being told what the warfare entails.

Let no one mistake my meaning. I thoroughly approve of offering a full, free, present, immediate salvation in Christ Jesus. I thoroughly approve of urging the possibility and the duty of immediate instantaneous conversion. In these matters I give place to no one, but I do say that these truths should not be set before people thoughtlessly or without explanation. They ought to be told honestly what it is they are taking up if they profess a desire to come out from the world and serve Christ. They should not be moved into the ranks of Christ's army without being told what the warfare entails. They should be told honestly to count the cost.

Does anyone ask what our Lord Jesus Christ's practice was in this matter? Let him read what Luke records. He tells us that on a certain

occasion that *great multitudes went with him, and he turned and said unto them, If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, and even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14:25-27). I must plainly say that I cannot reconcile this passage with the lives of many modern Christian pastors and teachers. Yet to my mind, this doctrine is as clear as the sun at noonday. It shows us that we should not hurry people into professing discipleship without warning them plainly to count the cost.

Does anyone ask what the practice of the eminent and best preachers of the gospel has been in days gone by? I am confident to say that they have all borne testimony to the wisdom of our Lord's dealing with the multitudes to which I have just referred. Luther, Latimer, Baxter, Wesley, Whitefield, Berridge, and Rowland Hill were all extremely aware of the deceitfulness of man's heart. They knew very well that all is not gold that glitters, that conviction is not conversion, that feeling is not faith, that sentiment is not grace, and that all blossoms do not come to fruit. "Do not be deceived," was their constant cry. "Consider well what you do. Do not run before you are called. Count the cost."

If we desire to do good, let us never be ashamed of walking in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ. Work hard if you will, and if you have the opportunity, for the souls of others. Urge them to consider their ways. Compel them with holy intensity to come in, to lay down their arms, and to yield themselves to God. Offer them salvation – ready, free, full, immediate salvation. Urge Christ and all His benefits on their acceptance. In all your work, though, tell the truth, and tell the whole truth. Be ashamed to use the common art of a recruiting sergeant. Do not speak only of the uniform, the pay, and the glory, but also speak of the enemies, the battle, the armor, the vigilance, the marching, and the drills. Do not present only one side of Christianity. When you speak of the cross on which Christ died for our redemption, do not keep back the cross of self-denial that must be carried. Explain fully what Christianity involves. Exhort people to repent and come to Christ, but urge them at the same time to count the cost.

I will now give some suggestions that will help people to properly count the cost.

I would be negligent indeed if I did not say something on this branch of my subject. I have no desire to discourage anyone or to keep any one back from Christ's service. It is my heart's desire to encourage everyone to go forward and take up the cross. Let us count the cost by all means, and count it carefully. But let us remember that if we consider it properly and look at it from all sides, there is nothing that should make us afraid.

Let us mention some things that should always enter into our calculations in counting the cost of true Christianity. Set down honestly and fairly what you will have to give up and go through if you become Christ's disciple. Leave nothing out. Put it all down. Then write down side by side the following points that I am going to give you. Do this fairly and honestly, and I will not be afraid of the result.

Count up and compare the profit and the loss if you are a true-hearted and holy Christian. You may possibly lose something in this world, but you will gain the salvation of your immortal soul. It is written, *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?* (Mark 8:36).

Count up and compare the praise and the blame if you are a true-hearted and holy Christian. You may possibly be blamed by others, but you will have the praise of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Your blame will come from the lips of a few erring, blind, fallible men and women. Your praise will come from the King of Kings and Judge of all the earth. Only those whom He blesses are really blessed. It is written, *Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in the heavens* (Matthew 5:11-12).

Count up and compare the friends and the enemies if you are a true-hearted and holy Christian. On the one side is the enmity of the devil and the wicked. On the other side you have the favor and friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Your enemies, at most, can only bruise your heel. They may rage loudly and travel sea and land to try to ruin you, but they cannot destroy you. Your Friend is able to save to the

uttermost all those who come unto God by Him (Hebrews 7:25). No one will ever pluck His sheep out of His hand (John 10:28). It is written, *Be not afraid of those that kill the body and, after that, have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, who, after being killed, has power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him* (Luke 12:4-5).

Count up and compare the life that now is and the life that is to come if you are a true-hearted and holy Christian. The present time, no doubt, is not a time of ease. It is a time of watching and praying, fighting and struggling, believing and working – but it is only for a few years. The future time is the season of rest and refreshing. Sin will be cast out. Satan will be bound. Best of all, it will be a rest forever. It is written, *For our tribulation, which is momentary and light, prepares an exceeding and eternal weight of glory unto us; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal* (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Count up and compare the pleasures of sin and the happiness of God's service if you are a true-hearted and holy Christian. The pleasures that the worldly man gets by his ways are hollow, unreal, and unsatisfying. They are like the fire of thorns, flashing and crackling for a few minutes and then quenched forever. The happiness that Christ gives to His people is something solid, lasting, and substantial. It does not depend upon health or circumstances. It never leaves anyone, even in death. It ends in an *incorruptible crown of glory* (1 Peter 5:4). It is written, *The joy of the hypocrite [is] but for a moment* (Job 20:5), and *The laughter of the fool is as the crackling of thorns under a pot* (Ecclesiastes 7:6). However, it is also written, *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid* (John 14:27).

Count up and compare the trouble that true Christianity involves and the troubles that are in store for the wicked beyond the grave. Admit for a moment that Bible reading, praying, repenting, believing, and holy living require effort and self-denial. It is all nothing compared to that *wrath to come* that is stored up for the impenitent and unbelieving (1 Thessalonians 1:10). A single day in hell will be worse than a whole

life spent carrying the cross. *Where their worm does not die, and the fire is never quenched* are things that we cannot fully conceive or describe (Mark 9:48). It is written, *Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime didst receive thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted here, and thou art tormented* (Luke 16:25).

Count up and compare the number of those who turn from sin and the world and serve Christ and the number of those who forsake Christ and return to the world. On the one side you will find thousands; on the other you will find none. Multitudes every year are turning out of the broad way and entering the narrow. None who really enter the narrow way grow tired of it and return to the broad way. The footsteps in the downward road are often to be seen leaving it. The footsteps in the road to heaven are all one way. It is written, *The way of the wicked is as darkness* (Proverbs 4:19), and *The way of transgressors is hard* (Proverbs 13:15). It is also written, though, that *The path of the just is as the light of the morning star, that shines more and more until the day is perfect* (Proverbs 4:18).

A single day in hell
will be worse than
a whole life spent
carrying the cross.

Such calculations as these, no doubt, are often not done correctly. Many people, I am well aware, are always wavering between two opinions (1 Kings 18:21). They cannot make up their minds that it is worthwhile to serve Christ. The losses and gains, the advantages and disadvantages, the sorrows and the joys, and the helps and the hindrances appear to them so nearly balanced that they cannot decide to choose the ways of God. They cannot add these things up correctly. They cannot make the result as clear as it should be.

What is the secret of their mistakes? It is lack of faith. To come to a proper conclusion about our souls, we must have some of that mighty principle that is described in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Let me try to show how that principle operates in the great business of counting the cost.

How was it that Noah persevered in building the ark? He stood alone amid a world of sinners and unbelievers. He had to endure scorn, ridicule, and mocking. What was it that steadied his arm and made him patiently work on and face it all? It was faith. He believed in a wrath

to come. He believed that there was no safety except in the ark that he was preparing. Believing, he did not place much value on the world's opinion. He counted the cost by faith and had no doubt that to build the ark was gain (Hebrews 11:7).

How was it that Moses gave up the pleasures of Pharaoh's house and refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter? How was it that he chose instead to join himself with a despised people like the Hebrews, risking everything in this world to carry out the great work of their deliverance from bondage? To the eye of the flesh he was losing everything and gaining nothing. What was it that moved him? It was faith. He believed that there was One far above Pharaoh who would carry him safe through all that he would do. He believed that *the recompense of the reward* was far better than all the honors of Egypt. He counted the cost by faith, *as seeing him who is invisible*. He was convinced that to forsake Egypt and go out into the wilderness was gain (Hebrews 11:23-29).

How was it that Saul the Pharisee made up his mind to become a Christian? The cost and sacrifices of the change were incredibly great.

Think seriously about whether your current version of Christianity costs you anything.

He gave up all his brilliant prospects among his own people. Instead of having man's favor, he brought upon himself man's hatred, enmity, and persecution, even unto death. What was it that enabled him to face it all? It was faith. He believed that Jesus, who met him on the way to Damascus, could give him a hundredfold more than he gave

up, and in the world to come everlasting life (Mark 10:30). By faith he counted the cost and saw clearly on which side the right choice lay. He believed firmly that to carry the cross of Christ was gain.

Let us consider these things well. That faith that made Noah, Moses, and Paul do what they did is the great secret of reaching a right conclusion about our souls. That same faith must be our helper when we sit down to count the cost of being a true Christian. That same faith is to be had for the asking. *He gives greater grace* (James 4:6). Armed with that faith, we will set things down at their true value. Filled with that faith, we will neither add to the cross nor subtract from the crown. Our conclusions will all be correct. Our sum total will be without error.

In conclusion, think seriously about whether your current version of

Christianity costs you anything. Very likely it costs you nothing. Very probably it does not cost you trouble, time, thought, care, effort, reading, praying, self-denial, conflict, working, or labor of any kind. Now notice what I say. Such a Christianity as this will never save your soul. It will not give you peace while you live nor hope while you die. It will not support you in the day of affliction nor cheer you in the hour of death. Christianity that costs nothing is worth nothing. Awake before it is too late. Awake and repent. Awake and be converted. Awake and believe. Awake and pray. Do not rest until you can give a satisfactory answer to my question: "What does it cost?"

If you lack inspiring motives for serving God, think about what it cost to provide salvation for your soul. Think how the Son of God left heaven and became a man, suffered on the cross, and lay in the grave to pay your debt to God and work out for you a complete redemption. Think about all this and learn that it is no little matter to possess an immortal soul. It is worthwhile to take some trouble about your soul.

Lazy man or woman, has it really come to this – that you will miss heaven because you will not take the time to count the cost? Are you really determined to make shipwreck forever merely because you do not want to exert yourself? Away with the cowardly, unworthy thought! Arise and be strong! Say to yourself, "Whatever it costs, I will strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Matthew 7:13-14). Look at the cross of Christ and take fresh courage. Look ahead to death, judgment, and eternity and be in earnest. It might cost much to be a Christian, but you can be sure that it is worth the cost.

If anyone really feels that he has counted the cost and taken up the cross, I urge him to persevere and press on. You might often feel your heart faint and be greatly tempted to give up in despair. Your enemies seem so many, your troubling sins so strong, your friends so few, and the way so steep and narrow that you hardly know what to do. Still I say, persevere and press on.

The time is very short. A few more years of watching and praying, a few more tossings on the sea of this world, a few more deaths and changes, a few more winters and summers, and all will be over. We will have fought our last battle and will need to fight no more.

The presence and company of Christ will make up for all we suffer

here below. When we see as we have been seen and look back on the journey of life, we will wonder at our own faintness of heart. We will marvel that we made so much of our cross and thought so little of our crown. We will marvel that in counting the cost we could have ever doubted on which side lay the greatest reward. Let us take courage. We are not far from home. It might cost much to be a true Christian and a consistent believer, but it is well worth the price.

Additional Thoughts on Revival

I would like to explain a little bit about true revivals, for which I am deeply grateful. If Christ is preached, I rejoice, whoever the preacher may be. If souls are saved, I rejoice, no matter where this occurs. But it is a sad fact that there are sometimes false and defective aspects that occur during a true revival of God. There can be a disproportionate magnifying of some points. Some of these points are instantaneous conversion, the invitation of unconverted sinners to come to Christ, and the possession of inward joy and peace as a test of conversion.

- Instantaneous conversion, no doubt, ought to be encouraged, but people should not be led to suppose that there is no other sort of conversion, and that unless they are suddenly and powerfully converted to God, they are not converted at all. The duty of coming to Christ at once, just as we are, should be urged upon all hearers. It is the very cornerstone of gospel preaching, but people ought to be told to repent as well as to believe. They should be told why they are to come to Christ, what they are to come for, and from where their need arises.
- The nearness of peace and comfort in Christ should be proclaimed, but people should be taught that the possession of strong inward joys and high frames of mind are not essential to justification, and that there may be true faith and true peace without such very triumphant feelings. Joy alone is no certain evidence of grace.
- The work of the Holy Spirit in converting sinners is far too

much narrowed and confined to one single way. Not all true converts are converted instantaneously like Saul and the Philippian jailor.

- Sinners are not sufficiently instructed about the holiness of God's law, the depth of their sinfulness, and the real guilt of sin. To be constantly telling a sinner to "come to Christ" is of little use unless you tell him why he needs to come and fully show him his sins.
- Faith is often not properly explained. In some cases, people are taught that mere feeling is faith. In others they are taught that if they believe that Christ died for sinners, they have faith! At this rate, the very demons are believers!
- The possession of inward joy and assurance is often made essential to believing, yet assurance is certainly not of the essence of saving faith. There can be faith when there is no assurance. To insist on all believers at once "rejoicing" as soon as they believe is most unsafe. Some, I am quite sure, will rejoice without believing, while others will believe who cannot immediately rejoice.
- Last, but not least, the sovereignty of God in saving sinners and the absolute necessity of preventing grace are far too much overlooked. Many talk as if conversions could be manufactured at man's pleasure and as if there were no such text as this: *It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that has mercy* (Romans 9:16).

The harm done by the theological system I refer to is very great. On the one hand, many humble-minded Christians are totally discouraged. They think they have no grace because they cannot attain the joyous emotions and feelings that are urged upon them. On the other hand, many graceless people are deceived into thinking they are converted because, under the pressure of excitement and temporary feelings, they are led to profess themselves Christians. And all this time the thoughtless and ungodly look on with contempt and find new reasons to neglect Christianity completely.

There are two passages of Scripture that should be frequently and fully expounded in the present day by all who preach the gospel, especially by those who have anything to do with revivals. One passage is the parable of the sower. That parable is not recorded three times without good reason and a deep meaning. The other passage is our Lord's teaching about counting the cost and the words that He spoke to the great multitudes whom He saw following Him. It is very noteworthy that in that occasion He did not say anything to flatter these volunteers or encourage them to follow Him. Instead, He saw what their case needed. He told them to stand still and count the cost. I am not sure that most modern preachers would have adopted this course of treatment.

Chapter 6

Growth

*Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord
and Saviour, Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)*

The subject of the text above is one that I dare not leave out of this book about holiness. It is a topic that should be deeply interesting to every true Christian. It naturally raises questions: Do we grow in grace? Do we make progress in our Christianity?

I do not expect these questions to be of interest to a mere formal Christian. The one who has nothing more than a kind of Sunday morning religion, whose Christianity is like his Sunday clothes – put on once a week and then laid aside – cannot, of course, be expected to care about growing in grace. He knows nothing about such matters. *They are foolishness unto him* (1 Corinthians 2:14). However, to everyone who is earnest and sincere about his soul and who hungers and thirsts after spiritual life, the questions ought to come home with searching power: Do we make progress in our Christian lives? Do we grow?

These questions are always useful, but especially so at certain times. A Saturday night, a communion Sunday, a birthday, the end of a year – all these are seasons that should cause us to think and make us look within. Time is flying quickly. Life is quickly fleeing away. The hour is daily drawing nearer when the reality of our Christianity will be tested and it will be seen whether we have built on the rock or on the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). Certainly it is wise for us to examine ourselves

from time to time and take account of our souls. Are we progressing in spiritual things? Are we growing in holiness?

These questions are of special importance in our day. Defective beliefs and strange opinions are floating in people's minds on some points of doctrine, including the point of growth in grace as an essential part of true holiness. It is totally denied by some people. Others try to explain it away until it is gone. It is misunderstood by most, and is therefore neglected. In a day like this, it is beneficial to look directly at the whole subject of Christian growth.

In considering this subject, there are three things that I want to bring forward and establish:

The reality of Christian growth. There is such a thing as growth in grace.

The characteristics of Christian growth. There are characteristics by which growth in grace can be known.

The method of Christian growth. There are methods that must be used by those who desire to grow in grace.

I may not know you who are reading this, but I am not ashamed to ask you to pay close attention to its message. The subject is not a mere matter of speculation and controversy. It is an eminently practical subject in Christianity. It is intimately and inseparably connected with the whole question of sanctification. It is a leading characteristic of true saints that they grow. The spiritual health and prosperity and the spiritual happiness and comfort of every truehearted and holy Christian are intimately connected with the subject of spiritual growth.

There is such a thing as growth in grace.

It seems at first sight to be a strange and sad thing if any Christian denies this point, but it is fair to remember that human understanding, as well as the human will, is fallen. Disagreements about doctrines are often nothing more than disagreements about the meaning of words. I try to hope that it is so in this case. I try to believe that I mean one thing

when I speak of growth in grace, while my brethren who deny it mean quite another. Let me therefore clear the way by explaining what I mean.

When I speak of growth in grace, I do not for a moment mean that a believer's portion in Christ can grow. I do not mean that he can grow in safety, acceptance with God, or security. I do not mean that he can ever be more justified, more pardoned, more forgiven, or more at peace with God than he is at the first moment he believes. I strongly believe that the justification of a believer is a finished, perfect, and complete work, and that the weakest saint, though he may not know and feel it, is as completely justified as the strongest. I strongly believe that our election, calling, and standing in Christ are not gradual and do not increase or decrease.

If anyone imagines that by growth in grace I mean growth in justification, he has missed the mark and is utterly mistaken about the whole point I am considering. I would go to the stake, God helping me, for the glorious truth that in the matter of justification before God every believer is complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10). Nothing can be added to his justification from the moment he believes, and nothing can be taken away.

When I speak of growth in grace, I only mean growth in the degree, size, strength, vigor, and power of the graces that the Holy Spirit plants in a believer's heart. I contend that every one of those graces can grow, progress, and increase. I believe that repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage, and the like can be little or great, strong or weak, and may vary greatly in the same person at different periods of his life.

When I speak of someone growing in grace, I simply mean that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, his love more extensive, and his spiritual-mindedness more evident. He feels more of the power of godliness in his own heart. He manifests more of it in his life. He is going on from strength to strength, from faith to faith, and from grace to grace. I leave it to others to describe such a person's condition by any words they please. For myself, I think the truest and best account of him is that he is growing in grace.

One main base on which I build this doctrine of growth in grace is the plain language of Scripture. If words in the Bible mean anything, there is such a thing as growth, and believers ought to be exhorted to grow.

What does Paul say? *Your faith grows exceedingly* (2 Thessalonians 1:3). *We beseech you, brethren, that ye continue to grow* (1 Thessalonians 4:10). *Growing in the knowledge of God* (Colossians 1:10). *Having hope of the increase of your faith* (2 Corinthians 10:15). *The Lord make you to multiply and make charity to abound* (1 Thessalonians 3:12). *Let us grow up into him in all things* (Ephesians 4:15). *This I pray that your charity may abound yet more and more* (Philippians 1:9). *We beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that in the manner ye were taught of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would continue to grow* (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

What does Peter say? *Desire the rational milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby* (1 Peter 2:2). *Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ* (2 Peter 3:18). I do not know what other people think of such texts, but to me they seem to establish the doctrine for which I contend, and they are incapable of any other explanation. Growth in grace is taught in the Bible. I could stop here and say no more.

The other base, however, on which I build the doctrine of growth in grace is the base of fact and experience. I ask any honest reader of the New Testament whether or not he can see degrees of grace in the New Testament saints whose histories are recorded, as plainly as the sun at noonday. I ask him whether or not he can see in the very same people as great a difference between their faith and knowledge at one time and at another, as between the same person's strength when he is an infant and when he is a grownup man. I ask him whether or not the Scripture distinctly recognizes this in the language it uses, when it speaks of "weak" faith and "strong" faith, and of Christians as *new-born babes, little children, young men, and fathers* (1 Peter 2:2; 1 John 2:12-14). I ask him, above all, whether or not his own observation of believers does not bring him to the same conclusion.

What true Christian would not confess that there is as much difference between the degree of his own faith and knowledge when he was first converted and his present attainments, as there is between a sapling and a fully grown tree? His graces are the same in principle, but they have grown. I do not know how these facts seem to others, but

to my eyes they seem to prove most conclusively that growth in grace is a real thing.

I feel almost ashamed to remain so long upon this part of my subject. In fact, if anyone intends to say that the faith, hope, knowledge, and holiness of a newly converted person are as strong as those of an old established believer and need no increase, it is a waste of time to argue further. There is no doubt they are as real, but not as strong; they are as genuine, but not as vigorous; they are as much seeds of the Spirit's planting, but are not yet as fruitful. If anyone asks how they are to become stronger, I say that it must be by the same process by which all things having life increase: they must grow. This is what I mean by growth in grace.²⁷

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something wrong.

Let us turn now to a more practical view of the great subject before us. I want people to look at growth in grace as a thing of infinite importance to the soul. No matter what others may think, I believe that our best interest is in having a right view of the question, "Do we grow?"

Growth in grace is the best evidence of spiritual health and prosperity. In a child or a flower or a tree, we are all aware that when there is no growth, there is something wrong. Healthy life in an animal or plant will always show itself by progress and increase. It is the same with our souls. If they are progressing and doing well, they will grow.

Growth in grace is one way to be happy in our Christianity. God has wisely linked together our comfort and our increase in holiness. He has graciously made it in our interest to press on and aim high in our Christianity. There is a vast difference between the amount of sensible enjoyment that one believer has in his Christianity compared to another. You can be sure that ordinarily the person who feels the most

27 "True grace is progressive, of a spreading, growing nature. It is with grace as it is with light: first, there is the daybreak; then it shines brighter to the full noonday. The saints are not only compared to stars for their light, but to trees for their growth (Isaiah 61:3; Hosea 14:5). A good Christian is not like Hezekiah's sun that went backwards, nor Joshua's sun that stood still, but is always advancing in holiness and increasing with the increase of God. . . . The growth of grace is the best evidence of the truth of grace. Things that have not life will not grow. A picture will not grow. A stake in a hedge will not grow. But a plant that hath vegetative life will grow. The growing of grace shows it to be alive in the soul" —Thomas Watson (1620-1686), English Puritan nonconformist preacher and author, from his book *A Body of Divinity*.

joy and peace in believing (Romans 15:13) and has the clearest witness of the Spirit in his heart is the person who grows.

Growth in grace is one secret of usefulness to others. Our influence on others for good depends greatly on what they see in us. The children of the world measure Christianity quite as much by their eyes as by their ears. The Christian who is always at a standstill, who to all appearances remains the same, with the same little faults, weaknesses, troubling sins, and little weaknesses, is seldom the Christian who does much good. The person who shakes and stirs minds and sets the world thinking is the believer who is continually improving and going forward. People think there is life and reality when they see growth.

Growth in grace pleases God. It might seem to be a wonderful thing, no doubt, that anything done by such creatures as we are can give pleasure to the Most High God, but it is so. The Scripture speaks of walking so as *to please God* (1 Thessalonians 4:1). The Scripture says there are sacrifices with which *God is well pleased* (Hebrews 13:16). The farmer loves to see the plants on which he has bestowed labor flourish and bearing fruit. It cannot but disappoint and grieve him to see them stunted and standing still. What does our Lord Himself say? *I AM the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. In this is my Father clarified, in that ye bear much fruit; and in this manner ye shall be my disciples* (John 15:1, 8). The Lord takes pleasure in all His people, but especially in those who grow.

Growth in grace is not only possible, but is something for which believers are accountable. To tell an unconverted person, dead in sins, to grow in grace, would doubtless be absurd. To tell a believer, who is awakened and alive to God, to grow, is only calling him to a plain scriptural duty. He has a new set of standards within him, and it is a solemn duty not to quench it. Neglect of growth robs him of privileges, grieves the Spirit, and makes the chariot wheels of his soul move heavily. Whose fault is it, I would like to know, if a believer does not grow in grace? The fault, I am sure, cannot be laid on God. He delights to give more grace (James 4:6). He *has pleasure in the peace of his slave* (Psalm 35:27). The fault, no doubt, is our own. We ourselves are to blame, and no one else, if we do not grow.

There are characteristics by which growth in grace can be known.

Let me take it for granted that we do not question the reality of growth in grace and its vast importance. So far so good, but now you want to know how anyone can find out whether he is growing in grace or not. I first answer that question by observing that we are very poor judges of our own condition, and that bystanders often know us better than we know ourselves. I answer further that there are undoubtedly certain great characteristics and signs of growth in grace, and that wherever you see these marks, you see a growing soul. I will now discuss some of these signs of growing in grace.

One sign of growth in grace is increased humility. The person whose soul is growing feels his own sinfulness and unworthiness more every year. He is ready to say with Job, *I am vile* (Job 40:4), with Abraham, *I am but dust and ashes* (Genesis 18:27), with Jacob, *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies* (Genesis 32:10), with David, *I am a worm* (Psalm 22:6), with Isaiah, *I am a man of unclean lips* (Isaiah 6:5), and with Peter, *Lord, . . . I am a sinful man* (Luke 5:8).

The nearer one grows to God and the more he sees of God's holiness and perfection, the more thoroughly he is aware of his own countless imperfections. The farther he travels on the way to heaven, the more he understands what Paul meant when he said that he was not already perfect (Philippians 3:12), that he was not worthy to be called an apostle (1 Corinthians 15:9), that he was *less than the least of all saints* (Ephesians 3:8), and that he was chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). The more ready he is for glory, the more, like the ripe corn, he hangs down his head. The brighter and clearer his light and understanding are, the more he sees of the shortcomings and infirmities of his own heart. When first converted, he would tell you he only saw a little of them compared to what he sees now. Do you want to know if you are growing in grace? Be sure that you look within for increased humility.

Another sign of growth in grace is increased faith and love toward our Lord Jesus Christ. The person whose soul is growing finds more in Christ to rest upon every year, and he rejoices more that he has such a Savior. No doubt he saw much in Him when he first believed. His faith laid hold on the atonement of Christ and gave him hope, but as he grows in grace, he sees a thousand things in Christ that he never dreamed of at first. His love and power, His heart and His intentions, His work

as Substitute, Intercessor, Priest, Advocate, Physician, Shepherd, and Friend – all unfold themselves to a growing soul in an unspeakable manner. The person who is growing in grace discovers a worthiness in Christ for the needs of his soul that he did not even know the half of before. Do you want to know if you are growing in grace? Then look within and see if you have increased knowledge of Christ.

Another sign of growth in grace is increased holiness of life and conversation. The person whose soul is growing gets more dominion over sin, the world, and the devil every year. He becomes more careful about his temperament, his words, and his actions. He is more watchful over his conduct in every aspect of life. He strives more to be conformed

The person whose soul is growing gets more dominion over sin, the world, and the devil every year.

to the image of Christ in all things, to follow Him as his example, and to trust in Him more deeply as his Savior. He is not content with old attainments and former grace. He forgets the things that are behind and reaches forth unto those things that are before, making “Higher! Upward! Forward! Onward!” his continual motto (Philippians 3:13).

On earth he thirsts and desires to have a will more entirely in unison with God’s will. In heaven the main thing that he looks for, next to the presence of Christ, is complete separation from all sin. Do you want to know if you are growing in grace? Then look within for increased holiness.

Another sign of growth in grace is increased spirituality of taste and mind. The person whose soul is growing takes more interest in spiritual things every year. He does not neglect his duty in the world. He carries out every duty of life faithfully, diligently, and conscientiously, whether at home or abroad, but the things he loves best are spiritual things. The ways, trends, amusements, and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in his heart. He does not condemn them all as downright sinful or say that those who have anything to do with them are going to hell, but they have a constantly diminishing hold on his own affections and gradually seem smaller and less important in his eyes. Godly friends, habits, activities, and conversation appear of ever-increasing value to him. Do you want to know if you are growing

in grace? Then look within for a greater desire for the things of God and less affection for the things of the world.

Another sign of growth in grace is increase of love. The person whose soul is growing is more full of love every year – of love to all people, but especially of love toward true Christian brethren. His love will show itself actively in a growing disposition to do kindnesses, to help others, to be good-natured to everybody, to be generous, sympathizing, thoughtful, tenderhearted, and considerate. It will show itself passively in a growing disposition to be humble and patient toward others, to put up with provocation and not stand upon rights, to be patient and to restrain rather than quarrel. A soul growing in grace will try to put the best construction on other people's conduct and to believe all things and hope all things, even to the end. There is no more certain sign of backsliding and falling off in grace than an increasing disposition to find fault, pick holes, and see weak points in others. Do you want to know if you are growing in grace? Then look within for increasing love.

One more sign of growth in grace is increased zeal and diligence in trying to do good to souls. The person who is really growing will take greater interest in the salvation of sinners every year. Missions at home and abroad, along with all efforts to increase biblical light and diminish spiritual darkness, will have a greater place in his attention every year. He will not become *weary in well doing* (Galatians 6:9) because he does not see every effort succeed. He will not care less for the progress of Christ's cause on earth as he grows older, though he will learn to expect less. He will just work on and do his duty, whether giving, praying, preaching, speaking, or visiting – whatever the result may be – and will consider his work its own reward. One of the most certain signs of spiritual decline is a decreased interest about the souls of others and the growth of Christ's kingdom. Do you want to know if you are growing in grace? Then look within for increased concern about the salvation of souls.

These are the most trustworthy signs of growth in grace. Let us examine them carefully and consider what we know about them. I can certainly believe that they will not please some professing Christians in our day. Those excitable emotional religionists whose only notion of Christianity is that of a state of perpetual joy and ecstasy, who tell

you that they have progressed far beyond the region of conflict and soul-humiliation, will no doubt regard the characteristics I have mentioned as legalistic, carnal, and producing bondage. I cannot help that. I call no one master in these things. I only desire that my statements will be judged according to Scripture. I firmly believe that what I have said is not only scriptural, but it is agreeable to the experience of the most eminent saints in every age. Show me someone in whom the six qualities I have mentioned can be found. He is the one who can give a satisfactory answer to the question, "Are we growing in grace?"

There are methods that must be used by those who desire to grow in grace.

The words of James must never be forgotten: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights* (James 1:17). This is no doubt as true of growth in grace as it is of everything else. It is the gift of God, but still it must always be kept in mind that God is pleased to work by means. God has ordained means as well as ends. He who wants to grow in grace must use the means of growth.

I am afraid that this point is too often overlooked by believers. Many admire growth in grace in others and wish that they themselves were like them, but they seem to suppose that those who grow do so because of some special gift from God, and that since they have not received this gift, they are content to sit still. This is a dreadful delusion, and one against which I desire to testify with all my might. I want it to be distinctly understood that growth in grace is bound up with the use of means within the reach of all believers, and that, as a general rule, growing souls are what they are because they use these means and methods.

Please pay careful attention while I explain the means of growth. Cast away forever the wrong thinking that if a believer does not grow in grace it is not his fault. Settle it in your mind that a believer, a person made alive by the Holy Spirit, is not a mere dead creature, but is a being of mighty capacities and responsibilities. Let the words of Solomon sink down into your heart: *The soul of the diligent shall be made fat* (Proverbs 13:4).

One thing essential to growth in grace is diligence in the use of

private means of grace. By this I understand such things as someone must use by himself alone, and no one can use for him. This includes private prayer, private reading of the Bible, and private meditation and self-examination. The person who does not exert any effort about these three things must never expect to grow. These are the roots of true Christianity. If a person is wrong here, he is wrong all the way through! This is the whole reason why many professing Christians never seem to grow spiritually. They are careless and not diligent about their private prayers. They read their Bibles only a little, and with very little enthusiasm or desire. They give themselves no time to meditate upon and examine the condition of their souls.

It is useless to try to deny that the age we live in is full of distinct dangers. It is an age of much activity and of much hurry, bustle, and excitement in Christian activity. Many are running *to and fro*, no doubt, and knowledge is increased (Daniel 12:4). Multitudes are ready to attend religious public meetings, events, or anything else in which there is excitement and emotion. Few, though, seem to remember the absolute necessity of making time to *meditate in your heart . . . and desist* (Psalm 4:4). Without this, however, there is seldom any deep spiritual success. I suspect that Christians a few hundred years ago read their Bibles more and were more frequently alone with God than they are in the present day. Let us remember this point! Private devotion must receive our first priority if we desire our souls to grow.

Another thing that is essential to growth in grace is carefulness in the use of public means of grace. By this I understand to include those means that we have within our reach as members of Christ's visible church. In this I include the ordinances of regular Sunday worship, uniting with God's people in common prayer and praise, the preaching of the Word, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. I firmly believe that the manner in which these public means of grace are used has much to say to the prosperity of a believer's soul. It is easy to use them in a cold and heartless way. The very familiarity of them is apt to make us careless. Religious tradition, ritual, and ceremonies are likely to make us sleepy, callous, and unfeeling.

This is a snare into which too many professing Christians fall. If we want to grow spiritually, we must be on our guard here. This is a matter

in which the Holy Spirit is often grieved and that is detrimental to many saints. Let us strive to use the old prayers, sing the old hymns, kneel at the old communion rail, and hear the old truths preached with as much freshness and hunger as when we first believed. It is a sign of bad health when a person loses enjoyment for his food, and it is a sign of spiritual decline when we lose our appetite for means of grace. Whatever we do about public means, let us always do it with our might (Ecclesiastes 9:10). This is the way to grow!

Another thing essential to growth in grace is watchfulness over our conduct in the little matters of everyday life. Our tempers, our tongues, how we carry out our duties of life, how we use our time – each and all must be vigilantly attended to if we want our souls to prosper. Life is made up of days, and days are made up of hours, and the little things of every hour are not too little to be beneath the care of a Christian. When a tree begins to decay at its root or heart, the mischief is first seen at the extreme end of the little branches. “He that despises little things,” says an uninspired writer, “shall fall by little and little” (Ecclesiasticus 19:1). That witness is true.

Let others despise us, if they like, and call us precise and over-careful. Let us patiently hold to our way, remembering that we serve a precise God, that our Lord’s example is to be imitated in the least things as well as the greatest, and that we must take up our cross daily (Luke 9:23) and hourly, rather than sin. We must strive to have a Christianity that, like the sap of a tree, runs through every twig and leaf of our character and sanctifies all. This is one way to grow!

Another thing that is essential to growth in grace is caution about the company we keep and the friendships we form. Perhaps nothing affects someone’s character more than the company he keeps. We are influenced by the ways and tone of those with whom we live and talk, and, sadly, we get harm far more easily than good. Disease is infectious, but health is not. If a professing Christian deliberately chooses to be closely acquainted with those who are not friends of God and who cling to the world, his soul is certain to be harmed.

It is hard enough to serve Christ under any circumstances in such a world as this, but it is twice as hard to do so if we are friends of the thoughtless and ungodly. Mistakes in friendship or marriage engagements

are the whole reason why some have entirely ceased to grow. *Evil companions corrupt good character* (1 Corinthians 15:33). *The friendship of the world is enmity with God* (James 4:4). Let us seek friends who will motivate us to pray, read the Bible, and use our time wisely. Let us seek friends who are concerned about our souls, our salvation, and a world to come. Who can tell the good that a friend's word in season may do or the harm that it can stop? This is one way to grow.²⁸

One more thing that is absolutely essential to growth in grace is regular and habitual communion with the Lord Jesus. I am not referring to the Lord's Supper. Rather, I mean that daily habit of private and close communion between the believer and his Savior that can only be carried on by faith, prayer, and meditation. It is a habit, I am afraid, of which many believers know little. A person can be a believer and have his feet on the rock, and yet live far below how he ought to live. It is possible to have union with Christ, and yet to have little, if any, communion with Him. All true Christians should have much communion with Jesus Christ.

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The names and offices of Christ, as laid down in Scripture, appear to me to show unmistakably that this communion between the saint and his Savior is not merely an idea, but it is a real, true thing. Between the Bridegroom and his bride, between the Head and His members, between the Physician and His patients, between the Advocate and His clients, between the Shepherd and His sheep, between the Master and His scholars – there is evidently implied a habit of familiar communion, of daily petitions for things needed, of daily pouring out and unburdening our hearts and minds. Such a habit of dealing with Christ is clearly something more than a vague general trust in the work that Christ did for sinners. It is getting close to Him and laying hold of Him with confidence, as a loving, personal Friend. This is what I mean by communion.

28 "Let those be your closest companions who have made Christ their main companion. Do not so much look at the outside of people as their inside; look most to their internal worth. Many people have their eyes upon the outside of one who professes to be a Christian; but give me a Christian who is concerned with the internal worth of people, who makes those who are most filled with the fullness of God his closest and best companions." — Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), Puritan nonconformist pastor and author.

I do not believe that anyone will ever grow in grace who does not know something practically of the habit of communion with God. We must not be content with a general routine knowledge that justification is by faith and not by works, and that we should put our trust in Christ. We must go further than this. We must seek to have personal intimacy with the Lord Jesus and to deal with Him as a man deals with a loving friend. We must realize what it is to turn to Him first in every need, to talk to Him about every difficulty, to consult with Him about every step, to spread before Him all our sorrows, to get Him to share in all our joys, to do everything as in His sight, and to go through every day leaning on Him and looking to Him.

This is the way that Paul lived. *The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God* (Galatians 2:20). *To me to live is Christ* (Philippians 1:21). It is ignorance of this way of living that makes so many see no beauty in the book of the Song of Solomon, but it is the person who lives in this way, who keeps up constant communion with Christ, I emphatically say, whose soul will grow.

Far more could be said about this subject of growth in grace, but I have said enough, I hope, to convince you that the subject is one of great importance. Let me conclude this with some practical applications.

For those who know nothing whatever about growth in grace. They have little or no concern about Christianity. Occasional Sunday church attendance makes up the substance of their Christianity. They are without spiritual life, and of course they cannot presently grow in grace. Are you one of these people? If you are, you are in a sad condition.

Years are slipping away and time is flying by. Graveyards are filling up and families are thinning. Death and judgment are getting nearer to us all, yet you live like one asleep about your soul! How absurd! What foolishness! What suicide can be worse than this?

Awake before it is too late! Awake, arise from the dead, and live for God. Turn to Him who is sitting at the right hand of God, waiting to be your Savior and Friend. Turn to Christ and cry earnestly to Him about your soul. There is yet hope! He who called Lazarus from the grave has not changed. He who commanded the widow's son at Nain to arise from his coffin can do miracles yet for your soul. Seek Him at once. Seek Christ if you do not want to be lost forever. Do not stand still

merely talking and meaning and intending and wishing and hoping. Seek Christ that you may live, and live so you may grow.

For those who ought to know something of growth in grace, but currently know nothing at all. They have made little or no progress since they were first converted. They seem to have *settled on their lees* (Zephaniah 1:12). They go on from year to year content with old grace, old experience, old knowledge, old faith, old measure of attainment, old religious expressions, and old set phrases. Like the Gibeonites, their bread is always moldy and their shoes are worn and patched (Joshua 9:12-13). They never appear to make any progress. Are you one of these people? If you are, you are living far below your privileges and responsibilities. It is time to examine yourself.

If you have reason to hope that you are a true believer and yet do not grow in grace, there must be a fault – a serious fault – somewhere. It is not the will of God that your soul should stand still. *He gives greater grace* (James 4:6). He takes *pleasure in the peace of his slave* (Psalm 35:27). It cannot be for your own happiness or usefulness that your soul should stand still. Without growth you will never rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4). Without growth you will never do good to others. Certainly this lack of growth is a serious matter! It should cause you to search your heart. There must be some *secret thing* (Job 15:11). There must be some reason.

Take the advice I give you. Resolve this very day that you will find out the reason why you are standing still and not growing in grace. Search every corner of your soul with a faithful and firm hand. Search from one end of the camp to the other until you find out the Achan who is weakening your hands (Joshua 7).

Begin by appealing to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Physician of souls, and ask Him to heal the secret ailment within you, whatever it may be. Begin as if you had never pleaded with Him before, and ask for grace to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye (Matthew 5:29-30). Never, never be content if your soul does not grow. For the sake of your own peace and your usefulness, and for the honor of your Maker's cause, resolve to find out the reason why.

For those who are really growing in grace, but are not aware of it and do not recognize it. Their very growth is the reason why they

do not see their growth! Their continual increase in humility prevents them from realizing that they are progressing. Like Moses when he came down from the mount from communing with God, their faces shine, and like Moses, they are not aware of it (Exodus 34:29). Such Christians, I freely admit, are not common, but they are to be found every once in a while. Like angels' visits, they are few and far between. Happy is the neighborhood where such growing Christians live! To meet them and see them and be in their company is like meeting and seeing a bit of heaven upon earth.

What should I say to such people? What can I say? Should I awaken them to a consciousness of their growth and tell them to be pleased with it? I will do nothing of the kind. Should I tell them to be satisfied with their own attainments and look at their own superiority over others? God forbid! I will do nothing of the kind. To tell them such things would do them no good. To tell them such things would be a useless waste of time.

If there is any one feature about a growing soul that especially characterizes him, it is his deep sense of his own unworthiness. He never sees anything to be praised in himself. He only feels that he is an unprofitable servant and the chief of sinners. It is the righteous, in the picture of the judgment day, who ask, *Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee? or thirsty and give thee drink?* (Matthew 25:37). Extremes do indeed meet strangely sometimes. The conscience-hardened sinner and the eminent saint are in one respect quite alike. Neither of them fully realizes his own condition. The one does not see his own sin, and the other does not see his own grace!

But will I say nothing to growing Christians? Is there no word of counsel I can address to them? The sum and substance of all that I can say is to be found in two sentences: Go forward! Go on!

We can never have too much humility, too much faith in Christ, too much holiness, too much spirituality of mind, too much love, or too much zeal in doing good to others. Let us then be continually *forgetting those things which are behind and extending myself unto those things which are ahead* (Philippians 3:13). The best Christians in these matters are infinitely below the perfect pattern of the Lord. Whatever the

world may say, we can be sure there is no danger of any of us becoming “too good.”

Let us cast to the winds as idle talk the common idea that it is possible to be extreme and go too far in the Christian life. This is a favorite lie of the devil, and one that he circulates with much effort. No doubt there are enthusiasts and fanatics to be found who bring evil report upon Christianity by their extravagances and foolishness, but if anyone says that a mortal man can be too humble, too loving, too holy, or too diligent in doing good, he must either be an infidel or a fool. It is easy to go too far in serving pleasure and money, but in following the things that make up true Christianity and in serving Christ, there can be no extreme.

Let us never measure our Christianity by that of others, and think we are doing enough if we think we are doing better than our neighbors. This is another snare of the devil. Let us mind our own business. *What is that to thee?* said our Master on a certain occasion; *follow thou me* (John 21:22). Let us follow on, aiming at nothing short of perfection. Let us follow on, making Christ’s life and character our pattern and example. Let us follow on, remembering daily that at our best we are miserable sinners. Let us follow on, never forgetting that it signifies nothing whether we are better than others or not. At our very best we are far worse than we ought to be. There will always be room for improvement in us. We will be debtors to Christ’s mercy and grace to the very end. Let us stop looking at others and comparing ourselves with them. We will find enough to do if we look at our own hearts.

Let us follow on,
making Christ’s life
and character our
pattern and example.

Last, but not least, if we know anything about growth in grace and desire to know more, let us not be surprised if we have to go through much trial and affliction in this world. I firmly believe it is the experience of nearly all the most eminent saints. Like their blessed Master, they have been men *of sorrows, and acquainted with weakness* (Isaiah 53:3), and made *perfect . . . through sufferings* (Hebrews 2:10). It is a remarkable saying of our Lord, that every branch in Him that bears fruit, His Father purges it *that [it] may bring forth more fruit* (John 15:2).

It is a sad fact that constant worldly prosperity, as a general rule, is

harmful to a believer's soul. We cannot stand it. Sickness, losses, crosses, anxieties, and disappointments seem absolutely necessary to keep us humble, watchful, and spiritual-minded. They are as needful as the pruning knife to the vine and the refiner's furnace to the gold. They are not pleasant to flesh and blood. We do not like them, and we often do not see their meaning. *No chastening at present seems to be cause for joy, but rather for grief; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness* (Hebrews 12:11). When we reach heaven, we will find that it all worked out for our good.

If we love growth in grace, let these thoughts abide in our minds. When days of darkness come upon us, let us not consider it a perplexing thing. Rather, let us remember that lessons are learned on such days that would never have been learned in sunshine. Let us say to ourselves, "This also is for my profit, that I may be a partaker of God's holiness. It is sent in love. I am in God's best school. Correction is instruction. This is meant to make me grow."

I now conclude the subject of growth in grace. I hope I have said enough to set some of you thinking about it. All things are growing older. The world is growing old, and we ourselves are growing older. A few more summers, a few more winters, a few more sicknesses, a few more sorrows, a few more weddings, a few more funerals, a few more meetings, and a few more partings, and then what? The grass will be growing over our graves!

Would it not be good now to look within ourselves and ask our souls a simple question? In Christianity, in the things that concern our peace, in the great matter of personal holiness, are we making progress? Are we growing?

Chapter 7

Assurance

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my release is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith; *from now on there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all those also that have loved his appearing* (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

In the words of the Bible verses at the top of this page, we see the apostle Paul looking three ways: downward, backward, and forward. He is looking downward to the grave, backward to his own ministry, and forward to that great day – the day of judgment!

It will do us good to stand by the apostle's side for a few minutes and pay attention to the words he uses. Happy is that soul who can look where Paul looked and then speak as Paul spoke!

He looks downward to the grave, and he does it without fear. Hear what he says: *I am now ready to be offered*. I am like an animal brought to the place of sacrifice and bound with cords to the very horns of the altar. The drink offering, which generally accompanies the offering, is already being poured out. The last ceremonies have been gone through. Every preparation has been made. Only the death blow remains, and then all is over.

The time of my release is at hand. I am like a ship about to unmoor and put to sea. Everything on board is ready. I only wait to have the

moorings cast off that fasten me to the shore, and I will then set sail and begin my voyage.

These are remarkable words to come from the lips of a child of Adam like ourselves! Death is a solemn thing, and never so much so as when we see it close at hand. The grave is a chilling, heart-sickening place, and it is vain to pretend it has no terrors. Yet here is a mortal man who can look calmly into the narrow *house appointed for all living* (Job 30:23) and say, while he stands upon the brink, “I see it all, and am not afraid.”

Paul looks backward to his ministerial life, and he does it without shame. Hear what he says: *I have fought a good fight*. Here he speaks as a soldier. I have fought that good fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil from which so many retreat and draw back.

I have finished the race. Here he speaks as one who has run for a prize. I have run the race marked out for me. I have gone over the ground appointed for me, however rough and steep. I have not turned aside because of difficulties, nor have I been discouraged by the length of the course. I am at last in sight of the goal.

I have kept the faith. Here he speaks as a steward. I have held fast that glorious gospel that was committed to my trust. I have not mingled it with man’s traditions, nor spoiled its simplicity by adding my own inventions, nor allowed others to adulterate it without opposing them to the face. “As a soldier – a runner – a steward,” he seems to say, “I am not ashamed.”

The Christian is happy who, as he leaves the world, can leave such a testimony behind him. A good conscience will save no one. It will not wash away any sin or lift us one hair’s breadth toward heaven, yet a good conscience will be found to be a pleasant visitor at our bedside in a dying hour. There is a fine passage in *Pilgrim’s Progress* that describes Old Honest’s passage across the river of death. “The river,” says Bunyan, “overflowed its banks in some places; but Mr. Honest, in his lifetime, had spoken to one Good-conscience to meet him there, and there he was ready to lend him his hand and he helped him over. We may be sure there is a mine of truth in that passage.

The apostle Paul looks forward to the great day of judgment, and he does it without doubt. Notice his words:

From now on there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which

the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all those also that have loved his appearing. “A glorious reward,” he seems to say, “is ready and laid up in store for me – even that crown that is only given to the righteous. In the great day of judgment, the Lord will give this crown to me, and to all others who have loved Him as an unseen Savior and have longed to see Him face to face. My work on earth is over. This one thing now remains for me to look forward to, and nothing more.”

Let us observe that the apostle Paul speaks without any hesitation or distrust. He regards the crown as a sure thing, as his own already. He declares with unfaltering confidence his firm persuasion that the righteous Judge will give it to him. Paul was no stranger to all the circumstances and accompaniments of that solemn day to which he referred. The great white throne, the assembled world, the open books, the revealing of all secrets, the listening angels, the tremendous sentence, and the eternal separation of the lost and saved were all things with which he was well acquainted, but none of these things moved him. His strong faith looked past them all, and he only saw Jesus, his all-prevailing Advocate, the blood of sprinkling, and his sin washed away. “A crown,” he says, “is laid up for me. The Lord Himself will give it to me.” He speaks as if he saw it all with his own eyes.

These are the main things that these verses contain. I will not write about most of them, because I want to confine myself to the specific topic of holiness. I will only try to consider one point in the passage. That point is the strong *fulfillment of your hope* (Hebrews 6:11) with which the apostle Paul looks forward to his own prospects in the day of judgment.

I will do this the more willingly because of the great importance that is attached to the subject of assurance, and the great neglect with which it is often treated. I will do it at the same time with fear and trembling. I feel that I am treading on very difficult ground and that it is easy to speak rashly and unscripturally in this matter. The road between truth and error here is an especially narrow pass, and if I will be enabled to do good to some without doing harm to others, I will be very thankful.

There are four things I want to mention on the subject of assurance, and it might help if I list them now.

First, I will try to show that an assured hope, such as Paul here expresses, is a true and scriptural thing.

Secondly, I will make a broad concession that a person might never arrive at this assured hope and yet be saved.

Thirdly, I will give some reasons why an assured hope is greatly to be desired.

Lastly, I will try to point out some reasons why an assured hope is so seldom attained.

I ask special attention of all who take an interest in the main subject of this book. If I am not greatly mistaken, there is a very close connection between true holiness and assurance, and I want to show the nature of that connection. At present, I content myself with saying that where there is the most holiness, there is generally the most assurance.

An assured hope is a true and scriptural thing.

Assurance, such as Paul expresses in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, is not a mere opinion or feeling. It is not the result of much imagination or of hopeful and positive thoughts. It is a positive gift of the Holy Spirit, given without reference to one's bodily frame or health, and it is a gift that every believer in Christ ought to aim at and seek after.

In matters like these, the first question should be, What does the Bible say? I answer that question without the least hesitation. The Word of God appears to me to teach distinctly that a believer can arrive at an assured confidence with regard to his own salvation.

I confidently say, as God's truth, that a true Christian, a converted person, can reach such a comfortable degree of faith in Christ that he will generally feel entirely confident as to the pardon and safety of his soul. He is able to seldom be troubled with doubts, seldom be distracted with fears, and seldom be distressed by anxious uncertainties. Though bothered by many inward conflicts with sin, he will look forward to death without trembling and to judgment without dismay. This, I say, is the doctrine of the Bible. This is my account of assurance. I will ask

my readers to notice it distinctly. I say neither less nor more than I have here laid down.

Such a statement as this is often disputed and denied. Many cannot see the truth of it at all. The Church of Rome denounces assurance in the most unmeasured terms. The Council of Trent declares sharply that a “believer’s assurance of the pardon of his sins is a vain and ungodly confidence,” and Cardinal Bellarmine, the well-known champion of Roman Catholicism, calls it “a prime error of heretics.”²⁹

The vast majority of the worldly and thoughtless Christians among us oppose the doctrine of assurance. It offends and annoys them to hear of it. They do not like others to feel comfortable and sure, because they never feel that way themselves. Ask them if their sins are forgiven, and they will probably tell you that they do not know! It is certainly not a surprise that they do not accept the doctrine of assurance.

There are also some true believers who reject assurance or resist it as a doctrine filled with danger. They think that it borders on presumption. They seem to think that it is humble never to feel sure, never to be confident, and to live in a certain degree of doubt and suspense about their souls. This is to be regretted, and it does much harm.

I freely admit that there are some presumptuous people who profess to feel a confidence for which they have no scriptural basis. There are always some people who think well of themselves when God thinks poorly of them, just as there are some who think poorly of themselves when God thinks well of them. There will always be such people. There never yet was a scriptural truth without abuses and counterfeits. God’s election, man’s helplessness, and salvation by grace are all abused truths. There will be fanatics and enthusiasts as long as the world stands, but despite all this, assurance is a reality and a true thing, and God’s children must not let themselves be driven from the use of a truth simply because it is abused by some people.

There never yet was
a scriptural truth
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and counterfeits.

My answer to all who deny the existence of real, well-grounded

29 Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) was a Jesuit and a cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church. He also was a Cardinal Inquisitor and took part in some of the trials against some alleged heretics, including Giordano Bruno (who was burned at the stake) and Galileo. Bellarmine was a loyal defender of the Roman Catholic Church.

assurance is simply this: What does the Bible say? If assurance is not there, I have not another word to say about it. But does not Job say, *For I know that my redeemer lives and that he shall rise at the latter day over the dust; and afterward from this, my stricken skin and from my own flesh, I must see God* (Job 19:25-26)?

Does not David say, *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me* (Psalm 23:4)?

Does not Isaiah say, *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusts in thee* (Isaiah 26:3)? Does he not also say, *The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness rest and security for ever* (Isaiah 32:17)?

Does not Paul say to the Romans, *I am certain that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor any creature shall be able to separate us from the charity of God, which is in Christ, Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38-39)?

Does he not say to the Corinthians, *For we know that if the earthly house of this our habitation were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens* (2 Corinthians 5:1), and that *We are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:6)?

Does he not say to Timothy, *I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day* (2 Timothy 1:12)? Does he not speak to the Colossians of the fulfilled understanding (Colossians 2:2)?

Does not the author to the Hebrews write of the full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:22) and the fulfillment of your hope (Hebrews 6:11)?

Does not Peter specifically say, *Give all the more diligence to make your calling and election sure* (2 Peter 1:10)?

Does not John say, *We know that we are passed from death unto life* (1 John 3:14), *These things I have written unto you that believe in the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life* (1 John 5:13), and *We know that we are of God* (1 John 5:19)?

What can we say to these things? I want to speak with all humility on any disputed point. I am only a poor fallible child of Adam myself,

but I must say that in the passages I have just quoted, I see something far higher than the mere hopes and trusts with which so many believers seem content in this day. I see the language of persuasion, confidence, and knowledge – and, I might almost say, of certainty. I feel, for my own part, that if I take these verses in their plain obvious meaning, the doctrine of assurance is true.

My answer, furthermore, to all who dislike the doctrine of assurance as bordering on presumption is this: It can hardly be presumption to tread in the steps of Peter, Paul, Job, and John. They were all eminently humble and lowly-minded men, if ever any were, and yet they all speak of their own condition with an assured hope. Certainly this should teach us that deep humility and strong assurance are perfectly compatible, and that there is not any necessary connection between spiritual confidence and pride.

Many have attained to such an assured hope as our text describes, even in modern times. I will not concede for a moment that it was a specific privilege confined to the apostolic day.

There have been in our own land many believers who have appeared to walk in almost uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son and who have seemed to enjoy an almost unceasing sense of the light of God's reconciled countenance shining down upon them, and many have left their experience on record. I could mention well-known names, if space permitted. The thing has been, and still is – and that is enough.

Assurance, after all,
is no more than a
full-grown faith.

Lastly, it cannot be wrong to be confident in a matter where God speaks unconditionally, to believe decidedly when God promises decidedly, and to have a sure persuasion of pardon and peace when we rest on the word and oath of Him who never changes. It is an utter mistake to suppose that the believer who feels assurance is resting on anything he sees in himself. He simply leans on the Mediator of the New Covenant and the Scripture of truth. He believes that the Lord Jesus means what He says, and he takes Him at His word. Assurance, after all, is no more than a full-grown faith. It is a mature faith that grasps Christ's promise with both hands. It is a faith that argues like the good centurion, "If the

Lord *“speak the word only, then I am healed”* (Matthew 8:8). Wherefore then should I doubt?³⁰

We can be sure that Paul was the last man in the world to build his assurance on anything of his own. He who could write himself down as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) had a deep sense of his guilt and corruption, but he had a still deeper sense of the length and breadth of Christ’s righteousness imputed to him. He who could cry, *O wretched man that I am* (Romans 7:24) had a clear view of the fountain of evil within his heart, but he had a still clearer view of that other Fountain that can remove all sin and uncleanness. He who thought himself *less than the least of all saints* (Ephesians 3:8) had a strong and abiding feeling of his own weakness, but he had a still stronger feeling that Christ’s promise that His sheep *shall never perish* could not be broken (John 10:28).

Paul knew, if ever anyone did, that he was a poor, frail boat floating on a stormy ocean. He saw the rolling waves and roaring tempest by which he was surrounded, but then he looked away from self to Jesus, and he was not afraid. He remembered that anchor within the veil that is both *sure and steadfast* (Hebrews 6:19). He remembered the word, work, and constant intercession of Him who loved him and gave Himself for him (Ephesians 5:2). It was this, and nothing else, that enabled him to say so boldly, “A crown is laid up for me, and the Lord will give it to me,” and to conclude so certainly, “The Lord will preserve me; I will never be defeated.”

I will not dwell longer on this part of the subject. I think I have shown some good ground for the assertion I made, that assurance is a true thing.

30 “To be assured of our salvation,” Augustine says, “is no arrogant stoutness; it is our faith. It is no pride; it is devotion. It is no presumption; it is God’s promise.”—Bishop Jewell’s *Defense of the Apology*. 1570.

“If the ground of our assurance rested in and on ourselves, it might justly be called presumption; but the Lord and the power of His might being the ground thereof, they either know not what is the might of His power, or else too lightly esteem it, who account assured confidence thereon presumption.”—Gouge’s *Whole Armour of God*. 1647.

“Upon what ground is this certainty built? Surely not upon anything that is in us. Our assurance of perseverance is grounded wholly upon God. If we look upon ourselves, we see cause of fear and doubting; but if we look up to God, we shall find cause enough for assurance.”—Arthur Hildersham on John 4. 1632.

“Our hope is not hung upon such an untwisted thread as, I imagine so. . . . The strong rope of our fastened anchor is the oath and promise of Him who is eternal truth. Our salvation is fastened with God’s own hand and Christ’s own strength to the strong stake of God’s unchangeable nature.”—*Rutherford’s Letters*. 1637.

I move on to the second point, that a believer might never arrive at this assured hope that Paul expresses, yet he might still be saved. I admit this most freely. I do not dispute it for a moment. I would not desire to make one contrite heart sad that God has not made sad, to discourage one weak child of God, or to leave the impression that people do not have any part in Christ unless they feel assurance.

A person can have saving faith in Christ and yet never enjoy an assured hope like the apostle Paul enjoyed. To believe and have a glimmering hope of acceptance is one thing; to have *joy and peace* in believing and to *abound in hope* is quite another (Romans 15:13). All God's children have faith; not all have assurance. This should never be forgotten.

I know that some great and good men have held a different opinion. I believe that some excellent ministers of the gospel at whose feet I would gladly sit do not agree with the distinction I have stated. I desire to call no man master. I dread as much as anyone the idea of healing the wounds of conscience slightly (Jeremiah 8:11), but I think that any view other than that which I have given would be a most uncomfortable gospel to preach, and one very likely to keep souls back a long time from the gate of life.

I do not refrain from saying that by grace a person can have sufficient faith to flee to Christ – sufficient faith really to lay hold on Him, really to trust in Him, really to be a child of God, and really to be saved, and yet to his last day never be free from much anxiety, doubt, and fear.

“A letter,” says an old writer (Thomas Watson), “may be written, which is not sealed; so grace may be written in the heart, yet the Spirit may not set the seal of assurance to it.” A child may be born heir to a great fortune and yet never be aware of his riches. He may live childish, die childish, and never know the greatness of his possessions. In the same way, a person can be a infant in Christ's family and can think as a baby, speak as a baby, and though saved, never enjoy a strong hope or know the real privileges of his inheritance.

Let no one mistake my meaning when I dwell strongly on the reality, privilege, and importance of assurance. Do not do me the injustice to say that I teach that no one is saved unless they can say with Paul, “I know and am persuaded that there is a crown laid up for me.” I do not say so. I teach nothing of the kind.

Beyond all question, a person must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ if he is to be saved. I know no other way of access to the Father. I see no indication of mercy except through Christ. A person must feel his sins and lost condition, must come to Jesus for pardon and salvation, and must rest his hope on Him and on Him alone. If he only has faith to do this, however weak and feeble that faith may be, I will agree that based upon the Word of God, he will not miss heaven.

Let us never curtail the freeness of the glorious gospel or diminish its magnitude. Let us never make the gate more confined and the way narrower than pride and the love of sin have made it already. The Lord Jesus is very compassionate and of tender mercy. He does not regard the quantity of faith, but the quality. He does not measure its degree, but its truth. He will not break any bruised reed nor quench any smoking flax (Isaiah 42:3). He will never let it be said that anyone perished at the foot of the cross. *He that comes to me*, He says, *I will in no wise cast out* (John 6:37).

Yes! Though one's faith is no bigger than a grain of mustard seed (Matthew 17:20), if it only brings him to Christ and enables him to touch the hem of His garment (Matthew 9:21; 14:35-36), he will be saved. He will be saved as certainly as the oldest saint in paradise. He will be saved as completely and eternally as Peter, John, or Paul. There are degrees in our sanctification, but there are none in our justification. What is written, is written, and it will never fail: *Whosoever believes on him* – not whosoever has a strong and mighty faith, but *Whosoever believes on him shall not be ashamed* (Romans 10:11).

Remember, though, that all this time the poor believing soul might have no full assurance of his pardon and acceptance with God. He might be troubled with fear upon fear and doubt upon doubt. He might have many inward questions, concerns, struggles, and doubts – clouds and darkness, storm and tempest – to the very end.

I will agree, I repeat, that plain simple faith in Christ will save a person even though he may never attain to assurance, but I will not agree that it will bring him to heaven with strong and abundant comfort. I will agree that it will land him safe in the harbor, but I will not

agree that he will enter that harbor in full sail, confident and rejoicing. I will not be surprised if he reaches his desired haven weather-beaten and tempest-tossed, scarcely realizing his own safety until he opens his eyes in glory.

I believe it is of great importance to keep this distinction between faith and assurance in view. It explains things that an inquirer in Christianity sometimes finds it hard to understand. Let us remember that faith is the root and assurance is the flower. You can never have the flower without the root, but it is just as certain that you can have the root and not the flower.

Faith is that poor trembling woman who came behind Jesus in the crowd and touched the hem of His garment (Mark 5:27). Assurance is Stephen standing calmly in the midst of his murderers, saying, *I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God* (Acts 7:56).

Faith is the penitent thief crying, *Lord, remember me* (Luke 23:42). Assurance is Job sitting in the dust, covered with sores, saying, *I know that my redeemer lives* (Job 19:25); *though he slay me, yet I will trust in him* (Job 13:15).

Faith is Peter's drowning cry as he began to sink, *Lord, save me* (Matthew 14:30). Assurance is that same Peter later declaring before the council, *This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men in which we can be saved* (Acts 4:11-12).

Faith is the anxious, trembling voice, *Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief* (Mark 9:24). Assurance is the confident challenge, *Who shall accuse the chosen of God's elect? God is he that justifies them. Who is he that condemns them?* (Romans 8:33-34).

Faith is Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, sorrowful, blind, and alone (Acts 9:11). Assurance is Paul, the aged prisoner, looking calmly into the grave and saying, *I know whom I have believed. There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness* (2 Timothy 1:12; 4:8).

Faith is life. How great the blessing! Who can describe or realize the gulf between life and death? *A living dog is better than a dead lion* (Ecclesiastes 9:4). Life may be weak, frail, unhealthy, painful, trying,

anxious, weary, burdensome, joyless, and smileless to the very end. Assurance is more than life. It is health, strength, power, vigor, activity, energy, determination, and beauty.

It is not a question of saved or not saved that lies before us, but of privilege or no privilege. It is not a question of peace or no peace, but of great peace or little peace. It is not a question between the wanderers of this world and the school of Christ, but it is one that belongs only to the school of Christ. It is between the beginning student and the wise.

He who has faith does well. I would be happy if I thought all who read this book had faith. Blessed, thrice blessed are they who believe! They are safe. They are washed. They are justified. They are beyond the power of hell. Satan, with all his malice, can never pluck them out of Christ's hand. He who has assurance, though, does far better; he sees more, feels more, knows more, enjoys more, and has more days like those spoken of in Deuteronomy, even *the days of the heavens upon the earth* (Deuteronomy 11:21).

I will now give some reasons why an assured hope is greatly to be desired.

Please pay special attention to this point. I greatly wish that assurance was more desired than it is. Too many among those who believe begin doubting and go on doubting, live doubting and die doubting, and they go to heaven in a kind of mist.

It would not be good for me to belittle "hopes" and "trusts," but I am afraid that many of us sit down content with them and go no further. I would like to see fewer who say, "I hope so" in the Lord's family, and more who could say, "I know and am persuaded." Oh, that all believers would desire the best gifts and not be content with less! Many miss the full tide of blessedness that the gospel was meant to convey. Many keep themselves in a low and starved condition of soul, while their Lord is saying, *Eat, O friends;. . . [and] drink abundantly, O beloved* (Song of Solomon 5:1), and *Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled* (John 16:24).

Let us remember that assurance is to be desired because of the present comfort and peace it provides.

Doubts and fears have power to ruin much of the happiness of a true believer in Christ. Uncertainty and suspense are bad enough in any condition – in the matter of our health, our property, our families, our affections, and our earthly callings – but they are never as bad as in the matter of our souls. As long as a believer cannot get beyond “I hope” or “I trust,” he obviously feels a degree of uncertainty about his spiritual state. The very words imply as much. He says, “I hope” because he dares not say, “I know.”

Assurance goes far to set a child of God free from this painful kind of bondage, and so ministers mightily to his comfort. It enables him to feel that the great business of life is settled, the great debt is paid, the great disease is healed, and the great work is finished. All other business, diseases, debts, and works are then small in comparison. In this way assurance makes him patient in tribulation, calm under bereavements, unmoved in sorrow, not afraid of bad news, and content in every condition, for it gives him firmness of heart. It sweetens his bitter cups. It lessens the burden of his crosses. It smooths the rough places over which he travels. It lightens the valley of the shadow of death. It makes him always feel that he has something solid beneath his feet and something firm under his hands. He knows that he has a sure friend along the way and a sure home at the end.³¹

Assurance will help a person bear poverty and loss. It will teach him to say, “I know that I have in heaven a better and more enduring substance. I do not have silver and gold, but grace and glory are mine, and these can never make themselves wings and fly away. *Because the fig tree shall not blossom, . . . yet I will rejoice in the LORD* (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

Assurance will support a child of God under the heaviest bereavements and help him to feel that It is well (2 Kings 4:26 NASB). An assured

31 “Assurance will assist us in all duties: it will arm us against all temptations; it will answer all objections; it will sustain us in all conditions into which the saddest of times can bring us. ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’”—*Bishop Reynolds on Hosea 14*. 1642.

“We cannot come amiss to him who has assurance. God is his. Has he lost a friend? His father lives. Has he lost an only child? God has given him His only Son. Does he lack bread? God has given him the finest of the wheat, the bread of life. Are his comforts gone? He has a Comforter. Does he meet with storms? He knows where to put in for harbor. God is his portion, and heaven is his haven.”—*Thomas Watson*. 1662.

soul will say, “Though beloved ones are taken from me, yet Jesus is the same and is alive for evermore” (Hebrews 13:8). *Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more* (Romans 6:9). Though my house is not as flesh and blood could wish, yet I have *an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and it shall be kept* (2 Samuel 23:5).

Assurance will enable a person to praise God and be thankful, even in prison, like Paul and Silas at Philippi. It can give a believer songs even in the darkest night (Job 35:10), and it can provide joy when all things seem to be going against him (Job 35:10; Psalm 42:8).³²

Assurance will enable a person to sleep even if facing the expectation of death soon, like Peter in Herod’s dungeon. It will teach him to say, *I will both lay me down in peace and sleep: for thou only, O LORD, dost make me to be confident* (Psalm 4:8).

Assurance can make a person rejoice to suffer shame for Christ’s sake, as the apostles did when put in prison at Jerusalem (Acts 5:41). It will remind him that he may *rejoice and be exceeding glad* (Matthew 5:12), and that there is in heaven an *exceeding and eternal weight of glory* that will make up for all our struggles and efforts and difficulties (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Assurance will enable a believer to meet a violent and painful death without fear, as Stephen did in the beginning of Christ’s church (Acts 7), and as Cranmer, Ridley, Hooper, Latimer, Rogers, and Taylor did in England. It will bring to his heart the texts, *Be not afraid of those that kill the body and, after that, have no more that they can do* (Luke 12:4), and *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit* (Acts 7:59).³³

Assurance will support a person in pain and sickness, make up his bed, and smooth down his dying pillow. It will enable him to say, “If

32 These were John Bradford’s words in prison, shortly before his execution: “I have no request to make. If Queen Mary gives me my life, I will thank her; if she will banish me, I will thank her; if she will burn me, I will thank her; if she will condemn me to perpetual imprisonment, I will thank her.”

This was Rutherford’s experience when banished to Aberdeen: “How blind are my adversaries, who sent me to a banqueting house, and not to a prison or a place of exile.” “My prison is a palace to me, and Christ’s banqueting house.”—*Letters*.

33 These were the last words of Hugh Mackail on the scaffold, at Edinburgh, 1666: “Now I begin my communion with God, that shall never be broken off. Farewell, father and mother, friends and relations; farewell, the world and all its delights; farewell, meat and drinks; farewell, sun, moon, and stars. Welcome, God and Father; welcome, sweet Lord Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; welcome, blessed Spirit of grace, and God of all consolation; welcome, glory; welcome, eternal life; welcome, death. O Lord, into Thy hands I commit my spirit; for Thou hast redeemed my soul, O Lord God of truth!”

my earthly house fails, I have a *building of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:1), "*I desire to depart and to be with Christ*" (Philippians 1:23), and *My flesh and my heart fail; the strength of my heart is that God is my portion for ever* (Psalm 73:26).³⁴

The strong consolation that assurance can give in the hour of death is a point of great importance. We can depend on it that we will never think assurance is as precious as when our turn comes to die. In that awful hour, there are few believers who do not find out the value and privilege of an assured hope, whatever they may have thought about it during their lives. General "hopes" and "trusts" are all very well to live upon while the sun shines and the body is strong, but when we come to die, we will want to be able to say, "I know" and "I feel." The river of death is a cold stream, and we have to cross it alone. No earthly friend can help us. The last enemy, the king of terrors, is a strong foe. When our souls are departing, there is no comfort like the strong wine of assurance.

When our souls are departing, there is no comfort like the strong wine of assurance.

There is a beautiful expression in the prayer book service for the Visitation of the Sick: "The Almighty Lord, who is a most strong tower to all them that put their trust in Him, be now and evermore thy defense, and make thee know and feel that there is no other name under heaven through whom you may receive health and salvation, but only the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The compilers of that service showed great wisdom there. They saw that when our eyes grow dim, the heart grows faint, and the spirit is on the eve of departing, we must know and feel what Christ has done for us, or else there cannot be perfect peace.

Let us remember that assurance is to be desired because it tends to make a Christian an active working Christian.

Generally speaking, none do as much for Christ on earth as those who enjoy the fullest confidence of a free entrance into heaven, who trust

34 These were Samuel Rutherford's words on his deathbed: "O that all my brethren did know what a Master I have served, and what peace I have this day! I shall sleep in Christ, and when I awake I shall be satisfied with His likeness." 1661.
These were Richard Baxter's words on his deathbed: "I bless God I have a well-grounded assurance of my eternal happiness, and great peace and comfort within." 1691.

not in their own works, but in the finished work of Christ. That sounds wonderful, I dare say, but it is true.

A believer who lacks an assured hope will spend much of his time in inward searchings of heart about his own spiritual condition. Like a nervous hypochondriac, he will be full of his own ailments, his own doubtings and questionings, and his own conflicts and corruptions. Basically, you will often find he is so taken up with his internal warfare that he has little leisure for other things and little time to work for God.

However, a believer who has, like Paul, an assured hope, is free from these harassing distractions. He does not trouble his soul with doubts about his own pardon and acceptance. He looks at the everlasting covenant sealed with blood, the finished work of Christ, and the never-broken word of his Lord and Savior, and therefore he considers his salvation settled. Thus he is able to give undivided attention to the work of the Lord and to do more in the long run.

Consider, for example, two English emigrants settling down side by side in New Zealand or Australia. Give each of them a piece of land to clear and cultivate. Let the portions allotted to them be the same both in quantity and quality. Secure that land to them by every needful legal instrument. Let it be conveyed to them that they completely own it and it is theirs forever. Let the transfer of property be publicly registered, and let the property be made sure to them by every deed and security that man's ingenuity can devise.

Suppose then that one of them will set to work to clear his land and bring it into cultivation, laboring at it day after day without intermission or cessation. Suppose in the meantime that the other person is continually leaving his work and going repeatedly to the public registry to ask whether the land really is his own, whether there is not some mistake, or whether there is not some flaw in the legal instruments that conveyed it to him.

The one never doubts his title, but just diligently works on. The other hardly ever feels sure of his title, and he spends half his time in going to Sydney or Melbourne or Auckland with needless inquiries about it.

Which of these two men will have made the most progress in a year's time? Who will have done the most for his land, got the greatest breadth of soil under tillage, have the best crops to show, and be altogether the

most prosperous? Anyone with common sense can answer that question. I do not need to supply an answer. There can only be one reply. Undivided attention will always attain the greatest success.

It is much the same in the matter of our title to mansions in the skies (John 14:2). No one will do as much for the Lord who bought him as the believer who sees his title clear and is not distracted by unbelieving doubts, questionings, and hesitations. The joy of the Lord will be that man's strength. *Restore unto me*, says David, *the joy of Your salvation, . . . Then I will teach transgressors Your ways* (Psalm 51:12-13 NASB).

Never were there such working Christians as the apostles. They seemed to live to labor. Christ's work was truly their meat and drink. They counted not their lives dear to themselves (Acts 20:24). They spent and were spent. They laid down ease, health, and worldly comfort at the foot of the cross. One great cause of this, I believe, was their assured hope. They were men who could say, *We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness* (1 John 5:19).

Let us remember that assurance is to be desired because it tends to make a Christian a decided Christian.

Indecision and doubt about our own state in God's sight is a shameful evil, and it is the mother of many evils. It often produces a wavering and unstable walk in following the Lord. Assurance helps to cut many knots and make the path of Christian duty clear and plain.

Many who have "hope" that they are God's children and have true grace, however weak, are continually perplexed with doubts in points of practice. "Should we do such and such a thing? Should we give up this family custom? Should we go into that group of people? How should we draw the line about visiting? What is to be the standard of our entertainment and how we dress? Are we never, under any circumstances, to dance, never to touch a card, and never to attend parties of pleasure?" These are the kinds of questions that seem to give them constant trouble. Very often, though, the simple root of their perplexity is that they do not feel assured that they are children of God. They have not yet settled the point of which side of the gate they are on. They do not know whether they are inside the ark or not.

They believe that a child of God ought to act in a certain decided way, but they wonder if they are children of God themselves. If they only felt they were so, they would go straightforward and take a decided stand, but not being sure about it, their conscience is forever hesitating and coming to a deadlock. The devil whispers, "Perhaps you are only a hypocrite; what right do you have to take a decided course? Wait until you really are a Christian." This whisper too often turns the scale and leads to some miserable compromise or wretched conformity to the world!

I believe this is one main reason why so many today are inconsistent, uncertain, unsatisfactory, and half-hearted in their conduct about the world. Their faith fails. They have no assurance that they are Christ's, so they are hesitant about breaking with the world. They hesitate from laying aside all the ways of the old man because they are not quite confident that they have put on the new. I have little doubt that one secret cause of "halting between two opinions" is lack of assurance. When people can say decidedly, *The LORD, he is the God*, their course becomes very clear (1 Kings 18:39).

Finally, let us remember that assurance is to be desired because it tends to make the holiest Christians.

This, too, sounds wonderful and strange, yet it is true. It is one of the paradoxes of the gospel, seemingly contrary at first to reason and common sense, yet it is a fact. Bellarmine was seldom more contrary to truth than when he said, "Assurance tends to carelessness and sloth." He who is freely forgiven by Christ will always do much for Christ's glory, and he who enjoys the fullest assurance of this forgiveness will ordinarily keep up the closest walk with God. It is a faithful saying and worthy to be remembered by all believers that he who *has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure* (1 John 3:3). A hope that does not purify is a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.

None are so likely to maintain a watchful guard over their own hearts and lives as those who know the comfort of living in close communion with God. They know the benefit and will fear losing it. They will dread falling from the high position and ruining their own contentment by bringing clouds between themselves and Christ. He who goes on a

journey with little money takes little thought of danger and cares little how late he travels. He, on the contrary, who carries gold and jewels will be a cautious traveler. He will look well to his roads, his lodgings, and his company, and will run no risks. It is an old saying, however unscientific it may be, that the fixed stars are those that tremble most. The man who most fully enjoys the light of God's reconciled countenance will be a man tremblingly afraid of losing its blessed consolations and jealously fearful of doing anything to grieve the Holy Spirit.

I recommend these four points for the serious consideration of all professing Christians. Would you like to feel the Everlasting Arms around you and hear the voice of Jesus daily drawing near to your soul and saying, *I am your salvation* (Psalm 35:3)? Would you like to be a useful laborer in the vineyard in your day and generation? Would you like to be known by others as a bold, firm, decided, single-eyed, uncompromising follower of Christ? Do you want to be thoroughly spiritually minded and holy? I do not doubt that some readers will say, "These are the very things our hearts desire. We long for them. We thirst after them, but they seem far from us."

Begin with simple believing, and all other things will soon be added to you.

Has it never occurred to you that your neglect of assurance might possibly be the main reason for all your failures, that the low measure of faith that satisfies you might be the cause of your low degree of peace? Can you think it is strange that your graces are weak and fading, when faith, the root and mother of them all, is allowed to remain feeble and weak?

Take my advice today. Seek an increase of faith. Seek an assured hope of salvation like the apostle Paul's. Seek to obtain a simple, child-like confidence in God's promises. Seek to be able to say with Paul, "*I know whom I have believed*, I am persuaded that He is mine, and I am His" (2 Timothy 1:12; Song of Solomon 2:16).

You have very likely tried other ways and methods and have completely failed. Change your plan. Change your course. Lay aside your doubts. Lean more entirely on the Lord. Begin with complete trust. Cast aside your faithless lack of progress and take the Lord at His word. Come and cast yourself, your soul, and your sins upon your gracious

Savior. Begin with simple believing, and all other things will soon be added to you.

Now I will point out some probable causes why an assured hope is so seldom attained.

This is a very serious question and ought to cause all of us to deeply and seriously search our hearts. Certainly, few of Christ's people seem to reach up to this blessed spirit of assurance. Many comparatively believe, but few are convinced. Many comparatively have saving faith, but few have that glorious confidence that shines forth in the language of Paul. I think we must all agree that this is the case.

I am inclined to think that justification and sanctification are unintentionally mixed together in the minds of many believers.

Why is this so? Why is something that two apostles have strongly urged us to seek after something that few believers have experienced and know in our day? Why is an assured hope so rare?

I desire to offer a few suggestions on this point, with all humility. I know that many at whose feet I would gladly sit both in earth and heaven have never attained assurance. Perhaps the Lord sees something in the natural disposition of some of His children that makes assurance not good for them. Maybe in order to be kept in spiritual health they need to be kept very low. God only knows. Still, after every allowance, I am afraid that there are many believers without an assured hope, whose case may too often be explained by causes such as those listed below.

One common cause is a defective view of the doctrine of justification.

I am inclined to think that justification and sanctification are unintentionally mixed together in the minds of many believers. They receive the gospel truth that there must be something done in us, as well as something done for us, if we are true members of Christ, and in this they are right. But then, maybe without being aware of it, they seem to pick up the idea that their justification is, in some degree, affected

by something within themselves. They do not clearly see that Christ's work and not their own work – either in whole or in part, either directly or indirectly – is the only ground of their acceptance with God. They do not see that justification is something entirely outside our ability, for which nothing whatsoever is necessary on our part except simple faith, and that the weakest believer is as fully and completely justified as the strongest.

Many people seem to forget that we are saved and justified as sinners, and only sinners, and that we can never attain to anything higher, even if we would live to the age of Methuselah. Redeemed sinners, justified sinners, and renewed sinners we doubtless must be – but sinners, sinners, sinners, we will be always to the very end. They do not seem to understand that there is a vast difference between our justification and our sanctification. Our justification is a perfect finished work, and it does not come in varying degrees.

Our sanctification is imperfect and incomplete, and will be so to the last hour of our lives. Some people seem to think that a believer can at some point in his life be somewhat free from corruption and attain to a kind of inward perfection. However, not finding this angelic state of things in their own hearts, they at once conclude that there must be something very wrong with them, and so they go mourning all their days, oppressed with fears that they have no part or inheritance in Christ, and they refuse to be comforted.

Let us consider this point well. If any believing soul desires assurance and does not have it, let him ask himself first if he is quite sure that he is sound in the faith, if he knows how to distinguish things that differ, and if his eyes are thoroughly clear in the matter of justification. He must know what it is simply to believe and to be justified by faith before he can expect to feel assured.

In this matter, as well as in many others, the old Galatian heresy is the most fertile source of error, both in doctrine and in practice. *Are ye so foolish? having begun by the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?* (Galatians 3:3). People ought to seek clearer views of Christ and what Christ has done for them. Happy is the person who really understands justification by faith without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:20).

Another common cause of the absence of assurance is slothfulness about growth in grace.

I think many true believers hold dangerous and unscriptural views on this point. I do not mean that they do so intentionally, but they do hold them. Many people seem to think that once they are converted, they do not have much more to attend to. They think that a state of salvation is a kind of easy chair in which they can just sit still, lie back, and be happy. They seem to think that grace is given to them that they may enjoy it, and they forget that it is given, like a talent, to be used, employed, and improved. Such people lose sight of the many direct commands to increase, to grow, to abound more and more, to add to our faith, and similar commands; and in this condition of doing little, this state of mind of sitting still, I never marvel that they miss assurance.

I believe it should be our continual aim and desire to go forward, and our watchword on every returning birthday and at the beginning of every year should be, *Continue to grow* (1 Thessalonians 4:1). We should desire more knowledge, more faith, more obedience, and more love. If we have brought forth thirtyfold, we should seek to bring forth sixty; if we have brought forth sixty, we should strive to bring forth a hundred (Matthew 13:23). The will of the Lord is our sanctification, and it ought to be our will, too (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

One thing that we can depend upon is that there is an inseparable connection between diligence and assurance. *Give all the more diligence*, says Peter, *to make your calling and election sure* (2 Peter 1:10). *We desire*, writes the author of Hebrews, *that each one of you show the same diligence until the end for the fulfillment of your hope* (Hebrews 6:11). *The soul of the diligent*, says Solomon, *shall be made fat* (Proverbs 13:4). There is much truth in the old maxim of the Puritans: "Faith of adherence comes by hearing, but faith of assurance does not come without doing."

Is any reader of this book one of those who desires assurance but does not have it? Mark my words: you will never get it without diligence, however much you may desire it. There are no gains without pains in spiritual things, any more than in worldly things. *The soul of the slug-gard desires, and attains nothing* (Proverbs 13:4).

Another common cause of a lack of assurance is an inconsistent walk in life.

With grief and sorrow, I feel constrained to say that I am afraid that nothing more frequently prevents people from attaining an assured hope than an inconsistent life. The stream of professing Christianity in this day is far wider than it formerly was, and I am afraid we must admit that it is also much shallower.

Inconsistency of life is utterly destructive of peace of conscience. The two things are incompatible. They cannot and will not go together. If you intend to have your besetting sins and cannot make up your minds to give them up, if you will refrain from cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye when occasion requires it, then I will presume that you will have no assurance.

A hesitant, undecided walk, a reluctance to take a bold and decided line, a readiness to conform to the world, an uncertain witness for Christ, a lingering tone of Christianity, and avoiding a high standard of holiness and spiritual life all make up a sure recipe for bringing an affliction upon the garden of your soul.

It is useless to think that you will feel assured and persuaded of your own pardon and acceptance with God unless you regard all God's commandments concerning all things to be right, and hate every sin, whether great or small. *I have esteemed all thy precepts concerning all things to be right and I have hated every false way* (Psalm 119:128). One Achan allowed in the camp of your heart will weaken your hands and lay your means of comfort low in the dust (Joshua 7). You must be daily sowing to the Spirit if you are to reap the witness of the Spirit. You will not find and feel that all the Lord's ways are ways of pleasantness (Proverbs 3:17) unless you labor in all your ways to please the Lord.³⁵

35 "Would you have your hope strong? Then keep your conscience pure: thou cannot defile one without weakening the other. The godly person who is loose and careless in his holy walking will soon find his hope languishing. All sin disposes the soul that tampers with it to trembling fears and shakings of heart"—William Gurnall.

"One great and too common cause of distress is the secret maintaining of some known sin. It puts out the eye of the soul, or dims it and stupefies it so that it can neither see nor feel its own condition; but especially, it provokes God to withdraw Himself, His comforts, and the assistance of His Spirit."—Richard Baxter's *Saints' Everlasting Rest*.

"The stars that have least circuit are nearest the pole; and men whose hearts are least entangled with the world are always nearest to God and to the assurance of His favor. Worldly Christians, remember this. You and the world must part, or else assurance and your souls will never meet."—Thomas Brooks.

I thank God that our salvation in no way depends on our own works. By grace we are saved, not by works of righteousness, but through faith, without the deeds of the law (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Romans 3:28). Never, though, would I want any believer to forget for a moment that our sense of salvation depends much on the manner of our living. Inconsistency will dim our eyes and bring clouds between us and the sun. The sun is the same behind the clouds, but you will not be able to see its brightness or enjoy its warmth, and your soul will be gloomy and cold. It is in the path of holy living that the dayspring of assurance will visit you and shine down upon your heart.

The secret of the LORD is for those that fear him, and he will show them his covenant. (Psalm 25:14)

To him that orders his ways aright I will show the salvation of God. (Psalm 50:23)

Those who love thy law have great peace, and nothing shall cause them to stumble. (Psalm 119:165)

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have communion with him in the midst of us. (1 John 1:7)

Let us not love in word neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And in this we know that we are of the truth and have our hearts certified before him. (1 John 3:18-19)

And in this we do know that we have known him if we keep his commandments. (1 John 2:3)

Paul was a man who applied himself to always have a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man (Acts 24:16). He could say with boldness, *I have fought a good fight, . . . I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7). I do not therefore wonder that the Lord enabled him to add with confidence, *From now on there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day* (2 Timothy 4:8).

If any believer in the Lord Jesus desires assurance and does not have it, let him think over this point also. Let him look at his own heart, his

own conscience, his own life, his own ways, and his own home. Perhaps when he has done that he will be able to say, "There is a reason why I have no assured hope."

I leave the three matters I have just mentioned to the individual consideration of every reader. I am sure they are worth examining. May we examine them honestly, and may the Lord give us understanding in all things.

To the Unsaved

In closing this important inquiry, let me speak first to those who have not yet given themselves to the Lord – to those who have not yet come out from the world, chosen the good part, and followed Christ.

I ask you to learn the advantages and comforts of a true Christian. I do not want you to judge the Lord Jesus Christ by His people. The best servants can only give you a poor idea of that glorious Master. Nor do I want you to judge of the benefits and advantages of His kingdom by the measure of comfort to which many of His people attain. Sadly, most of us are poor creatures! We come very short of the blessedness we might enjoy. You can depend upon it, though, that there are glorious things in the city of our God that they who have an assured hope taste, even in this lifetime. There are lengths and breadths

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and to spare in our
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of peace and consolation there that it has not entered into your heart to conceive. There is bread enough and to spare in our Father's house, even though many of us certainly eat but little of it and continue weak.

The Master must not be blamed, for it is our own fault. After all, the weakest child of God has a wealth of comforts within him of which you know nothing. You see the conflicts and struggles of the surface of his heart, but you do not see the pearls of great price that are hidden in the depths below. The weakest member of Christ would not change places with you. The believer who possesses the least assurance is far better off than you are. He has a hope, however faint, but you have none at all. He has a portion that will never be taken from him, a Savior who

will never be taken from him, a Savior that will never forsake him, a treasure that will not fade away, however little he may realize it all at present. But as for you, if you die as you are, your expectations will all perish. Oh, that you were wise! Oh, that you understood these things! Oh, that you would consider your latter end!

I feel deeply for you in these latter days of the world. I feel sad for those whose treasure is all on earth and whose hope is all on this side of the grave. Yes, for when I see old kingdoms and dynasties shaken to the very foundation; when I see, as we all saw a few years ago, kings and princes and rich men and great men fleeing for their lives and scarcely knowing where to hide their heads; when I see property dependent on public confidence melting like snow in the spring; when I see public stocks and funds losing their value – when I see these things, I feel sorry for those who have nothing better than this world can give them and who have no place in that kingdom that will never end.

Take advice from a minister of Christ this very day. Seek durable riches – a treasure that cannot be taken from you and a city that has lasting foundations (Hebrews 11:10). Do as the apostle Paul did. Give yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ and seek that incorruptible crown He is ready to bestow. Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him (Matthew 11:29). Come away from a world that will never really satisfy you, and depart from sin that will bite like a serpent, if you hold on to it. Come to the Lord Jesus as lowly sinners, and He will receive you, pardon you, give you His renewing Spirit, and fill you with peace. This will give you more real comfort than the world has ever done. There is a void in your heart that nothing but the peace of Christ can fill. Enter in and share our joys. Come with us and sit down by our side.

To the Saved

Lastly, let me turn to all believers who read these pages and speak to them a few words of brotherly counsel. The main thing that I urge upon you is this: if you do not have an assured hope of your own acceptance in Christ, resolve this day to seek it. Labor for it. Strive after it. Pray for it. Give the Lord no rest until you know whom you have believed (2 Timothy 1:12).

I really think that the small amount of assurance today among those who are considered to be God's children is a shame and a reproach. "It is a thing to be greatly regretted," says Robert Trail, "that many Christians have lived twenty or forty years since Christ called them by His grace, yet doubting in their life." Let us call to mind the earnest *desire* expressed, that *every one* of the Hebrews should seek after full assurance; and let us endeavor, by God's blessing, to roll this reproach away (Hebrews 6:11).

Believing reader, do you really mean to say that you have no desire to exchange hope for confidence, trust for persuasion, and uncertainty for knowledge? Because weak faith will save you, will you therefore rest content with it? Because assurance is not essential to your entrance into heaven, will you therefore be satisfied without it upon earth? This is not a healthy condition for your soul to be in! This is not how Christians thought in the apostolic days! Arise at once and go forward. Do not remain stuck at the foundation of Christianity; go on to perfection. Do not be content with a day of small things. Never despise it in others, but never be content with it yourself.

Believe me – assurance is worth seeking. You forsake your own mercies when you rest content without it. The things I speak are for your peace. If it is good to be certain in earthly things, how much better is it to be sure in heavenly things! Your salvation is a fixed and certain thing. God knows it. Why would you not seek to know it too? There is nothing unscriptural in this. Paul never saw the Book of Life, and yet Paul says, "I know and am persuaded" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Make it, then, your daily prayer to have an increase of faith. According to your faith will be your peace. Cultivate that blessed root more, and sooner or later, by God's blessing, you may hope to have the flower. You might not attain to full assurance all at once. It is good sometimes to be kept waiting; we do not value things that we get without any effort. *Though it tarry, wait for it* (Habakkuk 2:3). Keep seeking, and expect to find.

There is one thing, however, of which I do not want you to be ignorant: you must not be surprised if you have occasional doubts after you have gotten assurance. You must not forget that you are on earth and not in heaven. You are still in the body and have indwelling sin; the flesh

will lust against the spirit to the very end. The leprosy will never be out of the walls of the old house until death takes it down (Leviticus 14).

There is a devil, too – a strong devil. He is a devil who tempted the Lord Jesus and caused Peter to fall, and he wants you to know it. There will always be some doubts. He who never doubts has nothing to lose. He who never fears possesses nothing truly valuable. He who is never jealous knows little of deep love. Do not be discouraged; you will be more than conquerors through Him who loved you (Romans 8:37).

Finally, do not forget that assurance is something that can be lost for a time, even by the brightest Christians, unless they are careful. Assurance is a most delicate plant. It needs daily, hourly watching, watering, tending, and cherishing. Watch and pray even more when you have it. As Samuel Rutherford says, “Make much of assurance.” Be always upon your guard. When Christian slept in the arbor, in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, he lost his certificate. Keep that in mind.

David lost assurance for many months by falling into transgression. Peter lost it when he denied his Lord. Both undoubtedly found it again, but not until after bitter tears. Spiritual darkness comes on horseback and goes away on foot. It is upon us before we know that it is coming. It leaves us slowly, gradually, and not until after many days. It is easy to run downhill. It is hard work to climb up. Remember my caution: when you have the joy of the Lord, watch and pray.

Above all, grieve not the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). *Quench not the Spirit* (1 Thessalonians 5:19). Do not distress the Spirit. Do not drive Him away by messing around with small bad habits and little sins. Little clashings between husbands and wives make unhappy homes, and small inconsistencies, known and allowed, will bring in a lack of familiarity between you and the Spirit.

The conclusion of the entire sermon is heard (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The person who walks with God in Christ will generally be kept most closely in the greatest peace. The believer who follows the Lord most fully and strives for the highest degree of holiness will ordinarily enjoy the most assured hope and have the clearest certainty of his own salvation.

Chapter 8

Moses – An Example

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, 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 the Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. (Hebrews 11:24-26)

The characters of God's most eminent saints, as seen and described in the Bible, form a most useful part of Holy Scripture. Abstract doctrines, principles, and precepts are all most valuable in their way, but nothing is more helpful than a pattern or example. Do we want to know what practical holiness is? Let us sit down and study the picture of an eminently holy man. I propose to set before my readers the history of a man who lived by faith and left us a pattern of what faith can do in promoting holiness of character. To all who want to know what living by faith means, I offer Moses as an example.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews, from which my text is taken, is a great chapter. It deserves to be printed in golden letters. I can well believe it must have been most comforting and encouraging to a converted Jew. I suppose no members of the early church found as much difficulty in a profession of Christianity as the Hebrews did. The way was narrow to all, but preeminently so to them. The cross was heavy to all, but surely they had to carry twice the weight. This chapter would refresh them.

It would be as *wine unto those that have heavy hearts* (Proverbs 31:6). Its words would be as pleasant as a *honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and medicine to the bones* (Proverbs 16:24).

The three verses I am going to explain are far from being the least interesting in the chapter. Indeed, I think few, if any, have so strong a claim on our attention, and I will explain why I say so. It seems to me that the work of faith described in the story of Moses comes home more especially to our own case. The men of God who are named in the former part of the chapter are all beyond question examples to us, but we cannot literally do what most of them did, no matter how much our spirit may be similar to theirs.

We are not called upon to offer a literal sacrifice like Abel, build a literal ark like Noah, or literally leave our country, live in tents, and offer up our Isaac like Abraham. The faith of Moses comes nearer to us. It seems to operate in a way more familiar to our own experience. It made him live in such a way as we must sometimes live ourselves in the present day, each in our own walk of life, if we want to be consistent Christians. It is for this reason that I think these three verses deserve more than ordinary consideration.

I have nothing but the simplest things to say about them. I will only try to show the greatness of the things Moses did and the principle on which he did them. Then we might be better prepared for the practical instruction that the verses appear to provide to everyone who will receive it.

First I will speak of what Moses gave up and refused.

Moses gave up three things for the sake of his soul. He felt that his soul would not be saved if he kept them – so he gave them up. And in so doing, I say that he made three of the greatest sacrifices that man's heart can possibly make. Let us see.

He gave up power and greatness.

He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. We all know his history. The daughter of Pharaoh had preserved his life when he was an infant. She had even adopted him and educated him as her own son.

According to some writers of history, she was Pharaoh's only child. Some go so far as to say that in the common order of things, Moses would one day have been king of Egypt! That may or may not be; we cannot say. It is enough for us to know that, based upon his connection with Pharaoh's daughter, Moses might have been, if he had wanted to be, a very great man. If he had been content with the position in which he found himself at the Egyptian court, he might easily have been among the greatest (if not the very greatest) in all the land of Egypt.

Let us consider for a moment how great this temptation was. Here was a man with the same passions as we have. He might have had as much greatness as earth can well give. Position, power, place, honor, titles, and dignities were all before him and within his grasp. These are the things for which many people are continually struggling. These are the prizes for which there is an incessant race in the world around us to obtain. To be somebody, to be looked up to, to raise themselves in society, to gain power – these are the very things for which many sacrifice time, thought, health, and life itself; but Moses would not take them as a gift. He turned his back upon them. He refused them. He gave them up!

Sadly, pleasure is the one thing for which millions live.

Even more than this, Moses refused pleasure.

Pleasure of every kind, no doubt, was at his feet, if he had wanted to take it up – sensual pleasure, intellectual pleasure, social pleasure – whatever he could imagine. Egypt was a land of artists, a residence of intellectual men, a resort of everyone who had skill or science of any description. There was nothing that could feed *the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life* that someone in Moses' position might not easily have commanded and possessed as his own (1 John 2:16).

Let us think again how great this temptation was also. Sadly, pleasure is the one thing for which millions live. They differ, perhaps, in their views of what makes up real pleasure, but all agree in seeking first and foremost to obtain it. Pleasure and enjoyment in the holidays is the great object to which many school children look forward. Pleasure and satisfaction in making himself independent is the mark on which many young men and women in business fix their eyes. Pleasure and ease in

retiring from business with a fortune is the aim that the businessman sets before him. Pleasure and bodily comfort at his own home is what the poor man desires.

Pleasure and fresh excitement in politics, traveling, amusement, friends, and books is the goal toward which the rich person is striving. Pleasure is the shadow that all alike are hunting – high and low, rich and poor, old and young, one with another – each, perhaps, pretending to despise his neighbor for seeking it, each in his own way seeking it for himself, each secretly wondering why he does not find it, and each firmly persuaded that somewhere or other it is to be found. This was the cup that Moses had before his lips. He might have drunk as deeply as he liked of earthly pleasure, but he refused it. He turned his back upon it. He gave it up!

Moses also refused riches.

The treasures in Egypt is an expression that seems to tell of boundless wealth that Moses might have enjoyed if he had been content to remain with Pharaoh's daughter. We might well suppose that these treasures would have been a mighty fortune. Enough is still remaining in Egypt to give us a little idea of the money at its king's disposal. The pyramids, obelisks, temples, and statues are still standing there as witnesses. The ruins at Carnac, Luxor, Denderah, and many other places are still the mightiest buildings in the world. They testify to this day that the man who gave up Egyptian wealth gave up something that even our own minds would find it hard to calculate and estimate.

Let us consider once more how great this temptation was. Let us consider the power of money for a moment – the immense influence that the love of money has in people's minds. Let us look around us and observe how people covet it and what amazing effort and trouble they will go through to obtain it. Tell them of an island many thousand miles away where something may be found that might be profitable if imported, and at once a fleet of ships will be sent to get it. Show them a way to make one percent more of their money, and they will consider you among the wisest of people; they will almost fall down and worship you. To possess money seems to hide defects, to cover faults, and to clothe a person with virtues. People can look past much if you are

rich! But Moses is a man who could have been rich, but refused the wealth. He did not want Egyptian treasures. He turned his back upon them. He refused them. He gave them up!

These were the things that Moses refused – power, pleasure, riches – all three at once. Add to all this that he did it deliberately. He did not refuse these things in a hasty fit of youthful excitement. He was forty years old. He was in the prime of life. He knew what he was about. He was a highly educated man, *taught in all the wisdom of the Egyptians* (Acts 7:22). He could weigh both sides of the question.

In addition to this, Moses did not refuse them because he was required to. He was not like the dying man who tells us that he desires nothing more in this world – simply because he is leaving the world and cannot keep it. Moses was not like the poor man who makes a virtue of necessity and says he does not want riches – because he cannot get them. He was not like the old man who boasts that he has laid aside worldly pleasures – because he is worn out and cannot enjoy them. No! Moses refused what he could have enjoyed. Power, pleasure, and riches did not leave him – but he left them.

Moses is a man who could have been rich, but refused the wealth.

You may judge whether or not I am right in saying that his was one of the greatest sacrifices mortal man ever made. Others have refused much, but none, I think, have refused as much as Moses. Others have done well in the way of self-sacrifice and self-denial, but he excels them all.

The second thing I want to consider is what Moses chose.

I think his choices were as wonderful as his refusals. He chose three things for his soul's sake. The road to salvation led through them, and he followed it. In doing so, he chose three of the last things that we are willing to take up.

For one thing, he chose suffering and affliction.

He left the ease and comfort of Pharaoh's court and openly took part with the children of Israel. They were enslaved and persecuted, an object

of distrust, suspicion, and hatred, and anyone who befriended them was sure to taste something of the bitter cup they were daily drinking.

To the eye of sense there seemed no chance of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage without a long and doubtful struggle. A settled home and country for them must have appeared to be something never likely to be obtained, however much desired. In fact, if ever anyone seemed to be openly choosing pain, trials, poverty, need, distress, anxiety, and perhaps even death, Moses was that man.

Let us think how wonderful this choice was. Flesh and blood naturally try to avoid pain. It is in us all to do so. We draw back from suffering by a kind of instinct, and we avoid it if we can. If two courses of action are set before us that both seem right, we generally take that which is the least disagreeable to flesh and blood. We spend our days in fear and anxiety when we think affliction is coming near us, and we use every means to escape it. When it does come, we often worry and complain under its burden, and if we do happen to bear it patiently, we consider it a great victory.

But look here! Here is a man with the same emotions and feelings as we have, and he actually chose affliction! Moses saw the cup of suffering that was before him if he left Pharaoh's court, and he chose it, preferred it, and embraced it.

Even more than this, he chose the company of a despised people.

He left the society of the great and wise, among whom he had been brought up, and joined himself to the children of Israel. He who had lived from infancy in the midst of power, riches, and luxury came down from his high position and cast in his lot with poor men – slaves, serfs, bondservants, oppressed, destitute, afflicted, tormented – laborers in the brick kiln.

How wonderful this choice was! We generally think it is enough for us to carry our own troubles. We might be sorry for others who are lowly and despised. We might even try to help them. We might donate some money or even speak up on their behalf, but we generally stop there.

Here, though, is a man who does far more. Moses does not merely feel sorry for despised Israel, but he actually goes down to them, adds himself to their society, and lives with them. You would be surprised

if some famous person in Washington, D.C. or London were to give up house, fortune, and position in society and go live on a small income on some crowded street in the inner city for the sake of doing good. This would convey a very faint and feeble notion of the kind of thing that Moses did. He saw a despised people, and he chose their company in preference to that of the noblest in the land. He became one with them – their fellow, their companion in tribulation, their ally, their associate, and their friend.

But he did even more. He chose reproach and scorn.

Who can imagine the flood of derision and ridicule that Moses would have had to face in turning away from Pharaoh's court to join Israel! People would tell him he was crazy, foolish, weak, insensible, and out of his mind. He would lose his influence. He would forfeit the favor and good opinion of all among whom he had lived, but none of these things moved him. He left the court and joined the slaves!

What a choice this was! There are few things more powerful than ridicule and scorn. These can do far more than blatant hate and persecution. Many men who would march up to a cannon's mouth, lead a hopeless mission, or storm a breach have found it impossible to face the mockery of a few companions and have flinched from the path of duty to avoid it. To be laughed at! To be made a joke of! To be ridiculed and taunted! To be considered weak and stupid! To be thought a fool! There is nothing grand in all this, and many cannot make up their minds to face it!

Yet here is a man who made up his mind to willingly face it, and he did not withdraw from the trial. Moses saw reproach and scorn before him, and he chose to accept them for his portion in life.

Moses chose affliction, the company of a despised people, and scorn. Realize, too, that Moses was not a weak, ignorant, illiterate person who did not know what he was doing. We are specifically told that he was *mighty in his words and in deeds* (Acts 7:22), and yet he still chose as he did!

Consider, too, the circumstances of his choice. He was not required to choose as he did. No one forced him to take such a course. The things he chose did not force themselves upon him against his will. He went

after them; they did not come after him. All that he did, he did of his own free choice – voluntarily and of his own accord.

You can judge whether or not it is true that his choices were as wonderful as his refusals. Since the world began, I suppose, no one ever made such a choice as Moses did as revealed in our text.

Now I will speak of the beliefs and values that caused Moses to do as he did.

How can his conduct be accounted for? What possible reason can be given for it? To refuse that which is generally called good and to choose that which is commonly thought evil is not the way of flesh and blood. This is not the typical manner of man. This requires some explanation. What will that explanation be?

We have the answer in the text. I do not know whether its greatness or its simplicity is more to be admired. It all lies in one little word, and that word is “faith.” Moses had faith. Faith was the driving force behind his wonderful conduct. Faith made him do as he did, choose what he chose, and refuse what he refused. He did it all because he believed.

God set before the eyes of his mind His own will and purpose. God revealed to Moses that a Savior was to be born of the descendants of Israel, that mighty promises were bound up in these children of Abraham and yet to be fulfilled, and that the time for fulfilling a portion of these promises was at hand. Moses put credit in this and believed. Every step in his wonderful career, every action in his journey through life after leaving Pharaoh’s court, his choice of that which seemed evil to others, his refusal of that which seemed good – all must be traced to this fountain. All will be found to rest on this foundation.

God had spoken to Moses, and he had faith in God’s word. He believed that God would keep His promises. He believed that God would do what He had said and that what He had covenanted He would surely perform. Moses believed that with God nothing was impossible. Reason and sense might say that the deliverance of Israel was out of the question because the obstacles were too many and the difficulties too great, but faith told Moses that God was all-sufficient. God had undertaken the work, and it would be done.

Moses believed that God was all wise. Reason and sense might have told him that his line of action was absurd and that he was throwing away useful influence and destroying all chance of benefiting his people by breaking with Pharaoh's daughter, but faith told Moses that if God said, "Go this way," it must be the best.

Moses believed that God was all merciful. Reason and sense might suggest that a more pleasant manner of deliverance could be found, that some compromise might be reached, and that many hardships might be avoided, but faith told Moses that God was love and that He would not give His people one drop of bitterness beyond what was absolutely needed.

Faith was a telescope to Moses. It made him see the good land far off. He saw rest, peace, and victory when weak-sighted reason could only see trial and barrenness, storm and tempest, weariness and pain.

Faith was an interpreter to Moses. It made him pick out a comfortable meaning in the dark commands of God's handwriting while ignorant sense could see nothing in it but mystery and foolishness.

Faith told Moses that all this power and greatness was of the earth, worldly, a poor, vain, empty thing, frail, fleeting, and passing away. Moses saw by faith that there was no true greatness like that of serving God. God was the king, and Moses was the true nobleman who belonged to the family of God. It was better to be the lowest in heaven than the greatest in hell.

Faith told Moses that worldly pleasures were *pleasures of sin*. They were mingled with sin, they led to sin, they were ruinous to the soul, and they were displeasing to God. It would be little comfort to have pleasure while God was against him. It is better to suffer and obey God than to be at ease and sin.

Faith told Moses that these pleasures were only temporary. They could not last. They were all short-lived. They would soon weary him. He would have to leave them all in a few years.

Faith told him that there was a reward in heaven for the believer far richer than the treasures in Egypt – durable riches that rust could not corrupt and where thieves could not break through and steal (Matthew 6:19-20). The crown there would be incorruptible and the weight of glory would be *exceeding and eternal* (1 Corinthians 9:25;

2 Corinthians 4:17). Faith moved Moses to look away to an unseen heaven rather than have his eyes impressed with Egyptian gold.

Faith told Moses that affliction and suffering were not real evils. They were part of the school of God in which He trains the children of grace for glory. There were the medicines that are needed to purify our corrupt wills, the furnace that must burn away our dross, and the knife that must cut the ties that bind us to the world.

Faith told Moses that the despised Israelites were the chosen people of God. He believed that to them belonged the adoption, the covenant, the promises, and the glory. Moses believed that from them the seed of the woman was one day to be born who would bruise the serpent's head, that the special blessing of God was upon them, that they were lovely and beautiful in His eyes, and that it was better to be a doorkeeper among the people of God than to reign in the palaces of wickedness.

Faith told Moses that all the reproach and scorn poured out on him was the *reproach of the Christ*, that it was honorable to be mocked and despised for Christ's sake, that whoever persecuted Christ's people was persecuting Christ Himself, and that the day must come when His enemies would bow before Him and lick the dust. Moses saw all this, and much more, by faith. These were the things he believed, and believing, he did what he did. He was convinced of them and embraced them. He considered them as certainties, he regarded them as actual truths, and he accepted them as certainly as if he had seen them with his own eyes. Moses acted on them as realities, and this made him the man that he was. He had faith. He believed.

Do not be amazed that he refused greatness, riches, and pleasure. He looked far forward. With the eye of faith Moses saw kingdoms crumbling into dust, riches taking to themselves wings and fleeing away, pleasures leading on to death and judgment, and only Christ and His little flock enduring forever.

Do not be surprised that Moses chose affliction, a despised people, and reproach. He beheld things below the surface. With the eye of faith he saw affliction lasting only for a moment, reproach rolled away and ending in everlasting honor, and the despised people of God reigning as kings with Christ in glory.

Was he not right? Does he not speak to us, though dead, this very day?

The name of Pharaoh's daughter is forgotten. The city where Pharaoh reigned is not known. The treasures in Egypt are gone – but the name of Moses is known wherever the Bible is read, and it is still a standing witness that he who lives by faith is blessed.

Now I will wind this all up by trying to set forth some practical lessons that appear as legitimate consequences from this history of Moses.

What does all this have to do with us? Some people will say that we do not live in Egypt, we have seen no miracles, and we are not Israelites. Stay a little longer if this is what you are thinking, and by God's help I will show you that we can all learn and be instructed here. Let him who wants to live a Christian life and really be holy take notice of the history of Moses and get wisdom.

For one thing, if you ever want to be saved, you must make the choice that Moses made. You must choose God instead of the world.

Pay careful attention to what I say. Do not overlook this, though all the rest be forgotten. I do not say that the statesman must give up his office or that the rich man must forsake his possessions. Let no one think that I mean this. I am saying that if a person desires to be saved, no matter what his position in life is, he must be prepared for tribulation. He must make up his mind to choose much that seems troublesome and to give up and refuse much that seems good and beneficial.

If a person desires to be saved, no matter what his position in life is, he must be prepared for tribulation.

This probably sounds strange to some who read these pages. I know that you might have a certain form of religion and are content in your way. There is a common, worldly kind of Christianity today that many have and think is enough; it is a cheap Christianity that offends no one and is worth nothing. I am not speaking of religion of this kind.

However, if you really are sincere about your soul, if your Christianity is something more than a mere fashionable Sunday coat, if you are determined to live by the Bible, and if you are resolved to be a New

Testament Christian, then you will soon learn that you must carry a cross. You must endure difficult things. You must suffer on behalf of your soul, as Moses did, or you cannot be saved.

The world in this century is what it always was. The hearts of people are still the same. The offense of the cross has not ceased. God's true people are still a despised little flock. True evangelical religion still brings with it reproach and scorn. A real servant of God will still be thought by many to be a weak enthusiast and a fool.

It all comes down to this. Do you want your soul to be saved? Then remember – you must choose whom you will serve. You cannot serve God and the world. You cannot be on two sides at once. You cannot be a friend of Christ and a friend of the world at the same time. You must come out from the children of this world and be separate. You must put up with much ridicule, trouble, and opposition or you will be lost forever. You must be willing to think and do things that the world considers foolish. You must be willing to hold opinions that are only held by a few. It will cost you something. The stream is strong, and you must go against it. The way is narrow and steep, and it is no use to say it is not. You can depend on it, though, that there can be no saving Christianity without sacrifices and self-denial.

Are you now making any sacrifices? Does your Christianity cost you anything? I set the matter before your conscience in all affection and tenderness. Are you, like Moses, preferring God to the world or not? I beg you not to take shelter under that dangerous word “we”: “we should,” “we hope,” “we intend,” and the like.

I ask you plainly what you are doing yourself. Are you willing to give up anything that keeps you back from God? Are you clinging to the Egypt of the world and saying to yourself, “I must have it. I must have it. I cannot give it up”? Is there any cross in your Christianity? Are there any sharp corners in your Christianity, anything that ever clashes and comes in collision with the earthly-mindedness around you, or is it all smooth and rounded off and comfortably fitted into custom and fashion? Do you know anything of the afflictions of the gospel? Is your faith and practice ever a subject of scorn and reproach? Are you thought a fool by anyone because of your soul? Have you left

Pharaoh's daughter and wholeheartedly joined the people of God? Are you casting all on Christ? Search and see.

These are difficult inquiries and rough questions. I cannot help it. I believe they are founded on biblical truths. Remember that it is written, *And great multitudes went with him, and he turned and said unto them, If anyone comes to me and does not hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, and even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14:25-27). Many, I am afraid, want glory but have no desire for grace. They would gladly have the wages, but not the work; the harvest, but not the labor; the reaping, but not the sowing; the reward, but not the battle. This cannot be, however. As John Bunyan said, "The bitter must go before the sweet." If there is no cross, there will be no crown.

The second thing I say is this: nothing will ever enable you to choose God before the world except faith.

Nothing else will do it. Knowledge will not, emotion will not, a regular use of outward form and ritual will not, and good companions will not. All these may do something, but the fruit they produce has no power of continuance; it will not last. A religion springing from such sources will only endure as long as there is no tribulation or persecution because of the Word (Mark 4:17), but as soon as there is any, the form of Christianity will dry up. It is a clock without a mainspring or weights; its face may be beautiful and you can turn its hands, but it will not run. A Christian life that is to stand must have a living foundation, and there is none other but faith.

There must be a real heartfelt belief that God's promises are certain and can be depended on. There must be a sincere belief that all that God says in the Bible is true, and that every doctrine contrary to this is false, whatever anyone may say. There must be a real belief that all God's words are to be received, however difficult and disagreeable they may be to flesh and blood, and that His way is right and all others wrong. There must be this, or you will never come out from the world, take up the cross, follow Christ, and be saved.

You must learn to believe that God's promises are better than worldly

possessions, that things unseen are better than things seen, that things in heaven not yet in sight are better than things on earth before your eyes, and that the praise of the invisible God is better than the praise of visible man. Then, and only then, will you make a choice like Moses and prefer God to the world.

I ask every reader if you have this faith. If you have, you will find it possible to refuse that which seems good and choose that which seems contrary to the ideals of this world. You will think nothing of today's losses in the hope of tomorrow's gains. You will follow Christ in the dark and stand by Him to the very end. If you do not have this faith, though, I warn you that you will never war a good warfare and you will never run so as to obtain (1 Corinthians 9:24). You will soon be offended and will turn back to the world.

Above all this, there must be a real abiding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The life that you live in the flesh you must live by faith of the Son of God (Galatians 2:20). There must be an established habit of continually leaning on Jesus, looking unto Jesus, drawing out of Jesus, and using Him as the manna of your soul. You must strive to be able to say, *To me to live is Christ* (Philippians 1:21), and *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13).

This was the faith by which the old saints obtained a good report. This was the weapon by which they overcame the world. This made them what they were. This was the faith that made Noah go on building his ark while the world looked on and mocked. This faith allowed Abraham to give the best land to Lot and to dwell peacefully in tents. This faith allowed Ruth to cleave to Naomi and turn away from her country and her gods. It enabled Daniel to continue in prayer, even though he knew the lions' den was prepared. This faith gave the three Hebrew children the strength to refuse to worship idols, even though the fiery furnace was before their eyes. This faith allowed Moses to forsake Egypt, not fearing the wrath of Pharaoh.

These people all acted as they did because they believed. They saw the difficulties and troubles of doing what they did, but they saw Jesus by faith above them all, and they pressed on. Well may the apostle Peter speak of faith as *precious faith* (2 Peter 1:1).

The third thing I want to say about this is that the true reason why so many people are worldly and ungodly is that they have no faith.

We must be aware that multitudes of professing Christians would never think for a moment of doing what Moses did. It is useless to speak soft words and close your eyes to the truth. The person must be blind who does not see thousands around him who are daily preferring the world to God – placing the things of time before the things of eternity and the things of the body before the things of the soul. We might not like to admit this, and we try hard to pretend it is not this way, but it is so.

Why do they do so? No doubt they will all give us reasons and excuses. Some will talk of the snares of the world, some of the lack of time, some of the unique difficulties of their position, some of the cares and concerns of life, some of the strength of temptation, some of the power of passions, and some of the effects of bad companions. But what do all these excuses amount to? There is a far simpler way to account for the state of their souls: they do not believe. One simple sentence, like Aaron's rod, will swallow up all their excuses: they have no faith.

We must be aware that multitudes of professing Christians would never think for a moment of doing what Moses did.

They do not really think that what God says is true. They secretly flatter themselves, thinking, "It will surely not be fulfilled; there must certainly be some other way to heaven beside that which the Bible speaks of. There certainly cannot be so much danger of being lost." Basically, they do not put total confidence in the words that God has written and spoken, and so they do not act upon them. They do not thoroughly believe in hell, and so do not flee from it; nor heaven, so they do not seek it; nor the guilt of sin, so they do not turn from it; nor the holiness of God, so they do not fear Him; nor their need of Christ, so they do not trust in Him or love Him. They do not have confidence in God, and so risk nothing for Him. Like the boy named Passion in *Pilgrim's Progress*, they must have their good things now. They do not trust God, and so they cannot wait.

How is it with us? Do we believe all the Bible? Let us ask ourselves that question. It is a much greater thing to believe all the Bible than

many suppose. Happy is the person who can lay his hand on his heart and say, "I am a believer."

We talk of unbelievers sometimes as if they were the rarest people in the world. I admit that open avowed atheism is happily not very common now.³⁶ There is, however, a vast amount of practical infidelity around us that is as dangerous in the end as the principles of Voltaire and Paine. There are many who go to church Sunday after Sunday and make a point of declaring their belief in all that the Apostolic and Nicene creeds contain, yet these very people live all week as if Christ had never died, as if there were no judgment and no resurrection of the dead, and as if there were no everlasting life at all. There are many who will say, "Oh, we know it all," when spoken to about eternal things and the value of their souls, yet their lives clearly show that they do not know anything as they should know. The saddest part of their condition is that they think they do know!

It is a sad truth and worthy of all consideration that in God's sight, knowledge not acted upon is not just useless and unprofitable; it is much worse than that. It will add to our condemnation and increase our guilt in the judgment day. A faith that does not influence a person's life and actions is not worthy of the name. There are only two classes in the church of Christ: those who believe and those who do not believe. The difference between the true Christian and the mere outward professor of Christianity just lies in one word. The true Christian is like Moses: he has faith, while the person who merely professes outwardly has none. The true Christian believes, and therefore lives as he does. The one who merely professes to be a Christian does not believe, and therefore he is what he is – an unbeliever. Oh, where is our faith? Let us not be faithless, but believing.

The last thing I say is that the true secret of doing great things for God is to have great faith.

I believe that we are all apt to err on this point. We think too much and talk too much about graces, gifts, and attainments, and we do not sufficiently remember that faith is the root and mother of them all. In

36 Ryle wrote this in the nineteenth century. He might not think that open atheism is as rare today as it was then.

walking with God, a person will only go as far as he believes, and no further. His life will always be in proportion to his faith. His peace, patience, courage, and works will all be according to his faith.

If you read the lives of eminent Christians such as Wesley, Whitefield, Venn, Martyn, Bickersteth, Simeon, or McCheyne, you are inclined to say, “What wonderful gifts and graces these men had!” I answer that you should instead give honor to the main grace that God puts forward in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews – you should give honor to their faith. You can depend on it that faith was the driving force in the character of each and all.

I can imagine someone saying, “They were so prayerful; that made them what they were.” I then ask why they prayed so much. Simply because they had much faith. What is prayer but faith speaking to God?

Someone else might say, “They were so diligent and hardworking; that accounts for their success.” I ask why they were so diligent. Simply because they had faith. What is Christian diligence but faith at work?

Another person will say, “They were so bold and brave; that made them so useful.” I ask why they were so bold. Simply because they had much faith. What is Christian boldness but faith honestly doing its duty?

Someone else might say, “It was their holiness and spirituality that made them what they were.” I then ask what made them holy. Nothing but a living, realizing spirit of faith. What is holiness but faith visible and faith incarnate?

Does any reader desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do you want to bring forth much fruit? Do you want to be eminently holy and useful? Is it your desire to be bright and shine as a light in your day? Do you want to, like Moses, make it clear as noonday that you have chosen God before the world? I am sure that every true believer will reply, “Yes! Yes! Yes! These are the things we long for and desire.”

Then take the advice I give you today. Go and plead to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the disciples did, *Lord, Increase our faith* (Luke 17:5). Faith is the root of a real Christian’s character. If your root is right, your fruit will soon abound. Your spiritual prosperity will always be according to your faith. He who believes will not only be saved, but will never

thirst. He will overcome, he will be established, he will walk firmly on the waters of this world, and he will do great works.

Reader, if you believe the things contained in this book and if you desire to be thoroughly holy, begin to act on your belief. Take Moses for your example. Walk in his steps. *Go and do thou likewise* (Luke 10:37).

Chapter 9

Lot – A Beacon

He lingered. (Genesis 19:16)

The Holy Scriptures, which were written for our learning, contain beacons as well as patterns. They show us examples of what we should avoid, as well as examples of what we should follow. Lot is set as a beacon to the whole church of Christ. His character is put before us in one little sentence: *He lingered*. Let us look at this beacon for a few minutes. Let us consider Lot.

Who is this man who lingered? He is the nephew of faithful Abraham. When did he linger? He lingered on the very morning Sodom was to be destroyed. Where did he linger? He lingered within the walls of Sodom itself. Before whom did he linger? He lingered under the eyes of the two angels who were sent to bring him out of the city. Even then, *he lingered!*

The words are solemn and full of food for thought. They should sound like a trumpet in the ears of all who make any profession of Christianity. They should make every reader think. These could be the very words your soul needs. The voice of the Lord Jesus commands you to *remember Lot's wife* (Luke 17:32). The voice of one of His ministers invites you this day to remember Lot.

Let me try to show:

- What Lot was himself;
- What the text already quoted tells you of him;

- What reasons may account for his lingering; and
- What kind of fruit his lingering brought forth.

I ask for the special attention of all who have reason to hope they are real Christians and desire to live holy lives. Let it be a settled principle in our minds, if we follow holiness, that we must not linger.

Once more, I say, Lot is a beacon.

What was Lot?

This is a most important point. If I do not mention this, I might miss that class of professing Christians I especially want to help. If I did not make it quite clear, many might say after reading this book, “Lot was a bad man – a poor, wicked, dark creature, an unconverted man, a child of this world! No wonder he lingered.” But pay attention to what I now say. Lot was nothing of the kind. Lot was a true believer, a converted person, a real child of God, a justified soul, a righteous man.

Do any of you have grace in your heart? So did Lot. Do you have a hope of salvation? So did Lot. Are you a traveler in the narrow way that leads unto life? So was Lot.

This is not merely my own opinion, a mere random thought, or an idea unsupported by Scripture. I do not want you to believe it simply because I say it. The Holy Spirit has placed the matter beyond controversy by calling Lot *just* and *righteous* (2 Peter 2:7-8), and has given us good evidence of the grace that was in him.

One evidence is that he lived in a wicked place, *seeing and hearing* evil all around him (2 Peter 2:8), yet was not wicked himself. To be a Daniel in Babylon, an Obadiah in Ahab’s house, an Abijah in Jeroboam’s family, a saint in Nero’s court, or a righteous man in Sodom, one must have the grace of God. Without grace, it would be impossible.

Another evidence is that he *afflicted his righteous soul . . . with the deeds of those unjust people* that he saw around him (2 Peter 2:8). He was wounded, grieved, pained, and hurt at the sight of sin. Lot felt like holy David, who says, *I beheld the transgressors and was grieved because they did not keep thy words* (Psalm 119:158), and *Rivers of waters ran down my eyes because they did not keep thy law* (Psalm 119:136). This

was like Paul, who says, *I have great sorrow and continual pain in my heart . . . for my brethren, those who are my kinsmen according to the flesh* (Romans 9:2-3). Nothing will account for this but the grace of God.

Another evidence is that he *afflicted his righteous soul from day to day* with the unlawful deeds he saw (2 Peter 2:8). He did not eventually become indifferent and lukewarm about sin as many do. Familiarity and habit did not take off the fine edge of his feelings, as too often is the case. Many people are shocked and startled at the first sight of wickedness, and yet end up becoming so used to seeing it that they view it with comparative unconcern. This is especially the case with those who live in towns and cities. Such people often become utterly indifferent about Sabbath-breaking and many other forms of open sin, but it was not so with Lot. Again, this is a great indication of the reality of his grace.

Lot was a just and righteous man, a man sealed and stamped as an heir of heaven by the Holy Spirit Himself.

Before we move on, let us remember that a true Christian might have many blemishes, defects, and infirmities and yet still be a true Christian. We do not despise gold because it is mixed with much dross. We must not undervalue grace because it is accompanied by much corruption. Read on, and you will see that Lot paid dearly for his lingering, but as you read, do not forget that Lot was a child of God.

What does the text, already quoted, tell us about Lot's behavior?

The words are amazing and astounding: *he lingered*. The more we consider the time and circumstances, the more perplexing we will think they are. Lot knew the awful condition of the city in which he stood. *The cry of its abominations had waxed great before the face of the LORD* (Genesis 19:13); yet *he lingered*.

Lot knew the fearful judgment coming down on all within its walls. The angels had said plainly, *The LORD has sent us to destroy it* (Genesis 19:13); yet *he lingered*.

Lot knew that God was a God who always kept His word, and if He said He would do something, He would definitely do it. He could

hardly be Abraham's nephew and live with him for a while and not be aware of this; yet *he lingered*.

Lot believed there was danger, for he went to his sons-in-law and warned them to flee. *Up*, he said. *Get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city* (Genesis 19:14); yet *he lingered*.

Lot saw the angels of God standing by, waiting for him and his family to leave. He heard the voice of those ministers of wrath ringing in his ears to hurry him: *Arise, take thy wife and thy two daughters who are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city* (Genesis 19:15); yet *he lingered*.

He was slow when he should have been quick, backward when he should have been forward, trifling when he should have been rushing, loitering when he should have been hurrying, and cold when he should

have been hot. It is more than strange! It seems almost incredible! It appears too strange to be true, but the Spirit writes it down for our learning, and so it was.

There are many real children of God who appear to know far more than they live up to

Perplexing as it might appear at first, I am afraid that there are many of the Lord Jesus Christ's people very much like Lot. I ask every reader of this book to remember well what I say.

I will repeat it so that there will be no mistake about my meaning. I have shown you that Lot lingered. I say that there are many Christian men and Christian women today very much like Lot.

There are many real children of God who appear to know far more than they live up to and who see far more than they practice, yet they continue in this condition for many years. It is amazing that they go as far as they do, and yet go no further!

They acknowledge Christ and love the truth. They like sound preaching and agree with every article of gospel doctrine when they hear it, but there is still something indescribable that is not satisfactory about them. They are constantly doing things that disappoint the expectations of their more advanced Christian friends. It is amazing that they think as they do, yet stand still!

They believe in heaven, and yet do not seem to look forward to it very much. They believe in hell, and yet do not seem to fear it. They say

that they love the Lord Jesus, but the work they do for Him is small. They claim to hate the devil, but they often appear to tempt him to come to them. They know the time is short, but they live as if it were long. They know they have a battle to fight, yet others might think they were at peace. They know they have a race to run, yet they often look like people sitting still. They know the Judge is at the door and there is wrath to come, yet they appear half asleep. It is astonishing that they are what they are, yet have not progressed more than what they have!

What can we say of these people? They often bewilder godly friends and family members. They often cause great concern. They often give rise to great doubts and searchings of heart. They may be classed under one sweeping description: they are all brothers and sisters of Lot. They linger.

These are the ones who get the notion into their minds that it is impossible for all believers to be so very holy and very spiritual! They admit that true holiness is a beautiful thing. They like to read about it in books and even to see it occasionally in others, but they do not think that all Christians are meant to aim at so high a standard. At any rate, they seem to have made up their minds that it is beyond their reach.

These are the ones who get into their heads false ideas of love, as they call it. They are deathly afraid of being thought of as intolerant and narrow-minded, and they are always running to the opposite extreme. They would gladly please everybody and be agreeable to everyone, but they forget that first they should be sure that they please God.

These are the people who are afraid of sacrifices and who retreat from self-denial. They never appear able to apply our Lord's command to take up the cross (Matthew 16:24), cut off the right hand, and pluck out the right eye (Matthew 5:29-30). They cannot deny that our Lord used these expressions, but they never find a place for them in their own Christianity. They spend their lives in trying to make the gate wider and the cross easier to carry, but they never succeed.

These are the people who are always trying to remain in the world. They are ingenious in discovering reasons for not clearly separating themselves and in making convincing excuses for attending questionable amusements and keeping up questionable friendships. One day you are told that they attended a Bible study, and the next day you might hear that they went to a nightclub. One day they fast and pray

or go to the Lord's Table and receive the Lord's Supper, and another day they go to the casino in the morning and a movie at night. One day they are almost beside themselves under the sermon of some dramatic and emotional preacher, and another day they are weeping over some romance novel. They are constantly trying to convince themselves that to join a little with worldly people on their own ground does good, yet in their case, it is very clear that not only do they do no good, but they only receive harm.

These are people who cannot find it in their hearts to quarrel with their troubling sin, whether it is laziness, idleness, anger, pride, lust, selfishness, impatience, or whatever else it may be. They allow it to remain a tolerably quiet and undisturbed resident of their hearts. They try to excuse it due to their health, personality, temperament, trials, or by saying that is just how they are. Their father, mother, or grandmother was the same way, and so they say they cannot help it. When you meet them again a year or two later, they are still making the same excuses!

This can all be summed up in a single sentence: they are the brothers and sisters of Lot. They linger. If you are a lingering soul, you are not happy. You know you are not. It would be strange indeed if you were. Linging is the sure destruction of happy Christianity. A lingerer's conscience forbids him to enjoy inward peace.

Maybe at one time you did run well, but you have left your first love. You have not felt the same comfort since, and you never will until you return to your *first works* (Revelation 2:5). Like Peter when the Lord Jesus was taken prisoner, you are following the Lord afar off; and just like Peter, you will find the way unpleasant and difficult.

Come and look at Lot. Come and notice Lot's history. Come and consider Lot's lingering – and be wise.

Let us now consider the reasons for Lot's lingering.

This is a matter of great importance, and I ask you to pay the most serious attention to it. To know the root of a disease is one step toward a remedy. He who is forewarned is forearmed.

Who is there among the readers of this book who feels secure and has no fear of lingering? Come and listen while I tell you a few passages

of Lot's history. Do as he did, and it will be a miracle indeed if you do not get into the same state of soul in time.

One thing I observe in Lot is that he made a wrong choice early in life. There was a time when Abraham and Lot dwelt together. They both became rich and could live together no longer. Abraham, the elder of the two, in the true spirit of humility and courtesy, gave Lot the choice of the country when they resolved to part company: *If thou, he said, wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left* (Genesis 13:9).

What did Lot do? We are told that he saw that the plains of Jordan, near Sodom, were rich, fertile, and well-watered. It was a good land for cattle and was full of pastures. Lot had large flocks and herds, and it suited his requirements. This was the land he chose for a residence, simply because it was a rich, well-watered land (Genesis 13:10).

It was near the town of Sodom! Lot did not care about that. The people of Sodom, who would be his neighbors, were wicked! That did not matter to him. They were wicked sinners before God. That made no difference to him. The pasture was rich. The land was good. Lot wanted such a country for his flocks and herds, and that was all the reason he needed. No other argument mattered to him.

Lot chose by sight and not by faith. He did not ask counsel of God to preserve him from mistakes. He looked to the things of time and not of eternity. He thought of his worldly profit and not of his soul. He considered only what would help him in this life. He forgot the solemn business of the life to come. This was a bad beginning.

I observe also that Lot joined with sinners when there was no reason for him to do so. We are first told that he *pitched his tents toward Sodom* (Genesis 13:12). This, as I have already shown, was a huge mistake. But the next time Lot is mentioned, we find him actually living in Sodom itself. The Spirit says specifically that he *dwelt in Sodom* (Genesis 14:12). He had left his tents. He had forsaken the country. He occupied a house in the very streets of that wicked town.

We are not told the reason for this change. We are not aware that any occasion could have necessitated it. We are sure there could have been no command of God. Maybe his wife liked the town better than the country for the sake of society. It is plain that she had no grace

herself. Maybe she convinced Lot that it was needful for the benefit of his daughters so that they could marry and get settled in life. Maybe the daughters wanted to live in the town for the sake of fun company; they were evidently not serious-minded young women. Maybe Lot liked it himself in order to seem more important with his flocks and herds. People never lack reasons to try to justify what they want to do. One thing is very clear: Lot dwelt in the midst of Sodom without good cause.

When a child of God does these two things that I have named, we should never be surprised if we eventually hear unfavorable accounts about his soul. We never need to be surprised if he stops listening to the warning voice of affliction, as Lot had done (Genesis 14:12), and ends up being a lingerer in the day of trial and danger, as Lot was.

I know no more certain way to damage your own soul and to go backward about your eternal concerns than to make a wrong choice in life – an unscriptural choice – and settle yourself down unnecessarily in the midst of worldly people. This is the way to make the pulse of your soul beat feebly and sluggishly. This is the way to make the edge of your feeling about sin become blunt and dull. This is the way to dim

the eyes of your spiritual discernment until you can scarcely distinguish good from evil, and you stumble as you walk. This is the way to bring a moral paralysis on your feet and limbs and make you go stumbling and trembling along the road to Zion, as if the grasshopper was a burden. This is the way to let your worst enemy into the camp,

People never lack
reasons to try to justify
what they want to do.

to give the devil an advantage in the battle, to tie your arms in fighting, to bind your legs in running, to dry up the sources of your strength, to destroy your energies, and to cut off your own hair, like Samson, and give yourself into the hands of the Philistines – to put out your own eyes, grind at the mill, and become a slave.

I call on every reader to listen well to what I am saying. Write these things down in your mind. Do not forget them. Recall them in the morning. Restore them to your memory at night. Let them sink down deeply into your heart. If you ever want to be safe from lingering, beware of needless mingling with worldly people. Beware of Lot's choice! If you

do not want to settle down into a dry, dull, sleepy, lazy, barren, desolate, carnal, mindless, lethargic state of soul, beware of Lot's choice!

- Remember this in choosing a place to live, or a residence. It is not enough that the house is comfortable, the situation good, the air fine, the neighborhood pleasant, the rent or price low, and the living cheap. There are other things still to be considered. You must think of your immortal soul. Will the house you think of help you toward heaven or hell? Is the gospel preached nearby? Is Christ crucified within reach of your door? Is there a real man of God near who will watch over your soul? I urge you, if you love life, not to overlook this. Beware of Lot's choice.
- Remember this in choosing a job, career, or profession in life. It is not enough that the salary is high, the wages good, the work light, the advantages numerous, and the prospects of advancement most favorable. Think of your immortal soul. Will it be prospered or drawn back? Will you have your Sundays free and be able to have one day in the week for your spiritual business? I urge you, by the mercies of God, to be careful what you do. Make no careless decision. Consider this in every light – in the light of God as well as in the light of the world. Gold may be bought too dear. Beware of Lot's choice.
- Remember this in choosing a husband or wife, if you are unmarried. It is not enough that your eye is pleased, that your tastes are met, that your mind finds congeniality, that there is warmth and affection, and that there is a comfortable home for life. There needs to be something more than this. There is a life yet to come. Think of your immortal soul. Will it be helped upward or dragged downward by the union you are planning? Will it be made more heavenly or more earthly – drawn nearer to Christ or to the world? Will the Christianity in your soul grow stronger or will it decay? I ask you, by all your hopes of glory, allow this to enter into your calculations. "Think," as Richard Baxter

said, and “think, and think again,” before you commit yourself. *Be ye not unequally yoked* (2 Corinthians 6:14). Matrimony is nowhere named among the means of conversion. Remember Lot’s choice.

- Remember this if you are ever offered a good position in your career. It is not enough to have good pay and regular employment, the confidence of your employer, and the best chance of advancing in your company. These things are very good in their way, but they are not everything. How will your soul fare if you work at a company that makes you work on Sundays? What day in the week will you have for God and eternity? What opportunities will you have for hearing the gospel preached? I solemnly warn you to consider this. It will profit you nothing to fill your bank account if you bring leanness and poverty to your soul. Beware of trading the Lord’s Day for the sake of advancement in a career! Remember Esau’s mess of pottage. Beware of Lot’s choice!

Some reader might think, “A Christian does not need to fear. He is a sheep of Christ, he will never perish, and he cannot come to much harm. It cannot be that such small matters can be of great importance.”

Well, you might think so, but I warn you that if you neglect these matters, your soul will never prosper. A true Christian will certainly not be cast away if he lingers, but if he does linger, it is a waste of time to suppose that his Christianity will thrive. Grace is a tender plant. Unless you cherish it and nurse it well, it will soon become sick in this evil world. It might wilt, although it cannot die. The brightest gold will soon become dim when exposed to a damp atmosphere. The hottest iron will soon become cold. It requires pains and toil to bring it to a red heat; it requires nothing but leaving it alone, or adding a little cold water, for it to become black and hard.

You might be an earnest, zealous Christian now. You might feel like David in his prosperity when he said, *I shall never be moved* (Psalm 30:6). Do not be deceived, though. You only have to walk in Lot’s steps and make Lot’s choice, and you will soon come to Lot’s condition of

soul. Allow yourself to do as he did, dare to act as he acted, and you can be sure that you will soon discover that you have become a poor lingerer like him. You will find, like Samson, that the presence of the Lord is no longer with you. You will prove to be, to your own shame, an undecided, hesitating person in the day of trial.

There will come a rotting on your religion that will eat out its vitality without your knowing it. There will come a slow consumption on your spiritual strength that will waste it away insensibly. In time you will wake up to find your hands hardly able to do the Lord's work, your feet hardly able to carry you along the Lord's way, and your faith no bigger than a grain of mustard seed. This might happen at some turning point in your life, at a time when the enemy is coming in like a flood and your need is the greatest.

If you do not want to become a lingerer in Christianity, consider these things! Beware of doing what Lot did!

Let us inquire now what kind of fruit Lot's lingering spirit produced.

I do not want to skip over this point for many reasons, especially in the present day. There are many who will feel inclined to say, "After all, Lot was saved. He was justified. He got to heaven. That is all I need. If I just get to heaven, I will be content." If this is the thought of your heart, listen to me a little longer. I will show you one or two things in Lot's history that deserve attention and might convince you to change your mind.

I think it is of primary importance to dwell upon this subject. I will always contend that eminent holiness and eminent usefulness are quite closely connected. Happiness and following the Lord fully go side by side. If believers linger, they should not expect to be useful in their day and generation, they should not expect to be very saintly and Christlike, and they should not expect to enjoy much comfort and peace in believing.

Let us notice that Lot did no good among the inhabitants of Sodom.

Lot probably lived in Sodom many years. No doubt he had many

precious opportunities for speaking about the things of God and trying to turn souls away from sin, but Lot seems to have accomplished nothing at all. He appears to have had no weight or influence with the people who lived around him. He possessed none of that respect and reverence that even the people of the world will frequently concede to a bright servant of God.

Not one righteous person could be found in all Sodom outside the walls of Lot's home. Not one of his neighbors believed his testimony. Not one of his acquaintances honored the Lord whom he worshipped. Not one of his servants served his master's God. None of the people cared at all for his opinion when he tried to restrain their wickedness. *This fellow came in to sojourn*, they said, *and is he to lift himself up as judge?* (Genesis 19:9). His life carried no weight. His words were not listened to. His religion drew none to follow him.

Generally, lingering
souls do no good to
the world and bring no
credit to God's cause.

Truly, this does not surprise me! Generally, lingering souls do no good to the world and bring no credit to God's cause. Their salt has too little savor to season the corruption around them. They are not epistles of Christ who can be *known and read of all* (2 Corinthians 3:2). There is nothing magnetic, attractive, and Christ-reflecting about their ways. Let us remember this.

Let us observe that Lot did not help any of his
family, relatives, or acquaintances toward heaven.

We are not told how large his family was, but we know that he at least had a wife and two daughters when he was called out of Sodom. But whether Lot's family was large or small, one thing, I think, is perfectly clear: there was not one person among them who feared God!

When he *went out and spoke unto his sons-in-law, those who were to marry his daughters*, and warned them to flee from the judgments coming on Sodom, we are told that *he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law* (Genesis 19:14). What fearful words those are! It was just like saying, "Who cares about what you say?" As long as the Genesis 19:14

world stands, these things will be painful proof of the contempt with which a lingerer in Christianity is regarded.

What was Lot's wife? She left the city with him, but she did not go far. She did not have faith to see the need of such a quick escape. She left her heart in Sodom when she began to flee. She looked back from behind her husband, despite the plainest command not to do so. *Escape; for thy soul, do not look behind thee, neither stop thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed* (Genesis 19:17). Lot's wife looked back and was at once turned into a pillar of salt.

What about Lot's two daughters? They escaped, but only to do the devil's work. They later tempted their father to wickedness and led him to commit the vilest of sins.

In summary, Lot seems to have stood alone in his family! He was not made the means of keeping one soul back from the gates of hell! This does not surprise me. Lingerer souls are seen through by their own families, and when they are seen through, they are despised. Even if their nearest relatives understand nothing else in Christianity, they understand inconsistency. They draw the sad, but natural, conclusion, saying, "Certainly if he believed all that he claims to believe, he would not live and do as he does." Lingerer parents rarely have godly children. The eye of the child drinks in far more than the ear. A child will always observe what you do much more than what you say. Let us remember this.

**Let us consider that Lot did not leave any
godly evidence behind him when he died.**

We only know a little about Lot after his flight from Sodom, and all that we do know is unsatisfactory. His pleading for Zoar was only minor, and his later departure from Zoar and his conduct in the cave all tell the same story. It all shows the weakness of the grace that was in him and how low the condition of his soul was into which he had fallen.

We do not know how long he lived after his escape. We do not know where or when he died, whether he saw Abraham again, how he died, or anything that he later said or thought. All these things are hidden to us. We are told of the last days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and

David – but not one word about Lot. Oh, what a gloomy deathbed the deathbed of Lot must have been!

The Scripture appears to draw a veil around him on purpose. There is a painful silence about his end. He seems to have gone out like an expiring lamp and left a bad taste behind him. If we had not been specifically told in the New Testament that Lot was just and righteous, I really believe we would have doubted whether Lot was saved at all.

I do not wonder at his sad end, though. Lingerer believers will generally reap according as they have sown. Their lingering often meets them when their spirit is departing. They have little peace at the end. They reach heaven, to be sure, but they reach it in sad difficulty, weary and footsore, in weakness and tears, in darkness and storm. They are *saved, yet so as by fire* (1 Corinthians 3:15).

I ask every reader of this book to consider the three things I have just mentioned. Do not misunderstand my meaning. It is amazing to observe how willingly people grab at the littlest excuse for misunderstanding the things that concern their souls!

I am not saying that all believers who do not linger will be great instruments of usefulness to the world. Noah preached one hundred and twenty years, and no one believed him. The Lord Jesus was not esteemed by His own people, the Jews. Nor yet do I tell you that believers who do not linger will all be the means of converting their families and relatives. Many of David's children were ungodly. The Lord Jesus was not believed on even by His own brothers.

I do say, though, that it is nearly impossible not to see some connection between Lot's evil choice and Lot's lingering, and between Lot's lingering and his lack of benefit to his family and the world. I believe that the Holy Spirit meant for us to see it. I believe the Holy Spirit meant to make him a beacon to all professing Christians. I am sure the lessons I have tried to draw from the whole history deserve serious reflection.

Now let me speak a few parting words to all who read this book, and especially to all who call themselves believers in Christ. I have no desire to make your hearts sad. I do not want to give you a gloomy view of the Christian life. My only object is to give you friendly warnings. I desire your peace and comfort. I would gladly see you happy as well as safe, and joyful as well as justified. I write as I have done for your good.

You live in a day when a religion full of Lot-like lingerers abounds. The stream of people professing to be Christians is far broader than it once was, but it is far less deep in many places. A certain kind of Christianity is almost fashionable now. To belong to some church and show a zeal for its interests, to talk about the leading controversies of the day, to buy popular religious books as fast as they come out and lay them on your table, to attend meetings, seminars, and workshops, to discuss the merits of preachers, and to be enthusiastic and excited about every new form of sensational Christian trend that pops up – these are all comparatively easy and common attainments now. They no longer make a person stand out. They require little or no sacrifice. They require no cross.

However, to walk closely with God, to be truly spiritually minded, to behave like strangers and pilgrims, to be distinct from the world in how we use our time, to be different from the world in our conversation, entertainment, and clothing, to bear a faithful witness for Christ in all places, to leave a trace of our Master everywhere we go and in all company, to be prayerful, humble, unselfish, good-tempered, untroubled, easily pleased, charitable, patient, and meek, and to be jealously afraid of all types of sin and tremblingly alive to our danger from the world – these are still rare things! They are not common among those who are called true Christians, and worst of all, their absence is not felt and mourned as it should be.

In a time like this, I dare to offer counsel to every believing reader of this book. Do not turn away from it. Do not be angry with me for speaking plainly. I urge you to *give all the more diligence to make your calling and election sure* (2 Peter 1:10). I urge you not to be slothful, not to be careless, not to be content with a small measure of grace, and not to be satisfied with being a little better than the world.

I solemnly warn you not to attempt doing what can never be done – to serve Christ and yet stay in with the world. I call upon you and implore you to be a wholehearted Christian, to pursue eminent holiness, to aim at a high degree of sanctification, to live a consecrated life, to present your body a *living sacrifice* unto God (Romans 12:1), and to *walk in the Spirit* (Galatians 5:25). I instruct and exhort you by all your

hopes of heaven and desires of glory, if you want to be happy and useful, do not be a lingering soul.

Do you want to know what the times demand? The shaking of nations, the uprooting of ancient things, the overturning of kingdoms, the turmoil and restlessness of men's minds – what do they say? They all cry aloud: Christian, do not linger!

Do you want to be found ready for Christ at His second appearing – with your loins girded, your lamp burning, and yourself bold and prepared to meet Him? Then do not linger!

Do you want to enjoy much sensible comfort in your Christianity, to feel the witness of the Spirit within you, to know whom you have believed, and not to be a gloomy, complaining, sour, downcast, and melancholy Christian? Then do not linger!

Would you like to enjoy strong assurance of your own salvation in the day of sickness and on your deathbed? Do you want to see with the eye of faith heaven opening and Jesus rising to receive you? Then do not linger!

Do you desire to leave much evidence of your true Christianity behind you when you are gone? Would you like to be laid in your grave with comfortable hope and have others talk of your destiny after death without a doubt? Then do not linger!

Do you want to be useful to the world in your day and generation? Do you want to draw people from sin to Christ, to have your doctrine be appealing to others, and to make your Master's cause beautiful and attractive in their eyes? Then do not linger!

Do you desire to help your children and relatives toward heaven and have them say, "We want to go with you"? Do you not want to make them unbelievers and despisers of Christianity? Then do not linger!

Would you like a great crown in the day of Christ's appearing, not be the least and smallest star in glory, and not find yourself the last and lowest in the kingdom of God? Then do not linger!

Oh, let not one of us linger! Time does not linger. Death does not linger. Judgment does not linger. The devil does not linger. The world does not linger. Let the children of God not linger.

Does anyone feel that he is a lingerer? Has your heart felt heavy and your conscience wounded while you have been reading these pages? Does

something within you whisper, “This describes me”? Then listen to what I am saying. It is not well with your soul. Awake and try to do better.

If you are a lingerer, you must go to Christ at once and be cured. You must use the old remedy. You must bathe in the old fountain. You must turn again to Christ and be healed. The way to do something is to do it. Do this at once!

Do not think for a moment that your case is past recovery. Do not think that because you have been living in a dry, sleepy, heavy state of soul for a long time that there is no hope of revival. Is not the Lord Jesus Christ an appointed Physician for all spiritual ailments? Did He not cure every form of disease when He was upon earth? Did He not cast out every kind of demon? Did He not raise poor backsliding Peter and put a new song in his mouth? Oh, do not doubt, but sincerely believe that He will yet revive His work within you! Simply stop lingering, confess your foolishness, and come – come to Christ at once. Blessed are the words of the prophet: *Only acknowledge thine iniquity. . . . Return, ye rebellious sons, and I will heal your rebellion* (Jeremiah 3:13, 22).

Let us all remember the souls of others, as well as our own. If at any time we see any brother or sister lingering, let us try to awaken them, arouse them, and stir them up. Let us all exhort one another as we have opportunity (Hebrews 3:13). Let us motivate others unto *charity and unto good works* (Hebrews 10:24). Let us not be afraid to say to each other, “Brother or sister, have you forgotten Lot? Awake and remember Lot! Awake and linger no more.”

Chapter 10

A Woman To Be Remembered

Remember Lot's wife. (Luke 17:32)

There are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than that above. The Lord Jesus Christ says to us, *Remember Lot's wife.*

Lot's wife professed to follow God. Her husband was a *righteous man* (2 Peter 2:8). She left Sodom with him on the day that Sodom was destroyed. She looked back toward the city from behind her husband, against God's clear command. She was struck dead at once and turned into a pillar of salt. 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 tell us to remember Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, 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 discussing. He is speaking of His own second coming to judge the world. He is describing the dreadful 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 (Matthew 12:20). He could weep over unbelieving Jerusalem and pray for the men who

crucified Him, yet even He thinks it is good to remind us of lost souls. Even He says, *Remember Lot's wife*.

It is a solemn warning when we think of the people 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 was speaking to Peter, James, John, and many others who loved Him; yet He thought it was good to warn even them. 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 and imitating 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 urges us to keep the incident before our minds. He cries, *Remember Lot's wife*.

The danger of
worldliness is
continuously increasing
in the church.

I would now like to examine the lessons that Lot's wife is meant to teach us. I am sure that her history is full of useful instruction to the church.

The last days are upon us. The second coming of the Lord Jesus draws near. The danger of worldliness is continuously increasing in the church. Let us be provided with safeguards and antidotes against the disease that is around us. Let us become familiar with the story of Lot's wife.

There are three things that I will do in bringing the subject before our minds in order:

I will speak of the religious privileges that Lot's wife enjoyed.

I will speak of the sin that Lot's wife committed.

I will speak of the judgment that God inflicted upon her.

I will first speak of the religious privileges that Lot's wife enjoyed.

In the days of Abraham and Lot, true saving religion was scarce upon earth. There were no Bibles, no pastors, no churches, no tracts, and no missionaries. The knowledge of God was confined to a few favored families. Most of the inhabitants of the world were living in darkness,

ignorance, superstition, and sin. Probably not one in a hundred had such a good example, such spiritual company, such clear knowledge, and such plain warnings as Lot's wife. Compared with millions of her fellow human beings in her time, Lot's wife was a favored 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 about the God to whom they belonged and whom they served. Religion with Abraham and Lot was no mere formal business. It was the ruling principle of their lives and the mainspring of all their actions. Lot's wife must have seen and known all this. This was no small privilege.

When Abraham first received the promises, it is probable that Lot's wife was there. When he built his altar by his tent between Ai and Bethel, it is probable she was there. When her husband was taken captive by Chedorlaomer and delivered by God's providence, she was there. When Melchizedek, king of Salem, came forth to meet Abraham with bread and wine, she was there. When the angels came to Sodom and warned her husband to flee, she saw them. When the angels 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. Despite all her opportunities and means of grace and despite 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 stirred up and awakened. Her will was never really brought into a state of obedience to God. Her affections were never really set upon things above. The form of religion that she had was kept up for fashion's sake and not from feeling. It was a garment worn for the sake of pleasing her relatives, but not from any sense of its value.

She did as others did around her in Lot's house: she conformed to her husband's ways, she made no opposition to his religion, and 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 condition she lived, and in this condition she died.

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

Learn that the mere possession of religious privileges will save no one's soul. You might have spiritual advantages of every description. You might live in the full sunshine of the richest opportunities and means of grace. You might enjoy the best preaching and teaching. You might dwell in the midst of light, knowledge, holiness, and good company. You might have all these things, and yet you yourself may remain unconverted, and in the end be lost forever.

I dare say that this doctrine is difficult for some readers. I know that many people think they do not need anything except religious privileges in order to become wholehearted Christians. They will admit that they are not yet what they should be, but they say that they are going through difficulties and hard times. They claim that if they only had a godly husband or a godly wife, godly friends or a godly employer, if they could hear good gospel preaching – if they had these advantages and privileges, then they would walk with God.

It is all a mistake. It is a complete delusion. It requires something more than privileges and advantages 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. They all died in their sins. They went down to the pit despite knowledge, warnings, and opportunities. All these instances teach us that it is not privileges alone that we need. We need the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Let us value religious privileges, but let us not rest entirely upon them. Let us desire to have the benefit of them in all areas of our lives, but let us not put them in the place of Christ. Let us use them thankfully, if God grants them to us, but let us take care that they produce some fruit in our hearts and lives. If they do not do any good, they often do harm. They sear the conscience, increase responsibility, and intensify condemnation. The same fire that melts the wax hardens the

clay. The same sun that makes the living tree grow dries up the dead tree and prepares it for burning. Nothing hardens the heart of man as much as an empty familiarity with sacred things. Once more I say, it is not privileges alone that make people Christians, but the grace of the Holy Spirit. Without that, no one will ever be saved.

I ask the members of evangelical congregations to pay careful attention to what I am saying. You think your pastor is an excellent preacher. You delight in his sermons. His sermons help you the most of any you have heard anywhere. You have learned many things since you attended his ministry. You consider it a great privilege to be one of his hearers! All this is very good. It is a privilege. I would be thankful if ministers like yours were multiplied a thousandfold. But after all that, what do you have in your heart? Have you yet received the Holy Spirit? If not, you are no better than Lot's wife.

I ask the children of religious parents to consider 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 about sin, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, holiness, and heaven from the first moment we can remember. But take heed that you do not remain dead and unfruitful in the sunshine of all these privileges. Beware that your heart does not remain hard, unrepentant, and worldly despite the many advantages you enjoy. You cannot enter the kingdom of God on the credit of your parents' faith. You must eat the bread of life for yourself. You must 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 to God that all professing Christians may lay these things to heart. May we never forget that privileges alone cannot save us. Light and knowledge, faithful preaching, an abundant means of grace, and the company of holy people are all great blessings and advantages. Happy are they who have them! But, after all, there is one thing without which privileges are useless: that one thing is the grace of the Holy Spirit. Lot's wife had many privileges – but Lot's wife had no grace.

I will next speak of the sin that Lot's wife committed.

The history of her sin is given by the Holy Spirit in few and simple words: *Then the wife of Lot looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt* (Genesis 19:26). We are told no more than this. There is a simple solemnity about this history. The sum and substance of her transgression lies in these three words: "She looked back."

Does that sin seem small to you? Does the failing of Lot's wife appear to be too minor to be visited with such a punishment? I dare say that this is what some people think. Give your attention to me while I reason with you on the subject. There was far more in that look than strikes you at first. It implied far more than it expressed. Listen, and you will hear.

- **That look was a little thing, but it revealed the true character of Lot's wife.** Little things will often show the state of a person's mind even better than great ones, and little symptoms are often the signs of deadly and incurable diseases. The fruit that Eve ate was a little thing, but it proved that she had fallen from innocence and had become a sinner. A crack in an arch seems a little thing, but it proves that the foundation is giving way and that the whole structure is unsafe. A little cough in the morning seems like an unimportant ailment, but it is often evidence of failing health that leads to decline, sickness, and death. A straw may show which way the wind blows, and one look can show the rotten condition of a sinner's heart (Matthew 5:28).
- **That look was a little thing, but it told of disobedience in Lot's wife.** The command of the angel was specific and unmistakable: *Do not look behind thee* (Genesis 19:17). Lot's wife refused to obey this command, but the Holy Spirit says that *to hear is better than sacrifice, and rebellion is the sin of witchcraft* (1 Samuel 15:22-23). When God speaks plainly by His Word or by His messengers, man's duty is clear.
- **That look was a little thing, but it told of proud unbelief in Lot's wife.** She seemed to doubt whether God was really going to destroy Sodom. She seemed not to believe that there

was any danger or any need to quickly flee. But without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). The moment someone begins to think he knows better than God and that God is not serious when He warns and threatens, his soul is in great danger. When we cannot see the reason for what God does, our duty is to hold our peace and believe.

- **That look was a little thing, but it told of the secret love of the world in Lot's wife.** Her heart was in Sodom, though her body was outside. She had left her affections behind when she fled from her home. Her eye turned to the place where her treasure was, as the compass needle turns to the north. This was the crowning point of her sin. *The friendship of the world is enmity with God* (James 4:4). *If anyone loves the world, the charity of the Father is not in him* (1 John 2:15).

I ask you to pay special attention to this part of our subject. I believe it is the part to which the Lord Jesus particularly intends to direct our minds. I believe He would have us observe that Lot's wife was lost by looking back to the world. Her profession was at one time good and believable, but she never really gave up the world. She seemed at one time to be on the road to safety, but even then, the lowest and deepest thoughts of her heart were for the world. The immense danger of worldliness is the main lesson that the Lord Jesus wants us to learn. Oh, that we may all have an eye to see and a heart to understand!

Lot's wife was lost
by looking back
to the world.

I believe there never was a time when warnings against worldliness were so much needed by the church of Christ as they are today. Every age is said to have its own peculiar epidemic disease. The epidemic disease to which the souls of Christians are in danger of now is the love of the world. It is a *pestilence that walks in darkness*, and a sickness that destroys at noonday (Psalm 91:6). It *has caused many to fall down dead; yea, all the strong men have been slain by her* (Proverbs 7:26). I would willingly raise a warning voice and try to awaken the slumbering consciences of all who make a profession of Christianity. I would readily cry aloud,

“Remember the sin of Lot’s wife.” She was no murderess, adulteress, or thief – but she professed to follow God, and she looked back.

There are thousands of baptized people in our churches who are proof against immorality and infidelity, and yet who become victims to the love of the world. There are thousands who run well for a season and seem likely to reach heaven, but by and by they give up the race and completely turn their backs on Christ.

What has stopped them? Have they found the Bible not true? Did the Lord Jesus fail to keep His word? No, not at all. They have caught the epidemic disease – they are infected with the love of this world. I appeal to every truehearted evangelical pastor; I ask him to look all around his congregation. I appeal to every old established Christian; I ask him to look all around his circle of acquaintances. I am sure that I am speaking the truth. I am sure that it is the right time to remember the sin of Lot’s wife.

How many children of Christian families begin well and end poorly! In the days of their childhood they seem full of Christianity. They can repeat Bible verses and sing Christian songs in abundance. They have spiritual feelings and convictions of sin. They profess to love the Lord Jesus and desire heaven. They take pleasure in going to church and listening to sermons. They say things that their parents take as indications of grace. They do things that make their relatives say, *Who shall this child be!* (Luke 1:66).

But sadly, their goodness often vanishes like the morning cloud and like the dew that passes away! The boy becomes a young man and cares for nothing but amusement, sports, parties, and excess. The girl becomes a young woman and cares for nothing but fashion, popularity, empty entertainment, and fun. Where is the spirituality that once seemed so promising? It is all gone. It is buried. It is overflowed by the love of the world. These people walk in the steps of Lot’s wife. They look back.

How many married people do well in Christianity to all appearance, until their children begin to grow up – and then they fall away! In the early years of their married life they seem to follow Christ diligently and to witness a good confession of faith. They regularly attend the preaching of the gospel. They are fruitful in good works and are never seen in corrupt or immoral company. Their faith and practice

are both sound and walk hand in hand. But how often a spiritual blight comes over the household when a young family begins to grow up, and sons and daughters have to be brought up in this life. A leaven of worldliness begins to appear in their habits, clothing, entertainment, and use of time. They are no longer strict about the company they keep and the places they visit. Where is the obvious line of separation that they once observed? Where is the unswerving abstinence from worldly amusements that once marked their course? It is all forgotten. It is all laid aside, like an old newspaper. A change has come over them. The spirit of the world has taken possession of their hearts. They walk in the steps of Lot's wife. They look back.

How many young women seem to love Christianity until they are twenty or twenty-one, and then lose it all! Up to this time of their life, their conduct in Christian matters is all that could be desired. They keep up habits of private prayer, they read their Bibles diligently, they visit the poor when they have opportunity, and they teach in Sunday school when there is an opening. They minister to the physical and spiritual needs of the poor. They prefer Christian friends. They love to talk about the things of God. They tell others about their religious feelings and experience.

But how often they prove as unstable as water and are ruined by the love of the world! Little by little they fall away and lose their first love. Little by little the "things seen" push the "things unseen" out of their minds (2 Corinthians 4:18), and like the plague of locusts, eat up every green thing in their souls. Step-by-step they go back from the principled position they once held. They cease to be concerned about sound doctrine. They pretend to find out that it is "uncharitable" to think that one person follows Jesus more closely than another. They discover that it is "exclusive" to attempt any separation from the customs of society. By and by they give their affections to some man who makes no pretense to Christianity and holiness. At last they end by giving up the last remnant of their own Christianity and becoming thorough children of the world. They walk in the steps of Lot's wife. They look back.

How many members in our churches were at one time zealous and earnest professors of Christianity, but have now become lifeless, formal, and cold! There was a time when no one seemed so much alive

in Christ as they were. None were so diligent in their attendance on the means of grace. None were so eager to promote the cause of the gospel and so ready for every good work. None were so thankful for spiritual instruction. None were apparently so desirous to grow in grace.

But now everything has changed! The love of other things has taken possession of their hearts and choked the good seed of the Word (Luke 8:14). The money, rewards, entertainment, and honors of the world now have first place in their affections. If you talk to them, you will find that they have no interest in spiritual things. Observe their daily conduct and you will see that they have no zeal about the kingdom of God. They still have a form of religion, but it is no longer a living Christianity. The spring of their former Christianity is dried up and gone. The fire of their spiritual life is quenched and cold. The world has put out the flame that once burned so brightly. They have walked in the steps of Lot's wife. They have looked back.

How many clergymen work hard in their profession for a few years, but then become lazy and indolent from the love of this present world! At the beginning of their ministry they seem willing to spend and be spent for Christ. They are instant in season and out of season. Their preaching is lively and their churches are filled. Their congregations are well looked after. Bible studies, prayer meetings, and house-to-house visitations are their weekly delight.

But sadly, how often after beginning in the Spirit they end in the flesh (Galatians 3:3), and like Samson, are shorn of their strength in the lap of that Delilah – the world! They advance in their careers and enjoy the things of this world. Their wives become worldly. They are puffed up with pride. They neglect study and prayer. A biting frost cuts off the spiritual blossoms that once looked so fair. Their preaching loses its unction and power. Their weekday work becomes less and less. The society they mix in becomes less select. The tone of their conversation becomes more earthly. They cease to disregard the opinion of man. They acquire a deathly fear of “extreme views,” and are filled with a cautious dread of giving offense.

The man who at one time seemed likely to be a real successor of the apostles and a good soldier of Christ settles down as a clerical gardener, running a business rather than proclaiming and living Christ. He offends

no one, and no one is saved. His church becomes half empty. His influence dwindles away as the world has bound him hand and foot. He has walked in the steps of Lot's wife. He has looked back.

It is sad to write of these things, but it is far sadder to see them. It is sad to observe how professing Christians can blind their consciences by believing misleading arguments on this subject, and how they can try to defend their worldliness by talking of the responsibilities of their jobs, the pleasant things of life, and the necessity of having a pleasant and unoffensive religion.

It is sad to see how many gallant ships launch forth on the voyage of life with every prospect of success, but spring a leak of worldliness and go down with all her freight – in full view of the harbor of safety. It is saddest of all to observe how many people flatter themselves that it is all right with their souls – when it is all wrong because of their love of the world. Grey hairs are here and there upon them, and they do not know it. They start out with Jacob and David and Peter, but they are likely to end with Esau and Saul and Judas Iscariot. They began with Ruth, Hannah, Mary, and Persis, and they are likely to end with Lot's wife.

Be thorough, be real,
be honest, be sound,
and be wholehearted.

Beware of a halfhearted religion. Beware of following Christ from any secondary motive, whether it is to please relatives and friends, to fit in with others, or to appear respectable and have the reputation of being religious. Follow Christ for His own sake if you follow Him at all. Be thorough, be real, be honest, be sound, and be wholehearted. If you have any Christianity at all, let it be real. See that you do not sin the sin of Lot's wife.

Beware of ever supposing that you may go too far in holiness. Beware of secretly trying to remain in the world. I do not want you to become a hermit, a monk, or a nun, but I want you to do your real duty in that state of life to which you are called. I urge every professing Christian who wants to be happy to make no compromise between God and the world. Do not try to drive a hard bargain, as if you wanted to give Christ as little of your heart as possible and to keep as much as possible of the things of this life. Beware that you do not try to reach for too much and end up losing it all.

Love Christ with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Seek first the kingdom of God, and believe that then all other things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33). Take heed that you do not copy the character John Bunyan draws – Mr. Facing-both-ways. For your happiness’ sake, for your usefulness’ sake, for your safety’s sake, and for your soul’s sake, beware of the sin of Lot’s wife. It is a solemn saying of our Lord Jesus, that *No one having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God* (Luke 9:62).

I will now speak, in the last place, of the punishment that God inflicted on Lot’s wife.

The Scripture describes her end in few and simple words. It is written that she *looked back* and *became a pillar of salt* (Genesis 19:26). A miracle was wrought to execute God’s judgment on this guilty woman. The same Almighty hand that first gave her life took that life away in the twinkling of an eye. From living flesh and blood, she was turned into a pillar of salt.

That was a fearful end for a soul to come to! To die at any time is a solemn thing. Even to die amid kind friends and relatives calmly and quietly in one’s bed, with the prayers of godly people still sounding in your ears and with a good hope through grace in the full assurance of salvation, while leaning on the Lord Jesus and supported by gospel promises is serious business. But to die suddenly and in a moment, in the very act of sin, to die in full health and strength, to die by the direct interposition of an angry God – this is fearful indeed. Yet this was the end of Lot’s wife. I cannot blame the prayer book litany, as some do, for retaining the petition, “From sudden death, good Lord, deliver us.”

That was a hopeless end for a soul to come to! There are cases where one hopes, as it were, against hope, about the souls of those we see go down to the grave. We try to persuade ourselves that our poor departed brother or sister may have repented unto salvation at the last moment and laid hold on the hem of Christ’s garment at the eleventh hour. We call to mind God’s mercies. We remember the Spirit’s power. We think about the case of the penitent thief. We try to convince ourselves that saving work may have gone on even on that dying bed that the dying

person had not strength to tell. But there is none of this hope when a person is suddenly cut down in the very act of sin. Love itself can say nothing when the soul has been summoned away in the very midst of wickedness, without even a moment's time for thought or prayer. Such was the end of Lot's wife. It was a hopeless end. She went to hell.

But it is good for us to consider these things. It is good to be reminded that God can sharply punish those who sin willfully, and that great privileges misused bring down great wrath on the soul. Pharaoh saw all the miracles that Moses worked. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram had heard God speaking from Mount Sinai. Hophni and Phinehas were sons of God's high priest. Saul lived in the full light of Samuel's ministry. Ahab was often warned by Elijah the prophet. Absalom enjoyed the privilege of being one of David's children. Belshazzar had Daniel the prophet close by his door. Judas Iscariot was a chosen companion of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Ananias and Sapphira joined the church in the days when the apostles were working miracles.

However, they all sinned with a high hand against light and knowledge, and they were all suddenly destroyed without remedy. They had no time or space for repentance. As they lived, so they died. As they were, they hurried away to meet God. They went with all their sins upon them, unpardoned, unrenowned, and utterly unfit for heaven. Being dead, they yet speak. They tell us, like Lot's wife, that it is a dangerous thing to sin against light, that God hates sin, and that there is a hell.

I feel constrained to speak freely to my readers on the subject of hell. Allow me to use the opportunity that the end of Lot's wife provides. I believe the time has come when it is a positive duty to speak plainly about the reality and eternity of hell. A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. People are beginning to tell us that God is too merciful to punish souls forever, that there is a love of God lower even than hell, and that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly some of them may be, will sooner or later be saved.

We are invited to leave the old paths of apostolic Christianity. We are told that the views of our fathers about hell, the devil, and punishment are obsolete and old-fashioned. We are to embrace what is called a kinder version of theology, treating hell as a pagan fable or a scary story to frighten children and fools. Against such false teaching, I must

protest. As painful, sorrowful, and distressing as the controversy may be, we must not ignore it or refuse to look the subject in the face. I, for one, am resolved to maintain the old position and to assert the reality and eternity of hell.

Believe me, this is no mere speculative question. It is not to be classed with disputes about liturgies and church government. It is not to be ranked with mysterious problems like the meaning of Ezekiel's temple or the symbols of Revelation. It is a question that lies at the very foundation of the whole gospel. The moral attributes of God, His justice, holiness, and purity, are all involved in it. The necessity of personal faith in Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit are at stake. If the old doctrine about hell is overthrown, then the whole system of Christianity is unsettled, unscrewed, unpinned, and thrown into disorder.

Believe me, the question is not one in which we must fall back on the theories and inventions of man. The Scripture has spoken plainly and fully on the subject of hell. It is impossible to deal honestly with the Bible and to avoid the conclusions to which it will lead us on this point. If words mean anything, there is such a place as hell. If texts are to be interpreted fairly, there are those who will be cast into hell. If language has any sense belonging to it, hell is forever. I believe that the person who finds arguments for evading the evidence of the Bible on this question has arrived at a state of mind in which reasoning is useless. For my own part, it seems just as easy to argue that we do not exist as to argue that the Bible does not teach the reality and eternity of hell.

Settle it firmly in your mind that the same Bible that teaches that God in mercy and compassion sent Christ to die for sinners also teaches that God hates sin and must from His very nature punish all who cling to sin and refuse the salvation He has provided. The very same chapter that declares that *God so loved the world* also declares that *the wrath of God abides* on the unbeliever (John 3:16, 36). The very same gospel that is launched into the earth with the blessed tidings, *He that believes and is baptized shall be saved* proclaims in the same breath that *he that believes not shall be condemned* (Mark 16:16).

Settle it firmly in your mind that God has given us proof upon proof in the Bible that He will punish the hardened and unbelieving, and that He can take vengeance on His enemies as well as show mercy

on the penitent. The drowning of the old world by the flood, the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, the overthrow of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, the judgment on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and the utter destruction of the seven nations of Canaan all teach the same fearful truth. They are all given to us as beacons, signs, and warnings that we may not provoke God. They are all meant to lift up the corner of the curtain that hangs over things to come, and to remind us that there is such a thing as the wrath of God. They all tell us plainly that *the wicked shall be put into Sheol* (Psalm 9:17).

Settle it firmly in your mind that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has spoken most plainly about the reality and eternity of hell. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus contains things that should make us tremble, but it does not stand alone. No lips have used so many words to express the awfulness of hell as the lips of Him who spoke as no one had ever before spoken (John 7:46), and who said, *The word which ye have heard is not mine, but of the Father who sent me* (John 14:24).

Hell, hell fire, the damnation of hell, eternal damnation, the resurrection of damnation, everlasting fire, the place of torment, destruction, outer darkness, the worm that never dies, the fire that is not quenched, the place of weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, everlasting punishment – these are the words that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself used. Away with the miserable nonsense that people speak these days, who tell us that the ministers of the gospel should never speak of hell! They only show their own ignorance or their own dishonesty when they talk in such a manner. No one can honestly read the four Gospels and fail to see that he who desires to follow the example of Christ must speak of hell.

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Lastly, settle it in your mind that the comforting ideas that the Scripture gives us of heaven are over for us if we deny the reality or eternity of hell. Is there no future separate abode for those who die while wicked and ungodly? Are all people, after death, to be mingled together in one confused multitude? If so, then heaven will be no heaven at all!

It is utterly impossible for two to dwell happily together *except they be agreed* (Amos 3:3).

Is there to be a time when hell and punishment will be over? Are the wicked, after ages of misery, to be admitted into heaven? If so, then the need of the sanctification of the Spirit is cast aside and despised! I read that people can be sanctified and made ready for heaven on earth; I read nothing of any sanctification in hell. Away with such baseless and unscriptural theories! The eternity of hell is as clearly affirmed in the Bible as the eternity of heaven. Once you say that hell is not eternal, you might as well say that God and heaven are not eternal. The same Greek word that is used in the expression, “everlasting punishment,” is the word that is used by the Lord Jesus in the expression, “life eternal,” and is the same word used by Paul in the expression, “everlasting God” (Matthew 25:46; Romans 16:26).

I know that all this sounds dreadful in many ears. I do not wonder. But the only question we must answer is this: Is it scriptural? Is it true? I maintain firmly that it is so, and I maintain that professing Christians ought to be often reminded that they may be lost and go to hell.

I know that it is easy to deny all plain teaching about hell and to try to make it abhorrent by using unpleasant names. I have often heard of “narrow-minded views,” “old-fashioned notions,” brimstone theology,” and the like. I have often been told that “broad” views are needed in the present day. I want to be as broad as the Bible, no more and no less. I say that he is the narrow-minded theologian who trims down those parts of the Bible that the natural heart dislikes and who rejects any portion of the counsel of God.

God knows that I never speak about hell without pain and sorrow. I would gladly offer the salvation of the gospel to the very chief of sinners. I would willingly say to the vilest and most wicked of mankind on his deathbed, “Repent and believe on Jesus, and you will be saved.” But God forbid that I should ever keep back from mortal man the truth that Scripture reveals a hell as well as a heaven, and that the gospel teaches that people may be lost as well as saved. The watchman who keeps silent when he sees a fire is guilty of gross neglect. The doctor who tells us we are getting well when we are dying is a false friend. The

minister who keeps back hell from his people in his sermons is neither a faithful nor a kind man.

Where is the love in keeping back any part of God's truth? He is the kindest friend who tells me the whole extent of my danger. What is the use of hiding the future from the unrepentant and the ungodly? Surely it is like helping the devil if we do not plainly tell people that the soul that sins will surely die (Ezekiel 18:20). Who knows if the sad carelessness of many baptized people results from their never having been told plainly of hell? Who can tell if thousands might be converted if pastors would urge them more faithfully to flee from the wrath to come?

I fear that many of us are guilty in this matter. There is an unhealthy tenderness among us that is not the tenderness of Christ. We have spoken of mercy, but not of judgment. We have preached many sermons about heaven, but few about hell. We have been carried away by the pathetic fear of being thought improper, offensive, and intolerant. We have forgotten that He who judges us is the Lord, and that the man who teaches the same doctrine that Christ taught cannot be wrong.

If you want to be a healthy, biblical Christian, I urge you to give hell a place in your theology. Establish it in your mind as a fixed principle that God is a God of judgment as well as a God of mercy, and that the same everlasting counsels that laid the foundation of the bliss of heaven have also laid the foundation of the misery of hell. Keep in full view of your mind that all who die unpardoned and unsaved are utterly unfit for the presence of God and must be lost forever. They are not capable of enjoying heaven. They could not be happy there. They must go to their own place, and that place is hell. It is a great thing in these days of unbelief to believe the whole Bible!

If you want to be a healthy, biblical Christian, I urge you to beware of any ministry that does not plainly teach the reality and eternity of hell. Such a ministry may be soothing and pleasant, but it is far more likely to lull you to sleep than to lead you to Christ or build you up in the faith. It is impossible to leave out any part of God's truth without spoiling the whole.

That preaching is sadly defective that dwells exclusively on the mercies of God and the joys of heaven without ever setting forth the terrors of the Lord and the miseries of hell. It may be popular preaching, but

it is not biblical. It might amuse and gratify, but it will not save. Give me the preaching that keeps back nothing that God has revealed. You may call it stern and harsh. You might tell us that to frighten people is not the way to do them good. You are forgetting, though, that the grand object of the gospel is to persuade people to *flee from the wrath to come* (Matthew 3:7), and that it is foolish to expect people to flee unless they are afraid. It would be good for many professing Christians if they were more afraid about their souls than they now are!

If you want to be a healthy, biblical Christian, consider often what your own end will be. Will it be happiness or will it be misery? Will it be the death of the righteous or will it be a death without hope, like that of Lot's wife? You cannot live forever; there will be an end one day. One day you will hear your last sermon and pray your last prayer. One day you will read your last chapter in the Bible. All your intending, wishing, hoping, meaning, resolving, doubting, and hesitating will then be over. You will have to leave this world and stand before a holy God. Oh, that you would be wise! Oh, that you would consider your latter end!

You cannot ignore this forever; the time will come when you must be serious. You cannot put off your soul's concerns forever; the day will come when you must have a reckoning with God. You cannot always be singing, dancing, eating, drinking, dressing, reading, laughing, joking, scheming, planning, and making money. The summer insects cannot always enjoy the sunshine; the cold, chilly evening will come at last and stop their fun forever. So it will be with you. You might put off God for now and refuse the counsel of God's people, but the cool of the day is on the way, when God will come down to speak with you (Genesis 3:8). What will your end be? Will it be a hopeless one, like that of Lot's wife?

I beg you, by the mercies of God, to look this question directly in the face. I plead with you not to impede your conscience by vague hopes of God's mercy while your heart clings to the world. I urge you not to drown your conviction by childish stories about God's love while your daily ways and habits plainly show that the love of the Father is not in you (1 John 2:15).

There is mercy in God, like a river – but it is for the repentant believer in Christ Jesus. There is a love in God toward sinners that is unspeakable and unsearchable – but it is for those who hear Christ's voice and

follow Him (John 10:27). Seek to have a claim in that love. Break off every known sin. Come out boldly from the world. Cry mightily to God in prayer. Cast yourself wholly and unreservedly on the Lord Jesus for time and eternity. Lay aside every weight. Cling to nothing, however dear, that interferes with your soul's salvation. Give up everything, however precious, that comes between you and heaven.

This old shipwrecked world is sinking fast beneath your feet. The one thing needful is to have a place in the life-boat and get safely to shore. *Give all the more diligence to make your calling and election sure* (2 Peter 1:10). Whatever happens to your house and property, see that you are sure of heaven. It is a million times better to be laughed at and thought overzealous in this world than to go down to hell from the midst of the congregation and end up like Lot's wife!

It is a million times better to be laughed at and thought overzealous in this world than to go down to hell.

Let me now offer a few questions to stamp the subject on your conscience. You have seen the history of Lot's wife – her privileges, her sin, and her end. You have been told of the uselessness of these privileges without the gift of the Holy Spirit. You have been told of the danger of worldliness and the reality of hell. Allow me to offer a few direct appeals to your own heart. In a day of much light, knowledge, and Christian profession, I want to set up a beacon to preserve souls from shipwreck. I would gladly moor a buoy in the channel of all spiritual travelers and paint upon it, *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you careless about the second coming of Christ? Sadly, many are! They live like the people of Sodom and the people of Noah's day. They eat, drink, plant, build, marry and are given in marriage, and behave as if Christ was never going to return. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you lukewarm in your heart and cold in your Christianity? Sadly, many are! They try to serve two masters. They strive to be friends both with God and the world. They strive to be sort of spiritually neutral, neither one thing nor the other – not quite a thorough-going Christian, but not quite people of the world. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you wavering between two ways of life and inclined to go back to the world? Sadly, many are! They are afraid of the cross. They secretly dislike the trouble and reproach of wholehearted Christianity. They are weary of the wilderness and the manna, and they would gladly return to Egypt if they could. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you secretly cherishing some troubling sin? Sadly, many are! They go far in their profession of Christianity. They do many things that are right and they are very much like the people of God, but there is always some special sinful habit that they cannot tear from their heart. Hidden worldliness, covetousness, or lust sticks to them like their skin. They are willing to see all their idols broken except this one. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you messing around with little sins? Sadly, many are! They believe the great essential doctrines of the gospel. They keep clear of all obvious depravity or any obvious public disobedience of God's law, but they are painfully careless about little inconsistencies and are painfully ready to make excuses for them. "It is only a little anger, or a little levity, or a little thoughtlessness, or a little carelessness," they tell us. "God does not care about such little matters. None of us are perfect. God does not expect us to give up these little things." If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you resting in religious privileges? Sadly, many do! They enjoy the opportunity of hearing the gospel regularly preached and of attending many ordinances and means of grace, and they are content in this. They seem to be *rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing* (Revelation 3:17), but they do not have faith, grace, or spiritual-mindedness, and they are not prepared for heaven. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you trusting in your religious and biblical knowledge? Sadly, many do! They are not ignorant about the Bible, as many other people are. They know the difference between true doctrine and false. They can dispute, reason, argue, and quote some Bible verses, but they are not converted, and they remain dead in trespasses and sins. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you making a profession of Christianity, yet clinging to

the world? Sadly, many do! They want others to consider them to be Christians. They like the credit of being serious, steady, proper, regular, church-going people, yet all the while their clothing, tastes, friends, and entertainment plainly show that they are of the world. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Are you trusting that you will have a deathbed repentance? Sadly, many do! They know they are not what they ought to be. They are not yet born again and are not prepared to die, but they convince themselves that when their last illness comes, they will have time to repent, lay hold of Christ, and go out of the world pardoned, sanctified, and ready for heaven. They forget that people often die very suddenly, and that they generally die as they live. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

Do you belong to an evangelical congregation? Many do, and sadly, they go no further! They hear the truth Sunday after Sunday and remain as hard as a rock. Sermon after sermon sounds in their ears. Month after month they are invited to repent, to believe, to come to Christ, and to be saved. Year after year passes away, and they are not changed. They keep their seat under the teaching of their favorite pastor, and they also keep their favorite sins. If you are such a person, I say to you this day, take care, and *Remember Lot's wife*.

May these solemn words of our Lord Jesus Christ be deeply engraved on all our hearts! May they awaken us when we feel tired, revive us when we feel dead, sharpen us when we feel dull, and warm us when we feel cold! May they prove to be a spur to speed us on when we are falling behind, and a bridle to get us back on track when we are turning aside! May they be a shield to defend us when Satan casts a subtle temptation at our heart, and a sword to fight with when he says boldly, "Give up Christ, come back to the world, and follow me!" Oh, may we say, in such hours of trial, "Soul, remember your Savior's warning! Soul, soul, have you forgotten His words? Soul, soul, *Remember Lot's wife!*"

Chapter 11

Christ's Greatest Trophy

And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou art the Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.
(Luke 23:39-43)

There are few passages in the New Testament that are more familiar to our ears than the verses above. They contain the well-known story of the penitent thief.

It is right and good that these verses should be well known. They have comforted many troubled minds. They have brought peace to many uneasy consciences. They have been a healing ointment to many wounded hearts. They have been a medicine to many sin-sick souls. They have smoothed down more than a few dying pillows. Wherever the gospel of Christ is preached, they will always be honored, loved, and had in remembrance.

I want to say something about these verses. I will try to unfold the main lessons that they are meant to teach. I cannot see the specific state of mind of anyone who is reading this, but I can see truths in this

passage that no one can ever know too well. This is the greatest trophy that Christ ever won.

First of all, we are meant to learn from these verses of Christ's power and willingness to save sinners.

This is the main doctrine to be gathered from the history of the penitent thief. It teaches us that which ought to be music in the ears of all who hear it – that Jesus Christ is *mighty to save* (Isaiah 63:1).

Could any case look more hopeless and desperate than that of this penitent thief? He was a wicked man, a criminal, a thief – if not a murderer. We know this, for only this type of person was crucified. He was suffering a just punishment for breaking the laws. As he had lived in wickedness, so he seemed determined to die in wickedness, for when he was first crucified, he spoke against our Lord.

The penitent thief was a dying man. He hung there, nailed to a cross from which he was never to come down alive. He no longer had power to stir hand or foot. His hours were numbered. The grave was ready for him. There was but a step between him and death (1 Samuel 20:3).

If ever there was a soul hovering on the brink of hell, it was the soul of this thief. If ever there was a case that seemed lost, gone, and past recovery, it was his. If ever there was a child of Adam whom the devil made sure of as his own, it was this man.

But now see what happened. He ceased to mock and blaspheme, as he had done at first. He began to speak in another manner altogether. He turned to our blessed Lord in prayer. He asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. He asked that his soul might be cared for, his sins pardoned, and that he would be thought of in another world. Truly this was a wonderful change!

Then notice what kind of answer he received. Some would have said he was too wicked to be saved, but it was not so. Some would have thought that it was too late for him, that the door was shut and there was no room for mercy – but it proved not to be too late at all. The Lord Jesus gave him an immediate answer. He spoke kindly to him and assured him that he would be with Him that day in paradise. Jesus pardoned him completely, cleansed him thoroughly from his sins, received him

graciously, justified him freely, raised him from the gates of hell, and gave him a title to glory. Of all the multitude of saved souls, none ever received so glorious an assurance of his own salvation as this penitent thief did. Go over the whole list, from Genesis to Revelation, and you will find none who had such words spoken to him as these: *Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

I do not believe that the Lord Jesus ever gave such a complete proof of His power and will to save as He did upon this occasion. In the day when He seemed most weak, He showed that He was a strong deliverer. In the hour when His body was racked with pain, He showed that He could feel tenderly for others. At the time when He Himself was dying, He granted eternal life to a sinner.

Do not I have a right to say that Christ is able *to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him* (Hebrews 7:25)? Behold the proof of it. If ever a sinner was too far gone to be saved, it was this thief. Yet he was plucked as a brand from the fire (Zechariah 3:2).

Have I not a right to say that Christ will receive any poor sinner who comes to Him with the prayer of faith, and that He will not cast anyone out who comes to Him? Behold the proof of it. If ever there was one who seemed too bad to be received, this was the man. Yet the door of mercy was wide open – even for him.

Have I not a right to say that by grace you may be saved through faith, not of works (Ephesians 2:8), and to fear not, but only believe (Luke 8:50)? Behold the proof of it. This thief was never baptized. He belonged to no visible church. He never received the Lord's Supper. He never did any work for Christ. He never gave money to Christ's cause. But he had faith, and so he was saved.

Do I not have a right to say that the newest faith will save a person's soul, if it is true faith? Behold the proof of it. This man's faith was only one day old, but it led him to Christ and preserved him from hell.

Why then should any man or woman despair when we have such a passage as this in the Bible? Jesus is the Physician who can cure hopeless cases. He can make dead souls alive. He can call the things that are not as though they were.

No man or woman should ever despair! Jesus is still the same now as He was two thousand years ago. The keys of death and hell are

in His hand (Revelation 1:18). When He opens it, no one can shut it (Revelation 3:7-8).

It does not matter that your sins are more numerous than the hairs of your head. It is not a problem that your evil habits have grown with your growth and strengthened with your strength. You will not be rejected because until now you have hated good and loved evil all the days of your life. These things are sad indeed, but there is hope, even for you. Christ can heal you. Christ can raise you from your low condition. Heaven is not shut against you. Christ is able to admit you – if you will humbly commit your soul into His hands.

Are your sins forgiven? If not, I set before you this day a full and free salvation. I invite you to follow the steps of the penitent thief: come to Christ and live. Jesus is very compassionate and of tender mercy. He can do everything that your soul requires. *Then come, shall the LORD say, and we shall be even; if your sins were as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; if they were red like crimson, they shall become as wool* (Isaiah 1:18). Why should you not be saved as well as anyone else? Come unto Christ and live.

Are you a true believer? If you are, you ought to glory in Christ. Do not glory in your own faith, feelings, knowledge, prayers, changes, or diligence. Glory in nothing but Christ. The best of us know only a little of that merciful and mighty Savior. We do not exalt Him and glory in Him enough. Let us pray that we may see more of the fullness that there is in Him.

Do you ever try to do good to others? If you do, remember to tell them about Christ. Tell the young, the poor, the elderly, the uneducated, the sick, the dying – tell them all about Christ. Tell them of His power and tell them of His love. Tell them what He did and tell them of His emotions. Tell them what He has done for the chief of sinners and tell them what He is willing to do to the last day of time. Tell it to them over and over again. Never get tired of speaking of Christ. Say to them broadly and fully, freely and unconditionally, unreservedly and undoubtingly, “Come unto Christ, as the penitent thief did; come unto Christ, and you will be saved.”

The second lesson we are meant to learn from
this passage is that while some are saved in
the very hour of death, others are not.

This is a truth that should never be passed over, and I dare not leave it unnoticed. It is a truth that stands out plainly in the sad end of the other criminal, and it is too often forgotten. People forget that there were two thieves crucified with Jesus.

What became of the other thief? Why did he not turn from his sin and call upon the Lord? Why did he remain hardened and unrepentant? Why was he not saved? It is useless to try to answer such questions. Let us be content to take the facts as we find them and see what they are meant to teach us.

We have no right whatever to say that this thief was a worse man than his companion. There is nothing to prove that. Both plainly were wicked men. Both were receiving the due punishment for their wrong deeds. Both hung by the side of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both men heard Him pray for His murderers, and both saw Him suffer patiently. But while one repented, the other remained hardened. While one man began to pray, the other continued mocking. While one was converted in his last hours, the other died a bad man, just as he had lived. While one was taken to paradise, the other went to his own place – the place of the devil and his angels.

A deathbed is not
often a saving time.

These things were written for our warning. There is warning as well as comfort in these verses, and it is a very solemn warning. These verses tell me plainly that although some people may repent and be converted on their deathbeds, it does not mean that all will. A deathbed is not often a saving time.

These verses tell me plainly that two people may have the same opportunities of getting good for their souls. They may be placed in the same position and may see and hear the same things, yet only one of the two will take advantage of them, repent, believe, and be saved.

These verses tell me, above all, that repentance and faith are the gifts of God and are not in man's own power. If anyone flatters himself that he can repent in his own time, choose his own season, seek the Lord

when he pleases, and like the penitent thief, be saved at the very end of his life, he may find out that he is greatly deceived.

It is good and profitable to keep this in mind. There is an immense amount of delusion in the world on this very subject. I see many people allowing life to slip away, quite unprepared to die. I see many who know that they ought to repent, yet who always put off their own repentance. I believe one big reason is that most people think that they can turn to God whenever they like! They take the parable of the laborer in the vineyard, which speaks of the eleventh hour, and use it as it was never meant to be used (Matthew 20). They dwell on the pleasant part of the verses I am now considering, and forget the rest. They talk of the thief who went to paradise and was saved, and they forget the one who died as he had lived – and was lost. I ask everyone of common sense who reads this to take heed that you do not fall into this mistake.

Look at the history of people in the Bible and see how often these notions I have been speaking of are contradicted. Notice well how many proofs there are that two people can have the same light offered to them, but only one might use it. No one has a right to take liberties with God's mercy and presume that he will be able to repent whenever he likes.

Look at Saul and David. They lived at about the same time. They rose from the same rank in life. They were called to the same position in the world. They enjoyed the ministry of the same prophet, Samuel. They even reigned the same number of years! Yet one was saved, and the other lost.

Look at Sergius Paulus and Gallio. They were both Roman governors. They were both wise and prudent men in their generation. They both heard the apostle Paul preach! But one believed and was baptized, while the other man *cared for none of those things* (Acts 18:17).

Look at the world around you. See what is going on continually under your eyes. Two sisters will often attend the same church, listen to the same truths, and hear the same sermons, yet only one will be converted unto God, while the other one remains totally unmoved. Two friends often read the same Christian book. One is so moved by it that he gives up all for Christ, while the other sees nothing at all in it and continues the same as before. Hundreds have read Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* without profit, while with William

Wilberforce it was one of the beginnings of his spiritual life. Thousands have read Wilberforce's *Practical View of Christianity* and laid it down again unchanged, but Legh Richmond read it and became a new man in Christ.³⁷ No one has any right to say, "Salvation is in my own power."

I do not pretend to explain these things. I only put them before you as facts, and I ask you to consider them well. You must not misunderstand me. I do not want to discourage you. I say these things in all affection to warn you of danger. I do not say them to keep you back from heaven. I say them rather to urge you on and to bring you to Christ while He can be found.

Do not abuse God's
mercy and compassion.

I want you to beware of presumption. Do not abuse God's mercy and compassion. Do not continue in sin and think you can repent, believe, and be saved whenever you like, when you please, when you want, and when you choose. I would always set before you an open door. I would always say, "While there is life, there is hope." But if you would be wise, do not delay or put off anything that concerns your soul.

I want you to beware of letting good thoughts and godly convictions slip away, if you have them. Cherish them and nourish them, or you may lose them forever. Make the most of them, or they may take to themselves wings and fly away. Are you considering praying? Put it in practice at once. Are you thinking about beginning to really serve Christ? Set about it at once. Are you enjoying any spiritual light? See that you live up to your light. Do not play around with opportunities, or the day will come when you will want to use them but will not be able to do so. Linger not, or you may become wise too late.

You might say that it is never too late to repent. That is right in part, but late repentance is seldom true. Moreover, I say that you cannot be certain that if you put off repenting now, you will repent at all later.

You may say, "Why should I be afraid? The penitent thief was saved."

I answer, "That is true, but look again at the passage that tells you that the other thief was lost."

37 Legh Richmond (1772-1827) was an author and a minister in the Church of England. He wrote many pamphlets and narratives of conversion stories, the most notable of which is *The Dairyman's Daughter*.

The third lesson we are meant to learn from these verses is that the Spirit always leads saved souls in one way.

This is a point that deserves particular attention, but is often overlooked. People look at the broad fact that the penitent thief was saved when he was dying, and they look no further. They do not consider the evidences this thief left behind him. They do not observe the abundant proof he gave of the work of the Spirit in his heart. I want to look at these proofs more closely. I want to show you that the Spirit always works in one way, and that whether He converts someone in an hour, as He did with the penitent thief, or whether He converts someone slowly over a long period of time, as He does with others – the steps by which He leads souls to heaven are always the same.

Let me make it clear that I want to put you on your guard. I want you to shake off the common idea that there is some easy, royal road to heaven from a deathbed. I want you to thoroughly understand that every saved soul goes through the same experience, and that the leading principles of the penitent thief's newfound religion were the same as those of the oldest saint who ever lived.

See then, for one thing, how strong the faith of this man was. He called Jesus "Lord." He declared his belief that He would have a kingdom. He believed that Jesus was able to give him eternal life and glory, and in this belief he prayed to Him. He maintained His innocence of all the charges brought against Him. *This man*, he said, *has done nothing amiss*. Others, too, might have thought that the Lord was innocent, but none said so openly except this poor dying man.

When did all this happen? It happened when the whole nation had denied Christ and the people were shouting, "Crucify Him, crucify Him: *We have no king but Caesar*" (John 19:15). This happened when the chief priests and Pharisees had condemned Him and declared Him guilty of death. This happened when even His own disciples had forsaken Him and fled, and when He was hanging, faint, bleeding, and dying on the cross, numbered with transgressors, and considered accursed. This was the hour when the thief believed in Christ and prayed to Him! Surely such faith had not been seen since the world began.

The disciples had seen mighty signs and miracles. They had seen the

dead raised with a word, lepers healed with a touch, the blind receive sight, the mute made to speak, and the lame made to walk. They had seen thousands fed with a few loaves and fishes. They had seen their Master walking on the water as on dry land. They had all heard Him speak as no man ever spoke, and they heard Him hold out promises of good things yet to come. Some of them had seen a foretaste of His glory in the Mount of Transfiguration. Their faith was undoubtedly the gift of God, but still they had much to help it.

The dying thief saw none of the things I have mentioned. He only saw our Lord in agony, in weakness, in suffering, and in pain. He saw Him undergoing a dishonorable punishment – deserted, mocked, despised, and blasphemed. He saw Him rejected by all the great, wise, and noble of His own people. The thief saw His strength *dried up like a potsherd*, His life drawing *near unto Sheol* (Psalm 22:15; 88:3). He saw no scepter, no royal crown, no outward dominion, no glory, no majesty, no power, and no signs of might, yet the dying thief believed and looked forward to Christ's kingdom.

Would you like to know if you have the Spirit of God? Then note the question I put to you this day: Where is your faith in Christ?

See, for another thing, what a right sense of sin the thief had. He said to his companion, *We receive the due reward of our deeds*. He acknowledged his own ungodliness and the justice of his punishment. He made no attempt to justify himself or excuse his wickedness. He spoke like a man humbled and self-abased by the remembrance of past iniquities. This is what all God's children feel. They are ready to admit that they are poor, hell-deserving sinners. They can say with their hearts as well as with their lips, "We have left undone the things that we ought to have done, and we have done those things that we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us."

Do you want to know if you have the Spirit of God? Then consider my question: Do you feel your sins?

See, for another thing, what brotherly love the thief showed to his companion. He tried to stop his mocking and blaspheming and bring him to a better mind. *Dost not thou fear God*, he asked, *seeing thou art in the same condemnation?* There is no more certain mark of grace than this. Grace shakes a man out of his selfishness and makes him

feel for the souls of others. When the Samaritan woman was converted, she left her water pot and ran to the city, saying, *Come, see a man who told me all that I have done; is perchance this the Christ?* (John 4:28-29). After Saul was converted, he immediately went to the synagogue at Damascus and testified to his brethren of Israel that Christ was *the Son of God* (Acts 9:20).

Would you like to know if you have the Spirit of God? Then where is your compassion and love to souls?

We see in the penitent thief a finished work of the Holy Spirit. Every part of the believer's character may be traced in him. As short as his life was after conversion, he found time to leave abundant evidence that he was a child of God. His faith, his prayer, his humility, and his brotherly love are unmistakable witnesses of the reality of his repentance. He was not a penitent in name only, but in deed and in truth.

Let no one therefore think that because the penitent thief was saved, that people can be saved without leaving any evidence of the Spirit's work. Let such a person consider well what evidences this man left behind, and take care to do the same.

It is sad to hear what people sometimes say about what they call deathbed experiences. It is quite fearful to observe how little it takes to satisfy some people, and how easily they can convince themselves that their friends have gone to heaven. They will tell you, after their relative is dead and gone, that he made such a beautiful prayer one day, or that he talked so well, or that he was so sorry for his old ways and intended to live so differently if he got better, or that he desired nothing in this world, or that he liked people to read the Bible to him and pray with him, etc. And because they have this to go upon, they seem to have a comfortable hope that he is saved! Christ may never have been named and the way of salvation may never have been in the least mentioned, but that does not matter to them. There was a little talk of religion, and so they are content!

I have no desire to hurt the feelings of anyone who reads this, but I must and will speak plainly upon this subject. Once and for all, let me say that as a general rule, nothing is so unsatisfactory as deathbed experiences. The things that people say and the feelings they express when sick and frightened are little to be depended on.

Often, too often, they are the result of fear, and they do not spring from the ground of the heart. Often, too often, they are things said mindlessly, caught from the lips of ministers and anxious friends, but evidently not felt. Nothing can prove all this more clearly than the well-known fact that the great majority of people who make promises of amending their lives when on a sick bed and for the first time talk about following Jesus, go back to sin and the world if they recover.

When a man has lived a life of thoughtlessness and foolishness, I want something more than a few fair words and good wishes to satisfy me about his soul when he comes to his deathbed. It is not enough for me that he will let me read the Bible to him and pray by his bedside. There needs to be more than him saying that he has not thought as much about Christ as he should have, and that if he gets better, he will change. All this does not satisfy me. It does not put me at ease about the state of his soul. It is very good as far as it goes, but it is not conversion. It is very good in its own way, but it is not faith in Christ.

What kind of evidence
do you intend to
leave behind as to the
state of your soul?

Until I see conversion and faith in Christ, I cannot and dare not feel satisfied. Others may feel satisfied if they please, and after their friend's death say that they hope he is gone to heaven. For my part, though, I would rather hold my tongue and say nothing. I would be content with the smallest measure of repentance and faith in a dying man, even if it is no bigger than a grain of mustard seed; but to be content with anything less than repentance and faith seems to me next to unbelief.

What kind of evidence do you intend to leave behind as to the state of your soul? Take your example from the penitent thief, and you will do well.

When we have carried you to your narrow bed, let us not have to hunt up random words and scraps of religion in order to make it seem that you were a true believer. Let us not have to say in a hesitating way one to another, "I hope that he is happy. He talked so nicely one day. He seemed so pleased with a chapter in the Bible on another occasion. He liked such a person, who is a good man." Let us be able to speak decidedly as to your condition. Let us have some solid proof of your

repentance, your faith, and your holiness so that no one will be able to question your state for a moment.

Depend on it, that without this, those you leave behind can feel no solid comfort about your soul. We might use a form of religion at your burial and express kind hopes. We might meet you at the churchyard gate and say, *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord* (Revelation 14:13), but this will not change your condition! If you die without conversion to God, without repentance and without faith, your funeral will only be the funeral of a lost soul. It would have been better for you if you had never been born.

The next thing that we are meant to learn from these verses is that believers in Christ are with the Lord after they die. You can see this from our Lord's own words to the penitent thief: *Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*. There is also an expression very much like that in the epistle to the Philippians, where Paul says he has a desire *to depart and to be with Christ* (Philippians 1:23).

I will not say much on this subject. I simply want to lay it before you for your own private meditation. To my own mind, it is very full of comfort and peace. Believers after death are *with Christ*. That answers many difficult questions that might otherwise puzzle man's busy, restless mind. The dwelling place of dead saints – their joys, their feelings, their happiness – all seem to be met by this simple expression: they are *with Christ*.

I cannot enter into full explanations about the separate state of departed believers. It is a high and deep subject, one that man's mind can neither grasp nor fathom. I know their happiness falls short of what it will be when their bodies are raised again in the resurrection at the last day and Jesus returns to earth. I also know that they enjoy a blessed rest – a rest from labor, sorrow, pain, and sin. It does not mean, though, that because I cannot explain these things that I am not convinced that the departed in Christ are far happier than they ever were on earth. I see their happiness in this very passage, that they are with Christ, and when I see that, I see enough.

If the sheep are with the Shepherd, if the members are with the Head, if the children of Christ's family are with Him who loved them

and carried them all the days of their pilgrimage on earth, all must be well and all must be right.

I cannot describe what kind of place paradise is because I cannot understand the condition of a soul separate from the body. I ask no clearer view of paradise than this – that Christ is there. All other things in the picture that our imagination draws of the state between death and resurrection are nothing in comparison to this. How He is there and in what way He is there, I do not know. Let me only see Christ in paradise when my eyes close in death, and that is enough for me. Well does the Psalmist say, *In thy presence is fullness of joy* (Psalm 16:11). The mother of a dying girl tried to comfort her by describing what paradise would be like. She said to the child, “There you will have no pain and no sickness. You will see your brothers and sisters there who have gone before you, and you will be always happy.”

“Ah, mother,” was the girl’s right reply, “but there is one thing better than everything else, and that is that Christ will be there!”

It might be that you do not think much about your soul. You might know little of Christ as your Savior and have never tasted by experience that He is precious, yet maybe you hope to go to paradise when you die. Surely this passage is one that should make you think. Paradise is a place where Christ is. Then can it be a place that you would enjoy?

It might be that you are a believer, yet you tremble at the thought of the grave. It seems cold and dreary. You feel as if everything ahead of you is dark and gloomy and comfortless. Fear not, but be encouraged by this text. You are going to paradise, and Christ will be there.

The last thing we are meant to learn from these verses is that the eternal portion of every person’s soul is close by. *Today*, says our Lord to the penitent thief. *Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.* He names no distant period. He does not talk of entering into a state of happiness as a thing far off in the future. He speaks of today – the very day in which the thief was hanging on the cross.

How near that seems! How awfully near that word brings our everlasting dwelling place! Happiness or misery, sorrow or joy, the presence of Christ or the company of devils – all are close to us. *There is but a step*, says David, *between me and death* (1 Samuel 20:3). There is but a step, we may say, between ourselves and either paradise or hell.

None of us realize this as we should. It is high time to shake off the abstract state of mind in which we live on this matter. We are apt to talk and think, even about believers, as if death was a long journey – as if the dying saint had embarked on a long voyage. It is all wrong, very wrong! Their harbor and their home are close by, and they are nearing the destination.

Some of us know by bitter experience what a long and weary time it is between the death of those we love and the hour when we bury them out of our sight. Such weeks are the slowest, saddest, heaviest weeks in all our lives. But blessed be God, the souls of departed saints are free from the very moment their last breath is drawn. While we are weeping, the coffin is being prepared, the mourning has begun, and the last painful arrangements are being made, the spirits of our beloved ones are at rest. They are freed forever from the burden of the flesh. *There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary are at rest* (Job 3:17).

The very moment that believers die, they are in paradise. Their battle is fought. Their strife is over. They have passed through that gloomy valley we must one day tread. They have gone over that dark river we must one day cross. They have drunk that last bitter cup that sin has mingled for us. They have reached that place where sorrow and sighing are no more. Surely we should not wish them back again! We should not weep for them, but for ourselves (Luke 23:28).

We are still in the battle, but they are at peace. We are laboring, but they are at rest. We are watching, but they are sleeping. We are wearing our spiritual armor, but they have forever put it off. We are still at sea, but they are safely in harbor. We have tears, but they have joy. We are strangers and pilgrims, but they are at home. Better are the dead in Christ than the living! The very hour the poor saint dies, he is at once higher and happier than the highest upon earth.³⁸

I am afraid that there is a vast amount of delusion on this point. I fear that many, even those who are not Roman Catholics and profess

38 “We give Thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world.” — *Church of England Burial Service*
“I have some of the best news to impart. One beloved by you has accomplished her warfare; she has received an answer to her prayers, and everlasting joy rests upon her head. My dear wife, the source of my best earthly comfort for twenty years, departed on Tuesday.” — Venn’s *Letter to Stillingfleet*, announcing the death of his wife.

not to believe in purgatory, have some strange ideas in their minds about the immediate consequences of death.

I fear that many have a sort of vague notion that there is some interval or space of time between death and their eternal state. They think they will go through a kind of purifying change, and that even though they die unfit for heaven, they will still be found ready for it after all!

This is an absolute mistake. There is no change after death. There is no conversion in the grave. There is no new heart given after the last breath is drawn. The day we go from this world, we begin an eternal condition. From that day forward there is no spiritual alteration and no spiritual change. As we die, so we will receive our portion after death. As the tree falls, so it must lie (Ecclesiastes 11:3).

There is no change
after death.

If you are unconverted, this ought to make you think. Do you know you are close to hell? You might die this very day, and if you died out of Christ, you would open your eyes at once in hell and in torment.

If you are a true Christian, you are far nearer heaven than you think. If the Lord would take you this very day, you would find yourself in paradise. The good land of promise is near to you. The eyes that you closed in weakness and pain would open at once on a glorious rest, such as my tongue cannot describe.

Let me now say a few words in conclusion.

This book might fall into the hands of some humble-hearted and contrite sinner. Are you that person? Then here is encouragement for you. See what the penitent thief did, and do likewise. See how he prayed. See how he called on the Lord Jesus Christ. See what an answer of peace he obtained. Brother or sister, why should not you do the same? Why should you not also be saved?

This book might fall into the hands of some proud and presumptuous person of the world. Are you that person? Then take warning. See how the unrepentant thief died as he had lived, and beware that you do not come to a similar end. Oh, erring brother or sister, do not be too confident, lest you die in your sins! *Seek the LORD while he may be found* (Isaiah 55:6). *Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?* (Ezekiel 33:11).

This book might fall into the hands of some professing believer in

Christ. Are you such a person? Then take the penitent thief's religion as a measure by which to prove your own. See that you know something of true repentance and saving faith, of real humility and fervent love. Brother or sister, do not be satisfied with the world's standard of Christianity. Be of one mind with the penitent thief, and you will be wise.

This book might fall into the hands of someone who is mourning over departed believers. Are you one of these people? Then take comfort from this Scripture. See how your beloved ones are in the best of hands. They cannot be better off. They never were so well in their lives as they are now. They are with Jesus, whom their souls loved on earth. Oh, cease from your selfish mourning! Rejoice that they are freed from trouble and have entered into rest.

This book might fall into the hands of some elderly servant of Christ. Are you such a person? Then see from these verses how near you are to home. Your salvation is nearer than when you first believed. A few more days of labor and sorrow, and the King of Kings will send for you. Your warfare will be over in a moment, and all will be peace.

Chapter 12

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 awoke him and said unto him, Master, dost thou not care that we perish? And as he arose, he 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 good if professing Christians studied the four Gospels more than they do. There is no doubt that all Scripture is profitable. It is not wise to exalt one part of the Bible at the expense of another, but I think it would be good for some who are very familiar with the Epistles to know a little more about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Why do I say this? I say this because I want professing Christians to know more about Christ. It is good to be acquainted with all the doctrines and principles of Christianity, but it is better to be acquainted with Christ Himself. It is good to be familiar with faith, grace, 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 who desires to be conformed to Christ's image and become a Christlike man must be constantly studying Christ Himself.

The Gospels were written to make us acquainted with Christ. The Holy Spirit has told us the story of His life and death, of His sayings and His action, four different times. Four different inspired hands have drawn the picture of the Savior. His ways, His manners, His feelings, His wisdom, His grace, His patience, His love, and His power are graciously unfolded to us by four different witnesses. Should not the sheep be familiar with the Shepherd? Should not the patient be familiar with the Physician? Should not the bride be familiar with the Bridegroom? Should not the sinner be familiar with the Savior? Undoubtedly, it ought to be so. The Gospels were written to make us familiar with Christ, and therefore I want all people to study the Gospels.

On whom must we build our souls if we want to be accepted by God? We must build on the rock, Christ. From whom must we draw that grace of the Spirit that 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 all eternity? With the King of Kings, Christ. Surely we cannot know this Christ too well! Surely there is not a word, a deed, a day, a step, or a thought in the record of His life that should not be precious to us. We should labor 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 can learn from the verses of Scripture that stand at the beginning of this chapter. You see Jesus there 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. Jesus arises and rebukes the wind and the waves, and at once there is calm. He mildly reproves the faithless fears of His companions, and it is all over. That is the picture. It is one full of deep instruction. Come now and let us examine what we are meant to learn.

Let us learn, first of all, that following Christ will not prevent us from having earthly sorrows and troubles. The chosen disciples of the Lord Jesus are in great anxiety here. The faithful little flock that

believed when priests, scribes, and Pharisees were all alike unbelieving, is allowed by the Shepherd to be quite worried. 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.

They probably had not considered all this. They might have expected that serving Christ would lift them above the reach of earthly trials. Maybe they thought that He who could raise the dead, heal the sick, feed multitudes with a few loaves, and cast out devils with a word would never allow His servants to suffer upon earth. Perhaps they thought that 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 very mistaken. The Lord Jesus taught them that someone might be one of His chosen servants, yet still have to go through many anxieties and endure many pains.

It is good to understand this clearly. It is good to understand that serving Christ never did secure anyone from all the problems of the flesh, and it never will. If you are a believer, you must count on having your share of sickness and pain, of sorrow and tears, of losses and crosses, of deaths and bereavements, of partings and separations, and of vexations and disappointments as long as you are in the body. Jesus never says that you will get to heaven without these. He has promised that all who come to Him will have all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), but He has never said that He will make them prosperous, rich, or healthy, or that death and sorrow will never come to their family.

It is good to understand that serving Christ never did secure anyone from all the problems of the flesh, and it never will.

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 offer pardon, peace, grace, and glory to any son or daughter of Adam, but I dare not offer that person worldly prosperity as a part of the gospel. I dare not offer him long life, an increased income, and freedom from pain. I dare not promise the person who takes up the cross and follows Christ that he will never meet with a storm as He follows Jesus.

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

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

How would you know who the true Christians are if following Christ was the way to be free from trouble? How would we discern the wheat from the chaff if it were not for the winnowing of trial? How would we know whether people served Christ for His own sake or from selfish motives if serving Him always brought health and wealth? The winds of winter soon show us which 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 outward form.

How would the great work of sanctification go on in a person if he had no trial? Trouble is often the only fire that will burn away the dross that clings to our hearts. Trouble is the pruning knife that the great Husbandman uses 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, rain, and storm.

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

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

Let us learn, in the second place, that the Lord Jesus Christ is really and truly man. There are words used in these verses that, like

many other passages in the 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 back part of the ship, *asleep on a pillow*. He was weary, and who can be surprised at this after reading the account given in the fourth chapter of Mark? After laboring all day to do good to souls, after preaching in the open air to vast multitudes, Jesus was tired. Surely if *the sleep of the servant is sweet* (Ecclesiastes 5:12), much sweeter must have been the sleep of our blessed Lord!

Let us settle this great truth in our minds that Jesus Christ was truly and indeed man. He was equal to the Father in all things, and He was the eternal God; but He was also man and took part in flesh and blood. He was made like unto us in all things (Hebrews 2:17), with sin being the only exception (Hebrews 4:15). 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, thirsty, tired, and weary. Like us, He ate, drank, rested, and slept. Like us, He sorrowed, wept, and had emotion.

It is all very wonderful, but it is true. He who made the heavens traveled around as a poor, weary man on earth! He who ruled over principalities and powers in heavenly places took upon Himself a frail body like our own. He who could have dwelt forever in the glory that He had with the Father, amid the praises of multitudes 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, compassion, and love.

I find a deep mine of comfort in the 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 is a feeling High Priest. He is not only a powerful Savior, but He is a sympathetic Savior. He is not only the Son of God, mighty to save, but He is the Son of man, able to feel.

Who does not know that compassion and empathy are some of the sweetest things left to us in this sinful world? It is one of the bright seasons in our dark journey here below when we can find someone who enters into our troubles and goes along with us in our concerns and fears – who can weep when we weep and rejoice when we rejoice.

Empathy is far better than money, and far rarer, too. Thousands of people can give who do not know what it is to feel. Empathy 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 remain silent, shrink, and withdraw into ourselves when it is given in the day of trouble. 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, always has ready a sympathetic 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 He knows the springs by which that heart is most readily moved. He has wisely provided that the Savior of the gospel should be feeling as well as mighty. God has given us a Savior who not only has strong hands to pluck us as brands from the burning, but who has a sympathetic heart on which the laboring and heavy laden may find rest.

I see a marvelous proof of love and wisdom in the union of two natures in Christ's person. It was marvelous love in our Savior to condescend to go through weakness and humiliation for our sakes, ungodly rebels as we are. It was marvelous wisdom to make Himself in this way to be the very Friend of friends, who could not only save man, but who could meet him on his own ground.

I need a Savior who is able to perform all things necessary to redeem my soul. Jesus can do this, for He is the eternal Son of God. I need a Savior who is able to understand my weaknesses and infirmities and who will deal gently with my soul while tied to a body of death. Jesus can do this, for He was the Son of man and had flesh and blood like my own. If my Savior had only been God, perhaps I might have trusted Him, but I never could have come near to Him without fear. If my Savior had only been man, 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 Savior is God as well as man, and man as well as God. He is God, and so is able to deliver me. He is man, and so is able to understand me and sympathize 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 anyone reading this 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. *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin* (Hebrews

4:15). You do not have to deal with a being of so high and glorious a nature that your mind can in no way comprehend Him. You get to deal with Jesus, who had a body like your own and was a man upon earth like yourself. He well knows the world through which you are struggling, for He dwelt in the midst of it for thirty-three years. He

well knows the *contradiction of sinners* that so often discourages you, for He endured it Himself (Hebrews 12:3). He well knows the ways and deception of your spiritual enemy, the devil, for He wrestled with him in the wilderness. Certainly with such an advocate you can well feel bold.

If you know what it is to appeal 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 appealing to One who knows your feelings by experience and has drunk deeply of the bitter cup, for He was *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with weakness* (Isaiah 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.

He is no stranger to what you are feeling. He is acquainted with everything that belongs to human nature, with the exception of sin.

Are you poor and needy? So was Jesus. *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head* (Matthew 8:20). He dwelt in a despised city. People used to say, *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* (John 1:46). He was known as a carpenter's son. He preached in a borrowed boat, rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, and was buried in a borrowed tomb.

Your soul's business is in the hand of a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities.

Are you alone in the world and neglected by those who ought to love you? So was Jesus. *He came unto his own, and his own received him not* (John 1:11). 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 who followed Him were publicans and fishermen, and even these abandoned Him and were scattered every man to his own place.

Are you misunderstood, misrepresented, slandered, and persecuted? So was Jesus. He was called a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of publicans, a Samaritan, a madman, and a devil. His character was misrepresented. False charges were laid against Him. An unjust sentence was passed upon Him, and though innocent, He was condemned as a criminal, and as a criminal He died on the cross.

Does Satan tempt you and suggest awful thoughts to your mind? He also tempted Jesus. He asked Him to distrust God's fatherly providence: *Command that these stones be made into bread*. He suggested 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 I will give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me* (Matthew 4:1-10).

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?* (Matthew 27:46).

It is impossible to conceive of a Savior more suited to the needs of the human heart than our Lord Jesus Christ. He was suited not only by His power, but by His sympathy. He was suited not only by His divinity, but by His humanity. Work, I urge you, to have firmly impressed on your mind that Christ, the refuge of souls, is man as well as God. Honor Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. 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 Socinian errs dreadfully when he says that Christ was only man and not God. Let not the results of that error make you forget that while Christ was very God, He was also very man.

Do not listen for a moment to the contemptible argument of the Roman Catholic when he tells you that the Virgin Mary and the saints are more sympathetic than Christ. Answer 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 empathetic of friends, as well as the mightiest and most powerful of saviors. Answer him that you need no comfort from saints and angels, from the Virgin Mary or from Gabriel, as long as you can rest your weary soul on the man Christ Jesus.

Let us learn, in the third place, that there may be much weakness and infirmity, even in a true Christian. You have clear 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, dost thou not care that we perish?* (Mark 4:38).

There was impatience. They could have waited until their Lord thought it was suitable to arise 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. *Dost thou not care that we perish?*

Poor faithless men! What right did they have to be afraid? They had seen proof after proof that all would be well as 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. A sense of immediate danger often makes people 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 imagined that death was close at hand. They could wait no longer in suspense. *Dost thou not care, they said, that we perish?*

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

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

But suddenly some unexpected trial assails them. Their property makes itself wings and flies away. Their own health fails. Death comes up into their house. Tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word. Where is their faith now? Where is the strong confidence they thought they had? Where is their peace, their hope, their endurance? Sadly, they are sought for and not found. They are weighed in the balances and found wanting (Daniel 5:27). Fear, doubt, distress, and anxiety break in upon them like a flood, and they do not know what to do. I know that this is a sad description, but I 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 as 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 may be, he is still compassed with infirmity. There is not a just man upon earth that always does good and never sins (Ecclesiastes 7:20). *For we all offend in many things* (James 3:2). A person may have true saving faith, and yet not have it always close at hand and ready to be used.

Abraham was the father of the faithful. By faith he left his country and his family, and he 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. Yet this very Abraham was so far overcome by unbelief that because of the fear of man he allowed Sarah to be called his sister, and not his wife. This was great weakness, yet there have been few greater saints than Abraham.

David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). 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 the bear would deliver him from this Philistine. He had faith to believe God's promise that he should one day be king of

Israel, even though he only had a few followers, and even though Saul pursued him like a partridge on the mountains and there often seemed but a step between him and death.

This very David at one time was so far overtaken by fear and unbelief that he said, *I shall be killed some day by the hand of Saul* (1 Samuel 27:1). He forgot the many wonderful deliverances he had experienced at God's hand. He only thought of his present danger, and he took refuge among the ungodly Philistines. Surely here was great weakness, yet there have been few stronger believers than David.

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

Oh, learn to diminish
this flattering estimate
of yourself.

Do you think that you believe in Christ? Do you feel such love and confidence in Him that you cannot imagine being greatly moved by any event that could happen? It is all well. I am glad to hear it. But has your faith been tried? Has your confidence been put to the test? If not, be careful of condemning these disciples hastily. *Do not be highminded, but fear* (Romans 11:20). Do not think that because your heart is enthusiastic now, that it will always be that way. Do not say that because your feelings are warm and fervent today, that tomorrow will be the same, or even better. Do not say that because your heart is lifted up now with a strong sense of Christ's mercy, that you will never forget Him as long as you live.

Oh, learn to diminish this flattering estimate of yourself. You do not know yourself thoroughly. There are more things in your inward man than you are now aware of. The Lord may leave you as He did Hezekiah, to show you all that is in your heart (2 Chronicles 32:31). Blessed is he who is *clothed with humility* (1 Peter 5:5). *Blessed is the man that fears*

God always (Proverbs 28:14). Therefore let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (1 Corinthians 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 support 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 ignore inconsistencies? Once more I say, God forbid!

I hold strongly that there is a great 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. It is not just 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, and heat from cold.

I do want young Christians to understand, though, what they must expect to find in themselves. I want to prevent them from stumbling and being puzzled by the discovery of their own weakness and infirmity. I want them to see that they can have true faith and grace, despite all the devil's whispers to the contrary, even though they feel doubts and fears within. I want them to observe that Peter, James, John, and their brethren were true disciples, and yet they were not so spiritual that they could not 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 as 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 quickly conclude that a person has no grace simply because you see some imperfection in him. There are spots on the face of the sun, yet the sun shines brightly and enlightens the whole world. There are quartz and impurities mixed up with many lumps of gold, yet who thinks that the gold is worth nothing at all because of this? There are flaws in some of the finest diamonds in the world, yet the flaws do not keep the diamonds from being considered priceless.

Away with this unwholesome repulsion that makes many ready to excommunicate a person if he only has a few faults! Let us be quicker

to see grace and slower to see imperfections! Let us know that if we cannot accept that there is grace where there is corruption, we will 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 for us. The leprosy is not out of the walls of the house, however much we may scrape them, and never will be until the house is taken down (Leviticus 14:34-45). Our bodies are indeed temples of the Holy Spirit, but they are not perfect temples until they are raised or changed. Grace is indeed a treasure, but it is a treasure in earthen vessels. It is possible for someone to forsake all for Christ's sake, yet to be overtaken occasionally with doubts and fears.

It is possible for someone to forsake all for Christ's sake, yet to be overtaken occasionally with doubts and fears.

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

Let us learn, in the fourth place, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have a distinct example of His power in the incident I am now discussing. The waves were breaking into the ship where Jesus was. The terrified disciples awoke Him and cried for help. *As he arose, he rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm* (Mark 4:39). This was a wonderful miracle. No one could do this but one who was almighty.

Make the winds cease with a word! It is a common saying in order to describe an impossibility that "You might as well speak to the wind!" Yet Jesus rebukes the wind and at once it ceases! This is 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?³⁹ Yet here is one who says to raging waves in a storm, "Peace, be still," and at once there was a calm. This is power.

39 King Canute was an eleventh-century Danish king who ruled England. The story is that

It is good for all people to have a clear view of the Lord Jesus Christ's power. Let the sinner know that the merciful Savior to whom he is urged to flee and in whom he is invited to trust is nothing less than the Almighty, and that He has power over all flesh to eternal life. *I AM the Alpha and the Omega, beginning and end, saith the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty* (Revelation 1:8). *As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him* (John 17:2).

Let the anxious seeker understand that if he will only go with Jesus and take up the cross, he goes with One who has all power in heaven and earth. (Matthew 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. *These shall make war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them; for he is Lord of lords and King of kings* (Revelation 17:14). *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13). Let everyone study the subject, for it deserves to be studied.

- Study it in His works of creation. *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made* (John 1:3). The heavens and all their glorious host of inhabitants, the earth and all that it contains, 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 spoke 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 Creator of all things. Was not this power?
- Study it in His works of providence and in the orderly continuance of all things in the world. *By him all things consist* (Colossians 1:17). Sun, moon, and stars were created and placed in a perfect system. Spring, summer, autumn, and

he sat on his throne by the sea and ordered the tide not to come in. His intent was to show that there was a Power greater than that of kings. When the tide came in despite Canute's command, it is recorded that he then said, "Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings, for there is none worthy of the name, but He whom heaven, earth, and sea obey by eternal laws."

winter follow one another in regular order. They continue to this day and do not fail, according to the ordinance of Him who died on Calvary. *They persevere unto this day by thy ordinance; for they are all thy slaves* (Psalm 119:91). The kingdoms of this world rise and increase, and decline and pass away. The rulers of the earth plan, scheme, make laws, change laws, fight wars, and pull down one and raise up another – but they do not much consider 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 citizens are all as a drop of water in the hand of the crucified One, and that He increases and diminishes the nations according to His mind and will. Is not this power?

- Study the subject in the miracles worked by our Lord Jesus Christ during the three years of His ministry upon earth. Learn from the mighty works that He did that the things that are impossible with man are possible with Christ (Matthew 19:26). Regard every one of His miracles as a symbol and figure of spiritual things. See in it a lovely picture of what He is able to do for your soul. He who could raise the dead with a word can just as easily raise man from the death of sin. He who could give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the mute can also cause sinners to see the kingdom of God, hear the joyful sound of the gospel, and proclaim the praise of redeeming love. He who could heal leprosy with a touch can heal any disease of heart. He who could cast out devils can direct every besetting sin to yield to His grace. Oh, begin to read Christ's miracles in this light! As wicked, 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 there is also a fullness of power.
- Study the subject in particular as placed before you this day. I am sure that 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 today that there is One who can give you rest. Jesus can say to your heart, whatever may be its ailment, *Peace, be still.*

Maybe your conscience within has been ripped apart by the recollection of countless transgressions and has been torn by every gust of temptation. Is the remembrance of your past awful immorality and other wickedness grievous unto you and the burden unbearable? What if your heart seems full of evil and sin appears to drag you wherever it wants? Does the devil ride to and fro over your soul like a conqueror, telling you it is useless to struggle against him and that there is no hope for you?

I tell you that 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 can even say to you, *Peace, be still.* He can scatter that cloud of guilt that now weighs you down. He can command despair to 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 is, and when He commands, the prisoners must go free. Oh, if any troubled reader wants calmness within, go this day to Jesus Christ, and you will find peace!

But what if your heart is right with God, 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 your body is afflicted with pain day after day? What if you are suddenly laid aside from active usefulness and compelled by disease to sit still and do nothing? What if death has come into your home and taken away your Rachel, 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 He can calm troubled seas. He can rebuke rebellious wills as powerfully as raging winds. He can calm storms of sorrow and silence intense emotion as surely as He stopped the Galilean storm. He can say to the heaviest anxiety, *Peace, be still.*

The floods of care and tribulation might be mighty, but Jesus sits upon the floods and is mightier than the waves of the sea. *The LORD on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea* (Psalm 93:4). The winds of trouble might howl fiercely around you, but Jesus holds them in His hand and can calm them when He desires. Oh, if any reader is broken-hearted, overburdened, and sorrowful, let him go to Jesus Christ and cry to Him, and he will be refreshed. *Come unto me, He says, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28).

The winds of trouble might howl fiercely around you, but Jesus holds them in His hand and can calm them when He desires.

I invite all who profess to be Christians to take a good look at Christ's power. Doubt anything else if you want, but never doubt Christ's power. You might doubt that you do not secretly love sin or that you are not inwardly clinging to the world. It might be doubtful that the pride of your nature is not fighting against the idea of being saved as a poor sinner by grace. But one thing is not doubtful, and that is that Christ is able to save *to the uttermost*, and He will save you if you will let Him (Hebrews 7:25).

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 could have rebuked them sharply. He could 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?* (Mark 4:40).

The entirety of our Lord's conduct toward His disciples on earth deserves close consideration. It throws a beautiful light on the compassion and longsuffering that there is in Him. Surely no teacher ever had scholars so slow to learn their lessons as Jesus had in the apostles. Certainly no scholars 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 throughout the Gospels, and see the truth of what I say.

At no time during our Lord's ministry did the disciples seem to fully

understand the purpose for His coming into the world. The humiliation, the atonement, and the crucifixion were hidden things to them. The plainest words and clearest warnings from their Master of what was going to happen to Him seemed to have had no effect on their minds. They did not understand. They did not recognize what was happening. It was hidden from their eyes. Once Peter even tried to keep our Lord from His course of suffering. *Lord, be it far from thee*, he said, *in no wise shall this happen unto thee* (Matthew 16:22).

You will frequently see things in the spirit and demeanor of the apostles that are not at all to be commended. We are told that one day they disputed among themselves who should be the greatest (Mark 9:34). Another day they did not consider His miracles, and their hearts were hardened (Mark 6:52). Once two of them wanted to call down fire from heaven upon a village because the people there did not receive them (Luke 9:52-54). In the garden of Gethsemane, the three leading disciples slept when they should have watched and prayed (Mark 14:32-41). In the hour of His betrayal they all forsook Him and fled (Matthew 26:56), and worst of all, Peter, the most bold of the twelve, denied his Master three times with an oath (Matthew 26:69-75).

Even after the resurrection, the same unbelief and hardness of heart cling to the disciples. Even though they saw their Lord with their eyes and touched Him with their hands, some doubted, they were so weak in their faith! They were so *slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken* (Luke 24:25). They were so slow to understand the meaning of our Lord's words, actions, life, and death.

Yet what do you see in our Lord's behavior toward these disciples all through His ministry? You see nothing but unchanging sympathy, compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, and love. He does not cast them off for their slowness. 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 parent does with a toddler when he first begins to walk.

Jesus sends His disciples kind messages as soon as He is risen from the dead. *Go*, He said to the women. *Go tell my brothers that they may go into Galilee, and there they shall see me* (Matthew 28:10). He gathers them around Himself once more. He restores Peter to his place and tells

him, *Feed my sheep* (John 21:17). He condescends to stay with them forty more 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 age* (Matthew 28:20). Truly this was a love that passes knowledge. This is not the manner of man.

Let all the world know that the Lord Jesus Christ is very compassionate and of tender mercy (James 5:11). He will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax (Matthew 12:20). *Like as a father has mercy upon his children, so the LORD has mercy upon those that fear him* (Psalm 103:13). As one whom his mother comforts, so will He comfort His people (Isaiah 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 (Isaiah 40:11). He cares for the least members of His body as well as for the greatest. He cares for the children of His family as well as for the adults. He cares for the tenderest little plants in His garden as well as for the cedars of Lebanon. All are in His book of life, and all are under His care. All are given to Him in an everlasting covenant, and He has undertaken, despite all our weaknesses, to bring every one of His children safely home.

Let any 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* (Hebrews 13:5). He may occasionally correct him in love, and He may gently reprove him at times, but He will never, never give him up. The devil will 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 their shortcomings and weaknesses. The husband does not divorce his wife because he finds shortcomings in her. The mother does not forsake her infant because it is weak, feeble, and uneducated. The Lord Jesus 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 chapter of Hebrews is a wonderful chapter. It is

marvelous to observe how the Holy Spirit speaks of the worthy men and women whose names are recorded in that chapter. The faith of the Lord's people is brought forward there and remembered, but the faults of many people, which also might easily have been brought up, are left out and not mentioned at all.

Are there now readers of this book who desire salvation but are afraid to cast themselves on Christ because they fear that they might eventually fall away? Consider, I urge you, the tenderness and patience of the Lord Jesus, and be afraid no more. Do not fear to take up the cross and come out boldly from the world. That same Lord and Savior 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 allow you to perish in the wilderness. He will conduct you safely into the promised land. Only commit yourself to His guidance, and He will carry you safely home. Only hear Christ's voice and follow Him, and you will never perish.

Who is there among the readers of this book who has been converted and desires to do the Lord's will? Follow the example of your Master's gentleness and long-suffering, and learn to be tenderhearted and kind to others. Deal gently with young beginners. Do not expect them to know 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 that God would not want 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 many shortcomings, and do as you would want others to do to you.

Sadly, there is a painful absence of the Master's mind among many of His disciples. There are few churches today, I am afraid, that would have received Peter into communion again after he had denied the Lord without waiting a few years. There are few believers ready to do the work of Barnabas – willing to take young converts by the hand and encourage them when they first begin to follow Jesus. Truly we need an outpouring of the Spirit upon believers almost as much as upon the world.

I now ask my readers to make practical use of the lessons I have brought before you. You have heard this day five things:

1. Serving Christ will not secure you against troubles. The holiest saints often have troubles.
2. Christ is very man as well as God.
3. Believers may have much weakness and infirmity, and yet be true believers.
4. Christ has all power.
5. Christ is full of patience and kindness toward His people.

Remember these five lessons, and you will do well.

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

This book will very likely be read by some who know nothing of Christ's service by experience, or who know nothing of Christ Himself. There are only too many who take no interest whatsoever in the things about which I have been writing. These people have all their treasure here below. They are completely consumed by the things of the world. They care nothing about the believer's conflict, struggles, weaknesses, doubts, and fears. They care little whether Christ did miracles or not. It is all a matter of words and names and forms about which they do not trouble themselves. They are without God in the world.

If by chance you are such a person as this, I can only warn you solemnly that your present course cannot last. You will not live forever. There must be an end. Grey hairs, age, sickness, infirmities, and death are all 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 you are sick and dying – unless Jesus Christ is your friend. You will discover, to your sorrow and confusion, that however much people may talk and boast, they cannot do without Christ when they come to their deathbed. You can send for ministers and get them to read prayers and give you the sacrament. You can go through every form and ceremony of Christianity. But if you persist in living a careless and worldly life and despising Christ for most of your life, you should not be surprised

if Christ leaves you to yourself at the end of your life. These are solemn words and, sadly, they are often fulfilled: *I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear comes upon you* (Proverbs 1:26).

Come then, today, and be guided by one who loves your soul. *Cease to do evil; learn to do good* (Isaiah 1:16-17). *Forsake that which is foolish and live and go in the way of understanding* (Proverbs 9:6). Cast away that pride that hangs around your heart. *Seek the LORD while he may be found* (Isaiah 55:6). Cast away that spiritual laziness that is paralyzing your soul. Resolve to take effort to read and learn your Bible, fervently pray, and honor the Lord's Day. Break off from a world that can never really satisfy you, and seek that treasure that 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? Return at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you* (Proverbs 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 that this is not your sin also.

This book will probably fall into the hands of some people who love the Lord Jesus and believe in Him, yet desire to love Him better. If you are such a person, accept 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 am afraid that the personhood of our Lord has been sadly lost sight of by many who profess Christ in the present day. Their talk is more about salvation than about the Savior, more about redemption than about the Redeemer, more about justification than about Jesus, and more about the work of Christ than about the person of Christ. This is a great fault, and one that fully accounts for the dry and lifeless character of the religion of many of those who profess to be Christian.

If you want to grow in grace and have joy and peace in believing, beware of falling into this error. Stop regarding 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 to live daily. Stop regarding it as a mere set of abstract statements and hard-to-understand principles and rules. Look at it instead as the introduction to a glorious, personal Friend.

This is the kind of gospel that the apostles preached. They did not go around the world telling people about love, mercy, and pardon as theoretical, but the leading subject of all their sermons was the loving heart of an actual living Christ. This is the kind of gospel that is most calculated to promote sanctification and readiness for glory. Certainly nothing is as likely to prepare us for that heaven where Christ's personal presence will be all, and that glory where we will meet Christ face to face, as to commune 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 ever-present truth, that the Lord Jesus is absolutely unchanged. That Savior in whom you trust is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He knows *no variableness neither shadow of turning* (James 1:17). Though high in heaven at God's right hand, He is just the same in heart as He was two thousand years ago on earth. Remember this and you will do well.

Follow Him all through His journeys to and fro in Israel. Notice how He received all who came to Him, casting out none. Notice how He had an ear to listen to every tale of sorrow, a hand to help every case of distress, and a heart to feel for all who needed sympathy. Then say to yourself, "This same Jesus is my Lord and Savior. Place and time have made no difference in Him. What He was then, He is now – and He will be for evermore."

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

The last word of this chapter will be the same as the first. I want people to read the four Gospels more than they do. I want people to become better acquainted with Christ. I want unconverted people to know Jesus so that they may have eternal life through Him. I want believers to know Jesus better so that they will become happier, holier, and more prepared for the *inheritance of the saints in light* (Colossians 1:12). He will be the holiest person who learns to say with Paul, *To me to live is Christ* (Philippians 1:21).

Chapter 13

The Church That Christ Builds

Upon the large rock I will build my congregation, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her. (Matthew 16:18)

Do we belong to the church that is built upon a rock? Are we members of the only church in which our souls can be saved? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration. I ask for your attention while I try to show the one true, holy, universal church, and to guide your feet into the only safe fold.

What is this church? What is it like? What are its characteristics? Where is it to be found? On all these points I have something to say. I am going to unfold the words of our Lord Jesus Christ that stand at the top of this page. He declares, *Upon the large rock I will build my congregation, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her.*

There are five things in these famous words that demand our attention:

1. A Building: *My congregation.*
2. A Builder: Christ says, *I will build my congregation.*
3. A Foundation: *Upon the large rock I will build my congregation.*
4. Perils Implied: *The gates of Hades.*
5. Security Asserted: *The gates of Hades shall not prevail against her.*

The whole subject demands special attention in the present day. Holiness,

we must never forget, is the prominent characteristic of all who belong to the one true church.

We have, first, a building mentioned in the text. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of *my congregation [church]*. What is this church? Few inquiries can be made that are of more importance than this. For lack of proper attention to this subject, the errors that have crept into the world are neither few nor small.

The church of our text is not a physical building. It is not a temple of wood, brick, stone, or marble made by human hands. It is a company of men and women. It is no particular visible church on earth. It is not the Eastern Church or the Western Church. It is not the Church of England or the Church of Scotland. Above all, it is certainly not the Church of Rome. The church of our text is one that makes far less show in the eyes of man than any visible church, but is of far more importance in the eyes of God.

The church of our text is made up of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is made up of all people who are really holy and converted. It includes all who have repented of sin, have fled to Christ by faith, and have been made new creatures in Him. It includes all God's elect, all who have received God's grace, all who have been washed in Christ's blood, all who have been clothed in Christ's righteousness, and all who have been born again and sanctified by Christ's Spirit. All such people of every name, rank, nation, people group, and language compose the church of our text. This is the body of Christ. This is the flock of Christ. This is the bride. This is the Lamb's wife. This is the holy, universal, and apostolic church of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. This is "the blessed company of all faithful people" spoken of in the communion service of the Church of England. This is the church on the rock.

The members of this church do not all worship God in the same way or use the same form of government. Some of them are governed by bishops and some of them by elders. Some of them use a prayer book when they meet for public worship and some of them do not. The Thirty-Fourth article of the Church of England most wisely declares, "It is not necessary that ceremonies should be in all places one and alike." However, the members of this church all come to one throne of

grace. They all worship with one heart. They are all led by one Spirit. They are all really and truly holy. They can all say “Alleluia,” and they can all reply, “Amen.”

This is that church to which all visible churches on earth are servants and handmaidens. Whether they are Episcopalian, Independent, or Presbyterian, they all serve the interests of the one true church. They are the scaffolding behind which the great building is carried on. They are the husk under which the living kernel grows. They have their various degrees of usefulness. The best and worthiest of them is that which trains up most members for Christ’s true church. No visible church has any right to say, “We are the only true church.” No visible church should ever dare to say, “We will stand for ever. The gates of hell will not prevail against us.”

The church mentioned in our text is that church to which belong the Lord’s gracious promises of preservation, continuance, protection, and final glory. “Whatsoever,” says Richard Hooker, “we read in Scripture concerning the endless love and saving mercy that God shows towards His churches, the only proper subject thereof is this church, which we properly term the mystical body of Christ.” As small and despised as the true church may be in this world, it is precious and honorable in the sight of God. The temple of Solomon in all its glory was meager and contemptible in comparison with that church that is built upon the rock.

No visible church has any right to say, “We are the only true church.”

I hope that the things I have just been saying will sink down into the minds of all who read this. See that you hold sound doctrine regarding the subject of the church. A mistake here may lead to dangerous and soul-ruining errors. The church that is made up of true believers is the church for which we who are ministers are specially ordained to preach. The church that is made up of all who repent and believe the gospel is the church to which we desire you to belong. Our work is not done and our hearts are not satisfied until you are made a new creature and are a member of the one true church. There can be no salvation outside of the church that is built on the rock.

The second point is that our text contains not merely a building, but a Builder. The Lord Jesus Christ declares, *I will build my [church]*. The

true church of Christ is tenderly cared for by all three Persons in the blessed Trinity. In the plan of salvation revealed in the Bible, beyond doubt God the Father chooses, God the Son redeems, and God the Holy Spirit sanctifies every member of Christ's mystical body. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, three Persons yet one God, cooperate for the salvation of every saved soul. This is truth that should never be forgotten.

Nevertheless, there is a special sense in which the help of the church is laid on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is particularly and preeminently the Redeemer and Savior of the church. Therefore we find Him saying in our text, "*I will build* – the work of building is My special work."

It is Christ who calls the members of the church in due time. They are *the called of Jesus Christ* (Romans 1:6). It is Christ who gives them life. *The Son gives life unto whom he will* (John 5:21). It is Christ who washes away their sins. He has loved us, and *washed us from our sins with his own blood* (Revelation 1:5). It is Christ who gives them peace. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you* (John 14:27).

It is Christ who gives them eternal life. *I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish* (John 10:28). It is Christ who grants them repentance. *God has exalted him with his right hand as Prince and Saviour, to give repentance* (Acts 5:31). It is Christ who enables them to become God's children. *As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God* (John 1:12). It is Christ who carries on the work within them once it has begun. *Because I live, ye shall live also* (John 14:19).

In summary, it has *pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell* (Colossians 1:19). Jesus is *the author and finisher of our faith* (Hebrews 12:2). He is the life (John 14:6). He is the Head (Colossians 1:18). From Him every joint and member of the mystical body of Christians is supplied (Ephesians 4:16). Through Him they are kept from falling. He will preserve them to the end and present them faultless before the Father's throne with exceeding great joy (Jude 1:24). He is all things in all believers.

The mighty agent by whom the Lord Jesus Christ carries out this work in the members of His church is without doubt the Holy Spirit. It is He who is ever renewing, awakening, convincing, leading to the

cross, transforming, taking out of the world stone after stone, and adding to the mystical building. But the great chief Builder, who has undertaken to execute the work of redemption and bring it to completion, is the Son of God, the Word who *was made flesh* (John 1:14). It is Jesus Christ who builds.

In building the true church, the Lord Jesus condescends to use many subordinate instruments. The ministry of the gospel, the circulation of the Scriptures, the friendly rebuke, the word spoken in season, and the engaging influence of afflictions are all means and instruments by which His work is carried on and by which the Spirit conveys life to souls, but Christ is the great superintending Architect, ordering, guiding, and directing all that is done. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). Ministers may preach and authors may write, but the Lord Jesus Christ alone can build; and except He builds, the work stands still (Psalm 127:1).

Great is the wisdom wherewith the Lord Jesus Christ builds His church! All is done at the right time and in the right way. Each stone in its turn is put in its right place. Sometimes He chooses great stones, and sometimes He chooses small stones. Sometimes the work goes on quickly, and sometimes it goes on slowly. We are frequently impatient and think that nothing is happening, but our time is not God's time. A thousand years in His sight are but as a single day (2 Peter 3:8). The great Builder makes no mistakes. He knows what He is doing. He sees the end from the beginning. He works by a perfect, unalterable, and certain plan. The mightiest conceptions of great architects, like Michelangelo and Sir Christopher Wren, are mere trifling and child's play in comparison with Christ's wise counsels regarding His church.

Great is the condescension and mercy that Christ exhibits in building His church! He often chooses the most unlikely and roughest stones and fits them into a most excellent work. He despises none and rejects no one on account of former sins and past transgressions. He often makes Pharisees and Publicans become pillars of His house. He delights to show mercy. He often takes the most thoughtless and ungodly and transforms them into polished corners of His spiritual temple.

Great is the power that Christ displays in building His church! He carries on His work despite opposition from the world, the flesh, and

the devil. In storm, in tempest, through troublesome times, silently, quietly, without noise, without stir, and without excitement, the building progresses, like Solomon's temple. *If I work*, He declares, *who shall hinder it?* (Isaiah 43:13).

The children of this world take little or no interest in the building of this church. They care nothing for the conversion of souls. What are broken spirits and repentant hearts to them? What is conviction of sin or faith in the Lord Jesus to them? It is all foolishness in their eyes. But while the children of this world care nothing about these things, *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God* (Luke 15:10).

In order to preserve the true church, the laws of nature have often been suspended. For the good of that church, all the providential dealings of God in this world are ordered and arranged. For the elect's sake, wars are brought to an end and peace is given to a nation. Statesmen, rulers, emperors, kings, presidents, and heads of governments have their schemes and plans and think they are of vast importance, but there is another work going on of infinitely greater importance for which they are only the "axes and saws" in God's hands (Isaiah 10:15). That work is the building of Christ's spiritual temple, the gathering in of living stones into the one true church.

We ought to be very thankful that the building of the true church is laid on the shoulders of One who is mighty. If the work depended on man, it would soon stand still, but blessed be God, the work is in the hands of a Builder who never fails to accomplish His purposes! Christ is the almighty Builder. He will carry on His work, even though nations and visible churches may not know their duty. Christ will never fail. He will certainly accomplish that which He has undertaken.

The third point that I want to consider is the foundation upon which this church is built. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us, *Upon the large rock I will build my congregation*. What did the Lord Jesus Christ mean when He spoke of this foundation? Did He mean the apostle Peter, to whom He was speaking? Certainly not. I can see no reason, if He meant Peter, why He did not say, "Upon you I will build my church." If He had meant Peter, He would surely have said, "I will build my church upon you," as plainly as He said, "to you I will give the keys" (Matthew 16:19).

No, it was not the person of the apostle Peter, but the good confession

that the apostle had just made! It was not Peter, the erring, unstable man, but the mighty truth that the Father had revealed to Peter. It was the truth concerning Jesus Christ Himself that was the rock. It was the truth of Christ as Mediator and Christ as Messiah. It was the blessed truth that Jesus was the promised Savior, the true Guarantee, the real Intercessor between God and man. This was the rock, and this was the foundation, upon which the church of Christ was to be built.

The foundation of the true church was laid at a mighty cost. It required the Son of God to take our nature upon Him, and in that nature He must live, suffer, and die – not for His own sins, but for ours. It required that in that nature Christ should go to the grave and rise again. It required that in that nature Christ should go up to heaven and sit at the right hand of God, having obtained eternal redemption for all His people. No other foundation could have met the necessities of lost, guilty, corrupt, weak, helpless sinners.

The mediatorial office of Christ is a remedy sufficient for all the sins of all the world.

Once that foundation is laid, it is very strong. It can bear the weight of the sins of all the world. It has borne the weight of all the sins of all the believers who have built on it. Sins of thought, sins of the imagination, sins of the heart, sins of the head, sins that everyone has seen, sins that no one else knows, sins against God, sins against man, sins of all kinds and descriptions – that mighty rock can bear the weight of all these sins and not give way. The mediatorial office of Christ is a remedy sufficient for all the sins of all the world.

Every member of Christ's true church is joined to this one foundation. Believers disagree about many things, but in the matter of their soul's foundation they are all of one mind. Whether Episcopalians or Presbyterians, Baptists or Methodists, believers all meet at one point. They are all built on the rock. Ask where they get their peace and hope and joyful expectation of good things to come. You will find that it all flows from that one mighty source, Christ, the *mediator between God and men* (1 Timothy 2:5), and the office that Christ holds as the High Priest and Guarantee of sinners.

Look to your foundation if you want to know whether or not you are a member of the one true church. It is a point that can be known

only to yourself. Others can see your public worship, but they cannot see whether you are personally built upon the rock. Others can see your attendance at the Lord's Table, but they cannot see whether you are joined to Christ and are one with Christ, and if Christ is in you. Be careful to make no mistake about your own personal salvation. See that your own soul is upon the rock. Without this, all else is nothing. Without this, you will never stand in the day of judgment. It is a thousand times better in that day to be found in a cottage upon the rock than in a palace upon the sand!

The fourth point I want to discuss from our text is regarding the implied trials of the church. There is mention made of *the gates of Hades [hell]*. By that expression we are meant to understand the power of the prince of hell, even the devil (compare Psalm 9:13, Psalm 107:18, and Isaiah 38:10).

The history of Christ's true church has always been one of conflict and war. It has been constantly assailed by a deadly enemy, Satan, the prince of this world. The devil hates the true church of Christ with an undying hatred. He is ever stirring up opposition against all its members. He is ever urging the children of this world to do his will and to injure and harass the people of God. If he cannot bruise the head, he will bruise the heel (Genesis 3:15). If he cannot rob the believers of heaven, he will afflict them by the way.

Warfare with the powers of hell has been the experience of the whole body of Christ for six thousand years. It has always been a bush burning, though not consumed (Exodus 3:2), a woman fleeing into the wilderness, but not swallowed up (Revelation 12:6, 16). The visible churches have their times of prosperity and seasons of peace, but there has never been a time of peace for the true church. Its conflict is perpetual. Its battle never ends.

Warfare with the powers of hell is the experience of every individual member of the true church. Each Christian must fight. What are the lives of all the saints but records of battles? What were such men as Paul, James, Peter, John, Polycarp, Chrysostom, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Latimer, and Baxter but soldiers engaged in constant warfare? Sometimes the persons of the saints have been assailed, and sometimes their property. Sometimes they have been harassed by false accusations

and slander, and sometimes by open persecution. But in one way or another, the devil has been continually warring against the church. The gates of hell have been continually assaulting the people of Christ.

We who preach the gospel can tell about the *exceeding great and precious promises* offered to all who come to Christ (2 Peter 1:4). We can boldly offer to you, in our Master's name, *the peace of God, which passes all understanding* (Philippians 4:7). Mercy, free grace, and full salvation are offered to everyone who will come to Christ and believe on Him, but we promise you no peace with the world or with the devil. On the contrary, we warn you that there must be warfare as long as you are in the body. We do not want to keep you back or deter you from Christ's service, but we must tell you to count the cost and fully understand what Christ's service requires (Luke 14:28).

Marvel not at the enmity of the gates of hell. *If ye were of the world, the world would love its own* (John 15:19). As long as the world is the world and the devil is the devil, there must be warfare, and believers in Christ must be soldiers. The world hated Christ, and the world will hate true Christians as long as the earth stands. *If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you* (John 15:18). As the great reformer Martin Luther said, "Cain will go on murdering Abel as long as the church is on earth."

Be prepared for the enmity of the gates of hell. Put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). The tower of David contains a thousand shields, all ready for the use of God's people. The weapons of our warfare have been used by millions of poor sinners like ourselves and have never been found to fail.

Be patient under the enmity of the gates of hell. It is all working together for your good (Romans 8:28). It tends to sanctify. It will keep you awake. It will make you humble. It will drive you nearer to the Lord Jesus Christ. It will wean you from the world. It will help to make you pray more. Above all, it will make you desire heaven. It will teach you to say with your heart as well as your lips, *Come, Lord Jesus* (Revelation 22:20); *Thy kingdom come* (Matthew 6:10).

Be not discouraged by the enmity of hell. The warfare of the true child of God is as much a mark of grace as the inward peace that he enjoys. No cross, no crown! No conflict, no saving Christianity! *Blessed*

are ye, said our Lord Jesus Christ, *when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake* (Matthew 5:11). If you are never persecuted for following Jesus and if everyone speaks well of you, you may well doubt whether you belong to the church on the rock (Luke 6:26).

There remains one other point to be considered, and that is the security of the true church of Christ. There is a glorious promise given by the Builder: *The gates of Hades shall not prevail.*

He who cannot lie has pledged His word that all the powers of hell shall never overthrow His church. It will continue and stand, despite every assault. It will never be overcome. All other created things perish and pass away, but not the church that is built on the rock.

Empires have risen and fallen in rapid succession. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Tyre, Carthage, Rome, Greece, Venice – where are all these now? They were all the creations of man's hand, and they have all passed away, but the true church of Christ lives on.

The mightiest cities have become piles of ruins. The broad walls of Babylon have sunk to the ground. The palaces of Nineveh are covered with mounds of dust. The hundred gates of Thebes are only matters of history. Tyre is a place where fishermen hang their nets. Carthage is a desolation. Yet all this time the true church stands. The gates of hell do not prevail against it.

The earliest visible churches have in many cases decayed and perished. Where is the church of Ephesus and the church of Antioch? Where is the church of Alexandria and the church of Constantinople? Where are the Corinthian and Philippian and Thessalonian churches? Where, indeed, are they all? They departed from the Word of God. They were proud of their bishops, synods, ceremonies, learning, and antiquity. They did not glory in the true cross of Christ. They did not remain true to the gospel. They did not give the Lord Jesus His rightful office, or faith its rightful place. They are now among the things that have been. Their candlestick has been taken away, but all this time the true church has lived on.

Has the true church been oppressed in one country? It has fled to another. Has it been trampled on and oppressed in one soil? It has taken root and flourished in some other climate. Fire, sword, prisons, fines,

and penalties have never been able to destroy its vitality. Its persecutors have died and gone to their own place, but the Word of God has lived and grown and multiplied. As weak as this true church may appear to the eye of man, it is an anvil that has broken many hammers in times past, and perhaps will break many more before the end. *He that touches you touches the apple of his eye* (Zechariah 2:8).

The promise of our text is true of the whole body of the true church. Christ will never be without a witness in the world. He has had people in the worst of times. He had seven thousand in Israel even in the days of Ahab (Romans 11:4). There are some now, I believe, in dark places in some churches throughout the world, who despite much weakness, are serving Christ. The devil may rage horribly and the church in some countries may be brought exceedingly low, but the gates of hell shall never entirely prevail.

The promise of our text is true of every individual member of the church. Some of God's people have been so much cast down and distressed that they have despaired of their safety. Some have fallen sadly, as David and Peter did. Some have departed from the faith for a time, like Thomas Cranmer and John Jewell. Many have been tried by cruel doubts and fears. But all have gotten safely home at last, the youngest as well as the oldest, the weakest as well as the strongest. So it will be to the end.

Can you prevent tomorrow's sun from rising? Can you prevent the tide in the Bristol Channel from ebbing and flowing? Can you stop the planets from moving in their respective orbits? Then, and only then, can you stop the salvation of any believer, however feeble – the final safety of any living stone in that church that is built upon the rock, however small or insignificant that stone may appear.

The true church is Christ's body. Not one bone in that mystical body will ever be broken. The true church is Christ's bride. Those whom God has joined in everlasting covenant will never be torn apart. The true church is Christ's flock. When the lion came and took a lamb out of David's flock, David arose and delivered the lamb from his mouth.

As weak as this true church may appear to the eye of man, it is an anvil that has broken many hammers in times past, and perhaps will break many more before the end.

Christ will do the same. He is David's greater son. Not a single sick lamb in Christ's flock will perish. He will say to His Father in the last day, *Of those whom thou gavest me I have lost none* (John 18:9).

The true church is the wheat of the earth. It may be sifted, winnowed, pounded, and tossed to and fro, but not one grain will be lost. The tares and chaff will be burned. The wheat will be gathered into the barn. The true church is Christ's army. The Captain of our salvation loses none of His soldiers. His plans are never defeated. His supplies never fail. Those on His roster are the same at the end as they were at the beginning. Of the men who marched gallantly out of England many years ago in the Crimean war, how many ever came back? Regiments that went forth strong and cheerful, with bands playing and banners flying, laid their bones in a foreign land and never returned to their native country. But it is not so with Christ's army. Not one of His soldiers will be missing at the end. He Himself declares, *They shall never perish* (John 10:28).

The devil may cast some of the members of the true church into prison. He may kill, burn, torture, and hang others. But after he has killed the body, there is nothing more that he can do. He cannot hurt the soul. When the French troops took Rome years ago, they found on the walls of a prison cell, under the Inquisition, the words of a prisoner. We do not know who he was, but his words are worthy of remembrance. Though dead, he still speaks (Hebrews 11:4). He had written on the walls, very likely after an unjust trial and a still more unjust excommunication, the following striking words: "Blessed Jesus, they cannot cast me out of Your true church." That record is true! Not all the power of Satan can cast one single believer out of Christ's true church.

I hope that no reader of this book will ever allow fear to keep him from beginning to serve Christ. He to whom you commit your soul has all power in heaven and earth, and He will keep you. He will never let you be cast away. Relatives may oppose you. Neighbors may mock you. The world may slander, ridicule, jest, and sneer. Fear not! Fear not! The powers of hell will never prevail against your soul. Greater is He who is for you than all they who are against you (1 John 4:4).

Do not be afraid for the church of Christ when ministers die and saints are taken away. Christ can ever maintain His own cause. He will raise up better servants and brighter stars. The stars are all in His right

hand. Do not be anxious about the future. Do not be downhearted by the actions of statesmen or the plots of wolves in sheep's clothing. Christ will always provide for His own church. Christ will ensure that *the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her*. All is going on well, though our eyes may not see it. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ (Revelation 11:15).

I will now conclude this chapter with a few words of practical application.

My first word of application will be a question. Are you a member of the one true church of Christ? In the highest and best sense, are you a "churchman" in the sight of God? You now know what I mean. I look far beyond the Church of England. I am not speaking of church or chapel. I speak of the church built upon the rock. I ask you, with all sincerity, are you a member of that church? Are you joined to the great Foundation? Are you on the rock? Have you received the Holy Spirit? Does the Spirit witness with your spirit that you are one with Christ, and Christ with you (Romans 8:16)? I urge you, in the name of God, to take these questions to heart and to consider them well. If you are not converted, you do not yet belong to the church of the rock.

Let every reader be concerned for himself if he cannot give a satisfactory answer to my inquiry. Take heed, take heed, that you do not make shipwreck of your soul to all eternity. Take heed that at the end the gates of hell do not prevail against you, the devil cannot claim you as his own, and you will not be cast away forever. Take heed that you do not go down to the pit from the land of Bibles and in the full light of Christ's gospel. Take heed that you will not be found at the left hand of Christ at the end – a lost Episcopalian or a lost Presbyterian, a lost Baptist or a lost Methodist – lost because, with all your zeal for your own denomination and your own church, you never joined the one true church.

My second word of application will be an invitation. I address it to everyone who is not yet a true believer. I invite you to come and join the one true church without delay. Come and join yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.

Consider well what I say. I ask you solemnly not to mistake the meaning of my invitation. I do not ask you to leave the visible church

to which you belong. I abhor all idolatry of forms and denominations. I ask you to come to Christ and be saved. The day of decision must come some time. Why not this very hour? Why not today, while it is called today (Hebrews 3:13)? Why not this very night, before the sun rises tomorrow morning?

Come to Him who died for sinners on the cross and who invites all sinners to come to Him by faith and be saved. Come to my Master, Jesus Christ. *Come; for all things are now ready* (Luke 14:17). Mercy is ready for you. Heaven is ready for you. Angels are ready to rejoice over you. Christ is ready to receive you. Christ will receive you gladly and will welcome you among His children. Come into the ark. The flood of God's wrath will soon break upon the earth. Come into the ark and be safe.

Come into the lifeboat of the one true church. This old world will soon break into pieces! Do you not hear the tremblings of it? The world is but a ship stuck firmly upon a sandbank. The night is almost over. The waves are beginning to rise. The wind is getting stronger. The storm will soon shatter the old wreck. But the lifeboat is launched, and we, the ministers of the gospel, beg you to come into the lifeboat and be saved. We implore you to arise at once and come to Christ.

Do you say, "How can I come? My sins are too many. I am too wicked. I dare not come." Away with the thought! It is a temptation of Satan. Come to Christ as a sinner. Come just as you are. Hear the words of that beautiful hymn:

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.⁴⁰

This is the way to come to Christ. You should come waiting for nothing and delaying for nothing. You should come as a hungry sinner to be filled, as a poor sinner to be made rich, and as a bad, undeserving sinner to be clothed with righteousness. When you come in this way, Christ will receive you. *He that comes to me I will in no wise cast out* (John 6:37). Oh, come to Jesus Christ. Come into the true church by faith and be saved.

40 This is the first verse of "Just As I Am," a song written by Charlotte Elliot (1789-1871).

Last of all, let me give a word of exhortation to all believers into whose hands this book may fall. Strive to live a holy life. Walk worthy of the church to which you belong. Live like citizens of heaven. Let your light shine before men, so that the world may profit by your conduct (Matthew 5:16). Let them know whose you are and whom you serve. Be epistles of Christ, known and read of all people (2 Corinthians 3:2), written in such clear letters that no one can say of you, "I do not know whether this person is a member of Christ or not." He who knows nothing of real, practical holiness is no member of the church on the rock.

Strive to live a courageous life. Confess Christ before others. Whatever position you occupy, confess Christ. Why should you be ashamed of Him? He was not ashamed of you on the cross. He is ready to confess you now before His Father in heaven. Why should you be ashamed of Him? Be bold. Be very bold. The good soldier is not ashamed of his uniform. The true believer should never be ashamed of Christ.

Strive to live a
courageous life.

Strive to live a joyful life. Live like people who look for that blessed hope – the second coming of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13). This is the prospect to which we should all look forward. The thought that should fill our minds is not so much that of going to heaven, as of heaven coming to us. There is a good time coming for all the people of God, a good time for all the church of Christ, and a good time for all believers. There is a bad time coming for the unrepentant and unbelieving, but a good time for true Christians. For that good time, let us wait, watch, and pray.

The scaffolding will soon be taken down. The last stone will soon be brought out. The topstone will be placed upon the building. Yet a little while longer, and the full beauty of the church that Christ is building will be clearly seen.

The great Master Builder will soon come Himself. A building will be shown in which there will be no imperfection. The Savior and the saved will rejoice together. The whole universe will acknowledge that all was well done in the building of Christ's church. Blessed, it will be said in that day, if it was never said before, blessed are all they who belong to the church on the rock!

Chapter 14

Visible Churches Warned

He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the congregations. (Revelation 3:22)

I suppose I might take it for granted that every reader of this book belongs to some visible church of Christ. I do not ask now whether you are an Episcopalian, a Presbyterian, or an Independent. I only suppose that you would not like to be called an atheist or an infidel. You may attend the public worship of some specific visible body of professing Christians. Whatever the name of your church may be, I invite your special attention to the verse of Scripture before you. I want you to remember that the words of that verse concern yourself. They are written for your learning, and for all who call themselves Christians. *He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the congregations.*

This verse is repeated seven times in the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation. The Lord Jesus sends seven different letters there by the hand of His servant John to the seven churches of Asia. Seven times He ends His letter by the same solemn words: *He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the congregations.*

The Lord God is perfect in all His works. He does nothing by chance. He caused no part of the Scriptures to be written by chance. In all His dealings, you can trace His design, purpose, and plan. There was design in the size and orbit of each planet. There was design in the shape and structure of the smallest fly's wing. There was design in every verse of

the Bible. There was design in every repetition of a verse, wherever it took place. There was design in the sevenfold repetition of the verse before our eyes. It has a meaning, and we are intended to observe it.

This verse seems to call the special attention of all true Christians to the seven epistles to the churches. I believe it was meant to make believers take particular notice of the things that these seven letters contain.

Let me try to point out certain leading truths that these seven letters seem to teach. They are truths for the times in which we live, truths for the latter days, truths that we cannot know too well, and truths that would be good for us all to know and feel far better than we do.

I ask my readers to observe first that the Lord Jesus, in all seven epistles, speaks of nothing except matters of doctrine, practice, warning, and promise. I ask you to look over these seven epistles to the churches quietly and at your leisure, and you will soon see what I mean.

You will observe that the Lord Jesus sometimes finds fault with false doctrines and ungodly, inconsistent practices, and He rebukes them sharply.

You will observe that He sometimes praises faith, patience, work, labor, and perseverance, and He commends these graces highly.

You will sometimes find Him urging repentance, changes, return to the first love, renewed application to Himself, and similar things.

I want you to observe, though, that you will not find the Lord dwelling upon church government or ceremonies in any of the epistles. He says nothing about sacraments or ordinances. He makes no mention of liturgies or forms. He does not instruct John to write one word about baptism, the Lord's Supper, or the apostolic succession of ministers. The main principles of what can be called "the sacramental system" are not brought forward in any of the seven epistles.

Why do I mention this? I do so because many professing Christians today want us to believe that these things are of first, primary, and paramount importance. There are many who seem to think that there can be no church without a bishop and no godliness without a liturgy. They seem to believe that to teach the value of the sacraments is the main work of a minister, and to keep their parish church the first business of the people.

Now let no one misunderstand me when I say this. Do not run away

with the idea that I see no importance in sacraments. On the contrary, I regard them as great blessings to all who receive them “rightly, worthily, and with faith.” Do not think that I attach no value to church government and liturgy. On the contrary, I consider that a church that has these things in addition to an evangelical ministry is a far more complete and useful church than one in which they are not to be found. But I say that sacraments, church government, the use of a liturgy, and the observance of ceremonies and forms are all as nothing compared to faith, repentance, and holiness. My authority for saying so is the whole sense of our Lord’s words to the seven churches.

If a certain form of church government was as important as some say, why didn’t the great Head of the church say anything about it here? I would have expected to have found something said about it to Sardis and Laodicea, but I find nothing at all, and I think the silence here is a great fact.

I cannot help mentioning the same fact in Paul’s parting words to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:27-35). He was then leaving them forever. He was giving his last exhortation on earth, and he spoke as one who would not see the faces of his hearers anymore. Yet there is not a word in the exhortation about the sacraments and church government. If there was ever a time for speaking about them, it was then, but he says nothing at all about them, and I believe it was an intentional silence.

This is one reason why we who, rightly or wrongly, are called evangelical clergy, do not preach about bishops, the prayer book, and ordinances more than we do. It is not because we do not value them in their place, proportion, and way. We do value them as really and truly as anyone, and we are thankful for them, but we believe that repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and a holy manner of life are subjects of far more importance to people’s souls. Without these, no one can be saved. These are the first and most serious matters, and therefore we dwell on these.

This is one reason why we so often urge people not to be content with the mere outward part of religion. You must have noticed that we often warn you not to rest on church membership and duties. We tell you not to think that all is right with your soul because you come to church on Sunday and come up to the Lord’s Table. We often urge you

to remember that he is not a Christian who is one outwardly, but you *must be born again* (John 3:7), you must have a *faith which works by charity* (Galatians 5:6), and you must be a new creation by the Spirit in your heart (2 Corinthians 5:17). We tell you this because it seems to us to be the mind of Christ. These are the kinds of things He dwells upon when writing to the seven different churches. We feel that if we follow Him, we cannot greatly err.

I am aware that some people accuse us of having low views of church government and the sacraments. It does not matter much that our views are thought to be low as long as our consciences tell us they are scriptural. High ground, as it is called, is not always safe ground. What Balaam said must be our answer: *What the LORD saith that will I speak* (Numbers 24:13).

The plain truth is that there are two distinct and separate systems of Christianity in England at the present day. It is useless to deny it. Their existence is a great fact and one that cannot be too clearly known. According to one system, religion is a mere corporate business. You are to belong to a certain body of people. By virtue of your membership in this body, great privileges, both for time and eternity, are said to be conferred upon you. It matters little what you are and what you feel. You are not to test yourself by your feelings. You are a member of a great ecclesiastical corporation, and all its privileges and immunities are your own. Do you belong to the one true, visible corporation? That is the grand question.

According to the other system, religion is mainly a personal business between you and Christ. It will not save your soul to be an outward member of any ecclesiastical body whatsoever, however sound that body may be. Such membership will not wash away one sin or give you confidence in the day of judgment. There must be personal faith in Christ, personal dealings between you and God, and personal communion between your own heart and the Holy Spirit. Do you have this personal faith? Do you have this real work of the Spirit in your soul? This is the great question. If not, you will be lost.

This last system is the system that those who are called evangelical ministers hold to and teach. They do so because they are satisfied that it is the system of Holy Scripture. They do so because they are convinced

that any other system results in the most dangerous consequences and will fatally mislead people as to their actual state. They do so because they believe it to be the only system of teaching that God will bless, and that no church will flourish as much as that in which repentance, faith, conversion, and the work of the Spirit are the main subjects of the minister's sermon.

Again I say, let us often look carefully over the seven epistles to the churches in the book of Revelation.

I ask my readers, in the second place, to observe that in every epistle the Lord Jesus says, *I know thy works*. That repeated expression is very remarkable. It is not for nothing that we read these words seven times over. To one church the Lord Jesus says, I know your labor and patience (Revelation 2:2); to another, your tribulation and poverty (Revelation 2:9); and to a third, your charity, service, and faith (Revelation 2:19). But to all He uses the words I now dwell on: *I know thy works*. He did not say, I know your profession, your desires, your resolutions, or your wishes – but your works. *I know thy works*.

The works of a professing Christian are of great importance. But they cannot save your soul. They cannot justify you. They cannot wipe out your sins. They cannot deliver you from the wrath of God. This does not mean, though, that because they cannot save you they are of no importance. Take heed and beware of such a notion. The person who thinks so is extremely deceived.

I often think I could willingly die for the doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law (Romans 3:20, 28). I must earnestly contend, though, that as a general principle, a person's works are the evidence of his religion. If you call yourself a Christian, you must show it in your daily ways and daily behavior. Call to mind that the faith of Abraham and of Rahab was proven by their works (James 2:21-25). Remember that it avails us nothing to profess that we know God if in works we deny Him (Titus 1:16). Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: *Every tree is known by its own fruit* (Luke 6:44).

Whatever the works of a professing Christian may be, Jesus says, "I know them!" *The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding those who are evil and those who are good* (Proverbs 15:3). You never did anything, however private, that Jesus did not see. You never spoke a word,

not even in a whisper, that Jesus did not hear. You never wrote a letter, even to your dearest friend, that Jesus did not read. You never thought a thought, however secret, that Jesus did not know. His eyes are as a flaming fire (Revelation 1:14). The darkness is no darkness with Him. All things are open and made known before Him. He says to everyone, *I know thy works.*

The Lord Jesus knows the works of all unrepentant and unbelieving souls and will one day punish them. They are not forgotten in heaven, though they may be forgotten upon earth. When the great white throne is set and the books are opened, the wicked dead will be judged *according to their works* (Revelation 20:13).

The Lord Jesus knows the works of His own people, and He evaluates them. *For the LORD is the all-knowing God, and the magnificent works are his* (1 Samuel 2:3). He knows the why and the reason of the deeds of all believers. He sees their motives in every step they take. He discerns how much is done for His sake and how much is done for the sake of their own praise. Sadly, many things are done by believers that seem very good to you and me, but are rated very low by Christ.

The Lord Jesus knows the works of all His own people, and He will one day reward them. He never overlooks a kind word or a kind deed done in His name. He will acknowledge the least fruit of faith and declare it before the world in the day of His appearing. If you love the Lord Jesus and follow Him, you can be sure that your work and labor will not be in vain in the Lord. The works of those who die in the Lord *do follow them* (Revelation 14:13). Their works will not go before them or even beside them, but they will follow them and will be recognized in the day of Christ's appearing. The parable of the pounds will be made good (Luke 19:11-27). *Each one shall receive his own reward according to his own labour* (1 Corinthians 3:8). The world does not know you, for it does not know your Master, but Jesus sees and knows all. *I know thy works.*

Think what a solemn warning there is here to all worldly and hypocritical professors of Christianity. Let all such people read, acknowledge, and digest these words. Jesus says to you, *I know thy works.* You may deceive me or any other minister; it is easy to do so. You may receive the bread and wine from my hands and yet be clinging to iniquity in

your hearts. You may sit under the pulpit of an evangelical preacher week after week and hear his words with a serious face, yet still not believe what he says. Remember that you cannot deceive Christ. He who discovered the deadness of Sardis and the lukewarmness of Laodicea sees you through and through, and He will expose your sin at the last day unless you repent.

Believe me – hypocrisy is a losing game. It will never end well to seem to be one thing and actually be another, to have the name of Christian and not really be one. You can be certain that if your conscience troubles you and condemns you in this matter – *be sure your sin will catch up with you* (Numbers 32:23). The eye that saw Achan steal the golden wedge and hide it is upon you (Joshua 7). The book that recorded the deeds of Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27) and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) is recording your ways. Jesus mercifully sends you a word of warning today. He says, *I know thy works*.

Believe me – hypocrisy
is a losing game.

Think also about what encouragement there is here for every honest and true-hearted believer. To you Jesus also says, *I know thy works*. You see no beauty in any action that you do. It all seems imperfect, blemished, and defiled. You are often sick at heart because of your own shortcomings. You often feel that your whole life is one great debt to God, and that every day you fall further behind.

Know now that Jesus can see some beauty in everything that you do from a conscientious desire to please Him. His eye can discern excellence in the least thing that is a fruit of His own Spirit. He can pick out the grains of gold from amid the dross of your performances, and He can sift the wheat from amid the chaff in all your doings. Your tears are all put into His bottle (Psalm 56:8). Your efforts to do good to others, however feeble, are written in His book of remembrance (Malachi 3:16). The smallest cup of cold water given in His name will not lose its reward (Matthew 10:42). He does not forget your work and labor of love, no matter how little the world may regard it.

It is very wonderful, and it is true. Jesus loves to honor the work of His Spirit in His people and to pass over their weaknesses. He dwells on the faith of Rahab, but not on her lie. He commends His apostles for

continuing with Him in His temptations, but passes over their ignorance and lack of faith (Luke 22:28). *Like as a father has mercy upon his children, so the LORD has mercy upon those that fear him* (Psalm 103:13). As a father finds pleasure in even the smallest acts of his children, of which a stranger knows nothing, so I suppose the Lord finds pleasure in our poor, feeble efforts to serve Him.

It is all very wonderful. I can well understand the righteous in the day of judgment saying, *Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee? or thirsty and give thee drink? When did we see thee a stranger and take thee in? or naked and clothed thee? Or when did we see thee sick or in prison and come unto thee?* (Matthew 25:37-39). It may well seem incredible and impossible that they could have done anything worth mentioning in the great day! Yet it is so. Let all believers take comfort in this. The Lord says, *I know thy works*. It should humble you, but it should not make you afraid.

I ask my readers to observe, in the third and last place, that in every epistle to the seven churches, the Lord Jesus makes a promise to the person who overcomes. Seven times over, Jesus gives to the churches exceeding great and precious promises. Each one is different, and each one is full of strong consolation – but each one is addressed to the overcoming Christian. It is always *he that overcomes*, or *to him that overcomes*. I ask you to take notice of this.

Every professing Christian is the soldier of Christ. He is bound by his baptism to fight Christ's battle against sin, the world, and the devil. The person who does not do this breaks his vow. He is a spiritual defaulter. He does not fulfil the commitments made for him. The person who does not do this is practically renouncing his Christianity. The very fact that he belongs to a church, attends a Christian place of worship, and calls himself a Christian is a public declaration that he desires to be counted as a soldier of Jesus Christ.

Armor is provided for the professing Christian, if he will only use it.

Therefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and stand fast, all the work having been finished. Stand firm, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate, of

righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, above all, taking the shield of faith, with which ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Ephesians 6:13-17)

In addition to the armor of God, the professing Christian has the best leader: Jesus, the Captain of Salvation, through whom he can be more than conqueror. The Christian soldier has the best provisions: the bread and water of life. The Christian has the best pay promised to him: an eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17).

All this has been proven for many years, and I will not discuss this at length now. The one point I want to impress upon your soul now is that the true believer is not only a soldier, but he is a victorious soldier. He not only professes to fight on Christ's side against sin, the world, and the devil, but he actually does fight and overcome.

This is one great distinguishing mark of true Christians. Other people might like to be numbered in the ranks of Christ's army. Other people might have lazy wishes and leisurely desires after the crown of glory. It is the true Christian alone, though, who does the work of a soldier. He alone acceptably meets the enemies of his soul – really fights with them, and in that fight overcomes them.

One great lesson I want people to learn from these seven epistles is that if you want to prove that you are born again and going to heaven, you must be a victorious soldier of Christ. If you want to make it clear that you have any rightful claim to Christ's precious promises, you must fight the good fight in Christ's cause, and in that fight you must conquer.

Victory is the only satisfactory evidence that you have a saving religion. Maybe you like good sermons. You respect the Bible and read it occasionally. You say your prayers every morning and night. You have family prayers. You give to religious charities. I thank God for this. It is all very good. But how goes the battle? How does the great conflict go on all this time? Are you overcoming the love of the world and the fear of man? Are you overcoming the passions, tempers, and lusts of your own heart? Are you resisting the devil and making him flee from you? How

is it in this matter? You must either rule or serve sin, the devil, and the world. There is no middle course. You must either conquer or be lost.

I know very well that it is a hard battle that you must fight, and I want you to know it, too. You must fight the good fight of faith and endure hardships if you want to lay hold of eternal life. You must make up your mind to fight daily if you want to reach heaven. There may be short roads to heaven invented by man, but ancient Christianity, the good old way, is the way of the cross – the way of conflict. Sin, the world, and the devil must be actually opposed, resisted, and overcome.

This is the road that saints of old have traveled, and they left their record on high.

- When Moses refused the pleasures of sin in Egypt and chose affliction with the people of God – this was overcoming: he overcame the love of pleasure (Hebrews 11:24-26).
- When Micaiah refused to prophesy smooth things to king Ahab although he knew he would be persecuted if he spoke the truth – this was overcoming: he overcame the love of ease (1 Kings 22:8-28).
- When Daniel refused to give up praying although he knew the den of lions was prepared for him – this was overcoming: he overcame the fear of death (Daniel 6:7-11).
- When Matthew rose from the receipt of custom at our Lord's bidding, left all, and followed Him – this was overcoming: he overcame the love of money (Luke 5:27-28).
- When Peter and John stood up boldly before the council and said, *For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard* – this was overcoming: they overcame the fear of man (Acts 4:18-20).
- When Saul the Pharisee gave up all his prospects of advancement among the Jews and preached that very Jesus whom he had once persecuted – this was overcoming: he overcame the love of man's praise (Galatians 1:21-23).

The same kind of thing that these men did, you must also do if you

want to be saved. They were men with the same kind of passions as you have, yet they overcame (James 5:17). They had as many trials as you can possibly have, and yet they overcame. They fought. They wrestled. They struggled. You must do the same.

What was the secret of their victory? It was their faith. They believed on Jesus, and in believing they were made strong. They believed on Jesus, and in believing they were lifted up. In all their battles, they kept their eyes on Jesus, and He never left them nor abandoned them. *They have overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony*, and so may you (Revelation 12:11).

I set these words before you. I ask you to take them to heart. Resolve, by the grace of God, to be an overcoming Christian. I fear much for many professing Christians. I see no sign of fighting in them, much less of victory. They never fight one battle on the side of Christ. They are at peace with His enemies. They have no quarrel with sin. I warn you – this is not Christianity. This is not the way to heaven.

I often fear much for those who hear the gospel regularly. I fear that you might become so familiar with the sound of its doctrines that you insensibly become dead to its power. I fear that your religion might sink down into a little vague talk about your own weakness and corruption and a few sentimental expressions about Christ, while you completely neglect real, practical fighting on Christ's side. Beware of this state of mind! *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only* (James 1:22). No victory – no crown! Fight and overcome!

Young men and women, especially those who have been brought up in religious families, I am very afraid for you. I am afraid that you might develop a habit of giving in to every temptation. I am afraid that you might become afraid of saying "No!" to the world and the devil – and when sinners entice you, you find it easier to give in than to resist. Beware, I plead with you, of giving in. Every compromise will make you weaker. Go into the world resolved to fight Christ's battle – and fight your way on.

Believers in the Lord Jesus of every church and status in life – I have much compassion for you. I know your course is hard. I know it is an

I am afraid that you might become afraid of saying "No!" to the world and the devil.

intense battle you must fight. I know you are often tempted to say, "It is of no use," and to lay down your weapons completely.

Cheer up, dear brothers and sisters. Take comfort, I beg you. Look at the bright side of your position. Be encouraged to fight on. The time is short. The Lord is at hand. The night is far spent. Millions as weak as you have fought the same fight before you. Not one of all those millions has been finally led captive by Satan. Your enemies are mighty, but the Captain of your salvation is mightier still. His arm, His grace, and His Spirit will hold you up. Cheer up. Do not be discouraged.

So what if you lose a battle or two? You will not lose them all. So what if you fall down sometimes? You will not remain down. So what if you fall seven times? You will not be destroyed. Watch against sin, *so that sin shall have no dominion over you* (Romans 6:14). *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you* (James 4:7). Come out boldly from the world, and the world will be constrained to let you go. You will find yourselves in the end more than conquerors. You will overcome.

Let me present a few words of application, and then I will be done.

For one thing, let me warn all who are living only for the world to be careful what you are doing. You are an enemy to Christ, though you may not know it. He regards your ways, though you turn your back on Him and refuse to give Him your heart. He is observing your daily life and your daily ways. There will yet be a resurrection of all your thoughts, words, and actions. You might forget them, but God will not. You might be careless about them, but they are carefully written down in the book of remembrance. Oh, worldly man, think of this! Tremble; tremble and repent!

For another thing, let me warn all religious and self-righteous people to be careful that you are not deceived. You think you will go to heaven because you go regularly to church. You have an expectation of eternal life because you are always at the Lord's Table and often go to church, but where is your repentance? Where is your faith? Where is your evidence of a new heart? Where is the work of the Spirit? Where is the evidence of regeneration? Oh, formal Christian, consider these questions! Tremble; tremble and repent!

For another thing, let me warn all careless members of churches to beware that you do not lose your soul to hell by playing around

with the world. You continue year after year as if there was no battle to be fought with sin, the world, and the devil. You pass through life as a smiling, laughing, friendly person, and you behave as if there were no devil, no heaven, and no hell. Oh, careless church attender, or careless Methodist, careless Lutheran, careless Presbyterian, careless Independent, careless Baptist – awake to see eternal realities in their true light! Awake and put on the armor of God! Awake and fight hard for life! Tremble; tremble and repent!

For another thing, let me warn everyone who wants to be saved not to be content with the world's standard of religion. Certainly no one with his eyes open can fail to see that the Christianity of the New Testament is something far higher and deeper than the Christianity of most professing Christians. The formal, easygoing, do-little thing that most people call religion is evidently not the religion of the Lord Jesus. The things that He praises in these seven epistles are not praised by the world. The things that He blames are not things in which the world sees any harm. Oh, if you would follow Christ, do not be content with the world's Christianity! Tremble; tremble and repent!

In the last place, let me warn everyone who professes to be a believer in the Lord Jesus not to be content with a little religion. Of all sights in the church of Christ, I know none more painful to my own eyes than a Christian content and satisfied with a little grace, a little repentance, a little faith, a little knowledge, a little kindness, and a little holiness. I do beg and plead with every believing person who reads this not to be that kind of person. If you desire to have any usefulness, if you have any desire to promote your Lord's glory, if you have any desire for much inward peace – do not be content with a little religion.

Instead, let us seek every year that we live to make more spiritual progress than we have done before. Let us strive to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to grow in humility and to be more familiar with our own hearts, to grow in spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, and to grow in conformity to the image of our Lord.

Let us beware of leaving our first love like Ephesus did, of becoming lukewarm like Laodicea was, of tolerating false practices like Pergamos did, of tampering with false doctrine like Thyatira did, or of becoming half-dead and ready to die, like Sardis had become (Revelation 2:1-3:22).

Let us rather desire the best gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31). Let us aim at complete holiness. Let us endeavor to be like Smyrna and Philadelphia. Let us hold fast what we have already and continually seek to have more. Let us labor to be unmistakable Christians. Let it not be our distinguishing character that we are people of science or of education or of the world or of pleasure or of business – but let it be known by all that we are people of God. Let us so live that all may see that the things of God are the most important things to us, that the glory of God is the main goal in our lives, that to follow Christ is our main object in this life, and that to be with Christ is our greatest desire in the life to come.

Let us live in this way, and we will be happy. Let us live in this way, and we will do good to the world. Let us live in this way, and we will leave good evidence of our Christianity behind us when we are buried. Let us live in this way – and the Spirit's word to the churches will not have been spoken to us in vain.

Chapter 15

Lovest Thou Me?

Lovest thou me? (John 21:16)

The question that heads this chapter was addressed by Christ to the apostle Peter. A more important question could not be asked. Two thousand years have passed away since the words were spoken, but to this very day the question is most searching and useful.

An inclination to love somebody is one of the most common feelings that God has placed in the human nature. Too often, unhappily, people set their affection on unworthy objects. I want to claim a place for Him who alone is worthy of all our hearts' best feelings. I want people to give some of their love to that divine Person who loved us and gave Himself for us (Ephesians 5:2). In all their loving, I do not want them to forget to love Christ.

Allow me to emphasize this mighty subject to every reader. This is no matter for mere enthusiasts and fanatics. It deserves the consideration of every reasonable Christian who believes the Bible. Our very salvation is bound up with it. Life or death and heaven or hell depend on our ability to answer the simple question, "Do you love Christ?"

There are two points that I want to bring up in regard to this subject.

First, I want to show the special feeling that a true Christian has toward Christ – he loves Him. A true Christian is not just a baptized person. He is something more. He is not a person who only goes to church on Sundays as a matter of duty, while living all the rest of the

week as if there were no God. Formality is not Christianity. Routine lip worship is not true religion. The Scripture speaks clearly: *For not all the descendants of Israel are Israelites* (Romans 9:6). The practical lesson of those words is clear and plain. All are not true Christians who are members of the visible church of Christ.

The true Christian is one whose religion is in his heart and life. He feels it in his heart. It is seen by others in his conduct and life. He feels his sinfulness and guilt, and he repents. He sees Jesus Christ to be that divine Savior whom his soul needs, and he commits himself to Him. He puts off the old man with his corrupt and carnal habits, and he puts on the new man (Ephesians 4:22-24). He lives a new and holy life, fighting habitually against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Christ Himself is the cornerstone of his Christianity.

Ask him in what he trusts for the forgiveness of his many sins, and he will tell you that he trusts in the death of Christ. Ask him in what righteousness he hopes to stand innocent at the judgment day, and he will tell you it is the righteousness of Christ. Ask him by what pattern he tries to structure his life, and he will tell you that it is the example of Christ.

In addition to all this, there is one thing in a true Christian that is particularly distinguishing to him. That thing is love to Christ. Knowledge, faith, hope, reverence, and obedience are all noticeable features in a true Christian's character, but his picture would be very imperfect if you omitted his love to his divine Master. He not only knows, trusts, and obeys, but he goes further than this – he loves.

This particular characteristic of a true Christian is one that we find mentioned several times in the Bible. *Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ* is an expression that many Christians are familiar with (Acts 20:21). Let it never be forgotten that love is mentioned by the Holy Spirit in almost as strong terms as faith. As great as the danger is of him who does not believe, the danger of him who does not love is equally great. Not believing and not loving are both steps to everlasting ruin.

Hear what Paul says to the Corinthians: *If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema* (1 Corinthians 16:22). Paul allows no way out to the person who does not love Christ. He leaves him no loophole or excuse. A person can lack clear head knowledge

and yet be saved. He might fail in courage and be overcome by the fear of man, like Peter. He might fall tremendously, like David, and yet rise again. But if a person does not love Christ, he is not in the way of life. The curse is still upon him. He is on the broad road that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

Hear what Paul says to the Ephesians: *Grace be with all those that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption* (Ephesians 6:24). The apostle is here sending his good wishes and declaring his good will to all true Christians. Many of them, no doubt, he had never seen. Many of them in the early churches, we can be very sure, were weak in faith, knowledge, and self-denial. How, then, would he describe them in sending his letter? What words can he use that will not discourage the weaker brethren? He chose a sweeping expression that exactly describes all true Christians under one common name. Everyone had not reached the same level, whether in doctrine or practice, but all loved Christ *in incorruption*.

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ Himself says to the Jews: *If God were your Father, ye would surely love me* (John 8:42). He saw His misguided enemies satisfied with their spiritual condition simply because they were children of Abraham. He saw them, like many ignorant Christians of our own day, claiming to be God's children for no better reasons than that they were circumcised and belonged to the Jewish church. He lays down the broad principle that no man is a child of God who does not love God's only begotten Son. No man has a right to call God "Father" who does not love Christ. It would be good for many Christians to remember that this mighty principle applies to them as well as to the Jews. If there is no love to Christ, then there is no sonship to God!

If there is no love to Christ, then there is no sonship to God!

Hear once more what our Lord Jesus Christ said to the apostle Peter after He rose from the dead. Three times He asked him the question, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* (John 21:15-17.) The occasion was remarkable. He wanted to gently remind His erring disciple of his thrice-repeated fall. He desired to call forth from him a new confession of faith before publicly restoring to him his commission to feed the church.

What was the question that Jesus asked Peter? He could have asked,

Do you believe? Are you converted? Are you ready to confess Me? Will you obey Me? Jesus did not ask any of these questions. He simply asked, *Lovest thou me?* Jesus wants us to know that this is the point on which a person's Christianity hinges. As simple as the question sounded, it was most searching. Plain and easy to be understood by the most uneducated person, it contains that which tests the reality of the most advanced apostle. If a person truly loves Christ, all is right; if not, all is wrong.

Do you want to know the secret of this special feeling toward Christ that distinguishes the true Christian? You have it in the words of John: *We love him, because he first loved us* (1 John 4:19). That text, no doubt, applies especially to God the Father, but it is no less true of God the Son.

A true Christian loves Christ for all He has done for him. He has suffered in his place and has died for him on the cross. By His blood, He has redeemed him from the guilt, power, and consequences of sin. He has called him by His Spirit to self-knowledge, repentance, faith, hope, and holiness. He has forgiven all his many sins and blotted them out. He has freed him from the captivity of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He has taken him from the brink of hell, placed him in the narrow way, and set his face toward heaven. He has given him light instead of darkness, peace of conscience instead of uneasiness, hope instead of uncertainty, and life instead of death. Can you wonder that the true Christian loves Christ?

The Christian also loves Him because of all that He is still doing. He is daily washing away his many shortcomings and infirmities and pleading his soul's cause before God. Christ Jesus is daily supplying all the needs of his soul and providing him with an hourly provision of mercy and grace. He is daily leading him by His Spirit to a city of habitation, bearing with him when he is weak and ignorant, raising him up when he stumbles and falls, protecting him against his many enemies, and preparing an eternal home for him in heaven. Can you wonder that the true Christian loves Christ?

Does the debtor love the friend who unexpectedly and undeservedly pays all his debts, supplies him with fresh funds, and takes him into partnership with himself? Does the prisoner in war love the man who at the risk of his own life breaks through the enemy's lines, rescues him, and sets him free? Does the drowning sailor love the man who plunges

into the sea, dives after him, catches him by the hair of his head, and by a mighty effort saves him from a watery grave? A very child can answer such questions as these. Just in the same way and upon the same principles, a true Christian loves Jesus Christ.

This love for Christ is the inseparable companion of saving faith. A person can have the faith of demons, a mere intellectual faith, without love, but the faith that saves is always accompanied by love. Love cannot take the place of faith. It cannot justify. It does not join the soul to Christ. It cannot bring peace to the conscience. However, where there is real justifying faith in Christ, there will always be heart-love to Christ. He who is really forgiven is the person who will really love (Luke 7:47). If a person has no love for Christ, you can be sure that he has no faith.

Love for Christ is the driving force behind work for Christ. There is little done for His cause on earth from a sense of duty or from knowledge of what is right and proper. The heart must be interested before the hands will move and continue moving. Excitement may galvanize the Christian's hands into intermittent and occasional activity, but without love there will be no patient continuance in well-doing or unwearied labor in missionary work at home or abroad.

The nurse in a hospital might do her duty properly and well. She might give the sick man his medicine at the right time, feed him, help him, and attend to all his needs, but there is a big difference between that nurse and a wife tending the sickbed of a beloved husband, or a mother watching over a dying child. The one acts from a sense of duty, but the other acts from affection and love. The one does her duty because she is paid for it, while the other is what she is because of her heart. It is just the same in the matter of service for Christ. The great workers of the church – the ones who have led unlikely hopes in the mission field and who have turned the world upside down – have all been notably lovers of Christ.

Examine the characters of men such as John Owen, Richard Baxter, Samuel Rutherford, George Herbert, Robert Leighton, James Hervey, George Whitefield, John Wesley, Henry Martyn, Adoniram Judson, Edward Bickersteth, Charles Simeon, William Hewitson, Robert Murray McCheyne, Hugh Stowell, and Hugh McNeile. These men have left a mark on the world. What was the common feature of their characters?

They all loved Christ. They not only held a creed, but they loved a Person, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

Love to Christ is the point that we should especially dwell upon in teaching Christianity to children. Election, imputed righteousness, original sin, justification, sanctification, and even faith itself are subjects that sometimes puzzle a child of tender years, but love to Jesus seems far more within reach of their understanding. They can understand that Jesus loved them even to His death – and that they ought to love Him in return. How true it is that *out of the mouth of children and sucklings thou hast perfected praise* (Matthew 21:16). There are Christians who know every article of the Athanasian, Nicene, and Apostolic creeds, yet know less of real Christianity than a little child who only knows that he loves Christ.

Love to Christ is the common meeting point of believers of every branch of Christ's church on earth. Whether Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Baptist or Independent, Calvinist or Arminian, Methodist or Moravian, Lutheran or Reformed, Established or Free – here, at least, they are agreed. They might disagree about forms and ceremonies, church government, and modes of worship, but on one point they are united. They have all one common feeling toward Him on whom they build their hope of salvation. They *love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption* (Ephesians 6:24). Many of them, perhaps, are ignorant of systematic divinity and could not very well argue the distinctives of their church, but they all know what they feel toward Him who died for their sins. "I cannot speak much for Christ, sir," said an old, uneducated Christian woman to Dr. Chalmers, "but if I cannot speak for Him, I could die for Him!"

Love to Christ will be the distinguishing mark of all saved souls in heaven. The multitude that no one can number will all be of one mind (Revelation 7:9). Old differences will be merged in one common feeling. Old doctrinal distinctives, fiercely fought for upon earth, will be covered over by one common sense of debt to Christ. Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli will no longer dispute. John Wesley and Augustus Toplady will no longer waste time in controversy. Churchmen and Dissenters will no longer bite and devour one another. All will find themselves joining with one heart and voice in that hymn of praise: *Unto him that loved*

us and washed us from our sins in his own blood and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen (Revelation 1:5-6).

The words that John Bunyan puts in the mouth of Mr. Standfast as he stood in the river of death are very beautiful. He said:

The waters certainly taste bitter and feel cold to the stomach, yet the thoughts of what I am going to and the party that awaits me on the other side warm my heart like a glowing coal. I see myself at the end of my journey with my hard days behind me. I am going to see that head which was crowned with thorns, and that face which was spit upon for me. Until now, I have lived by faith based on what I've heard; but now where I go I shall live by sight and shall be with him in whose company I delight myself. I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of, and wherever I have seen the print of his shoe in the earth, I have longed to follow in his steps too. His name has been as sweet to me as a honey pot and more fragrant than any perfume. His voice has been pleasing and I have longed to see his face more than most people desire sunlight.⁴¹

Happy are they who know something of this experience! He who would like to be in tune for heaven must know something of love for Christ. It would be better to have never been born than to die ignorant of that love.

Secondly, I want to show the special characteristics by which love for Christ makes itself known. This point is one of great importance. If there is no salvation without love for Christ, and if he who does not love Christ is in danger of eternal condemnation, then we each ought to figure out very clearly what we know about this matter. Christ is in heaven, and we are upon earth. In what way will the person be recognized who loves Him?

He who would like to be in tune for heaven must know something of love for Christ.

Thankfully, the point is one that is not very difficult to settle. How do we know whether we love any person here upon earth? In what way and manner does love show itself between people in this world – between

41 *Pilgrim's Progress* (Updated Edition), ANEKO Press, 2014

husband and wife, between parent and child, between brother and sister, or between friend and friend? Let these questions be answered by common sense and observations, and that is all we need. Let these questions be honestly answered, and the knot before us is untied. How does affection show itself among ourselves?

If we love someone, we like to think about that person. We do not need to be reminded of him. We do not forget his name, his appearance, his character, his opinions, his tastes, his position, or his occupation. He comes up before our mind's eye many times a day. Though perhaps far distant, he is often present in our thoughts. That is how it is between the true Christian and Christ! Christ dwells in his heart and is thought about every day (Ephesians 3:17). The true Christian does not need to be reminded that he has a crucified Master. He often thinks about Him. He never forgets that Jesus Christ has a day, a cause, and a people, and that he belongs to Him. Affection is the real secret of a good memory in Christianity. No worldly person can think much about Christ unless Christ is brought to his attention, because the worldly person has no affection for Him. The true Christian thinks about Christ every day that he lives for this one simple reason – he loves Him.

If we love someone, we like to hear about him. We find pleasure in listening to those who speak about him. We are interested in any report that others give about him. We pay attention when others talk about him and describe his ways, his sayings, his doings, and his plans. Some people might hear him mentioned with utter indifference, but our own hearts leap within us at the very sound of his name. This is how it is between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian delights to hear something about his Master. He likes those sermons best that are full of Christ. He enjoys that company most in which people talk of Jesus.

I read of an old Welsh believer who used to walk several miles every Sunday to hear an English clergyman preach, though she did not understand a word of English. She was asked why she did so. She replied that this clergyman named the name of Christ so often in his sermons that it did her good. She loved even the name of her Savior.

If we love someone, we like to read about him. What intense pleasure a letter from an absent husband gives to a wife, or a letter from an absent son gives to his mother! Others might not see much worth

noticing in the letter. They can hardly take the trouble to read it through. But those who love the writer see something in the letter that no one else can see. They carry it around with them as a treasure. They read it over and over again. This is how it is between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian delights to read the Scriptures because they tell him about his beloved Savior. It is no tiresome duty with him to read the Bible. He does not need to be reminded to take his Bible with him when he goes on a journey. He cannot be happy without it. Why is this? It is because the Scriptures testify of Him whom his soul loves, even Christ.

If we love someone, we like to please him. We are happy to ask about his tastes and opinions, to act upon his advice, and to do the things that he approves. We even deny ourselves in order to meet his wishes. We abstain from things that we know he dislikes, and we learn to do things that we are not naturally inclined to do – because we think it will please him. This is how it is between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian studies to please Him by being holy both in body and spirit. Show him anything in his life that Christ hates, and he will give it up. Show him anything that Christ delights in, and he will pursue it. He does not complain that Christ's requirements are too strict and severe, as the children of the world do. Christ's *commandments are not grievous*, and Christ's burden is light to him (1 John 5:3; Matthew 11:30). Why is this? Simply because he loves Him.

If we love someone, we like his friends. We are favorably inclined to them, even before we know them. We are drawn to them by the common tie of common love to one and the same person. When we meet his friends, we do not feel that we are complete strangers. There is a bond of union between us. They love the person whom we love, and that alone is an introduction. This is how it is between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian regards all Christ's friends as his friends, members of the same body, children of the same family, soldiers in the same army, and travelers to the same home. When he meets them, he feels as if he had long known them. He is more at home with them in a few minutes than he is with many worldly people after knowing them for several years. What is the reason for this? It is simply affection to the same Savior and love to the same Lord.

If we love someone, we are jealous about his name and honor. We do not like to hear him spoken against without speaking up for him and defending him. We feel obligated to maintain his interests and his reputation. We regard the person who treats him poorly with almost as much disfavor as if he had poorly treated us. This is how it is between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian regards with a godly jealousy all efforts to belittle or ridicule his Master's word, name, church, or day. He will confess Him before princes, if need be, and he will be sensitive of the least dishonor put upon Him. He will not remain silent and allow his Master's cause to be put to shame without testifying against the slander. Why is this? Simply because he loves Him.

If we love someone, we like to talk to him. We tell him all our thoughts and pour out all our heart to him. We find no difficulty in finding things to talk about. However silent and reserved we may be to others, we find it easy to talk to a much-loved friend. However often we may meet, we are never at a loss for things to discuss. We always have much to say, much to ask about, much to describe, and much to communicate. This is how it is between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian finds no difficulty in speaking to his Savior. He must talk to Him every day, and he is not happy unless he does so. He speaks to Him in prayer every morning and every night. He tells Him his needs and desires, his feelings and his fears. He asks counsel of Him in difficulty. He asks comfort of Him in trouble. He cannot help it. He must converse with his Savior continually or he would faint by the way. Why is this? Simply because he loves Him.

Finally, if we love someone, we always like to be with him. Thinking, hearing, reading, and occasionally talking are all good in their own way, but when we really love people, we want something more. We want to always be in their company. We want to be continually with them. We want to hold communion with them without interruption and without ever leaving. This is how it is between the true Christian and Christ!

The heart of a true Christian desires that blessed day when he will see his Master face to face, and never again leave. He wants to be done with sinning and repenting. Believing, he wants to begin that endless life when he will see as he has been seen, and will sin no more. He has found it sweet to live by faith, and he knows it will be sweeter still to live

by sight. He has found it pleasant to hear of Christ and talk of Christ and read of Christ. How much more pleasant it will be to see Christ with his own eyes, and never to leave Him! *It is better to enjoy the good that is present than the wandering of desire* (Ecclesiastes 6:9). Why is this? Simply because he loves Him.

These are the characteristics by which true love may be discovered. They are all plain, simple, and easy to understand. There is nothing secret, obscure, or mysterious about them. If you use them honestly and handle them fairly, you cannot fail to get some light on the subject of holiness.

Maybe you had a beloved son in the army at the time of a great war. Maybe he was actively engaged in that war and was in the very midst of the struggle. Do you not remember how strong, deep, and anxious your feelings were about that son? That was love!

Maybe you have known what it is to have a beloved husband in the navy, often called away from home by duty, often separated from you for many months and even years. Can you not recall your sorrowful feelings at that time of separation? That was love!

Maybe at this moment you have a beloved brother in a big city, living for the first time amid the temptations of the city, trying to make his way in business. How will things turn out? Will he succeed? Will you ever see him again? You often think about that brother. That is affection!

Maybe you are engaged to be married to a person who is right for you in every way, but wisdom makes it necessary to delay the marriage to a later time, and duty makes it necessary to be at a distance from the one you have promised to make your wife. Must you not confess that she is often in your thoughts? Must you not confess that you like to hear of her and hear from her, and that you desire to see her? That is affection!

Love to the Lord Jesus
Christ is no hidden,
secret, unseen thing.

These or similar things are familiar to everyone. I do not need to dwell upon them any further. They are as old as the hills. They are understood all over the world. There is hardly a branch of Adam's family that does not know something of affection and love. Let it never be said that we cannot know whether a Christian really loves Christ. It

can be known. It can be discovered. The proof can be seen. You have heard them this very day. Love to the Lord Jesus Christ is no hidden, secret, unseen thing. It is like the light – it will be seen. It is like sound – it will be heard. It is like heat – it will be felt. Where it exists, it cannot be hidden. Where it cannot be seen, you can be sure there is none.

It is time for me to bring this chapter to a conclusion, but I cannot end without attempting to bring this subject home to the individual conscience of each reader. I do this in all love and affection. My heart's desire and prayer to God in writing this is to do good to souls.

Let me ask you to look the question in the face that Christ asked of Peter, and try to answer it for yourself. Look at it seriously. Examine it carefully. Weigh it well. After reading all that I have said about it, can you honestly say that you love Christ?

It is not a good answer to tell me that you believe the truth of Christianity and accept the doctrines of the Christian faith. Such religion as this will never save your soul. The demons also believe this, and they tremble (James 2:19). True saving Christianity is not merely believing a certain set of opinions and holding a certain set of ideas. Its essence is knowing, trusting, and loving a certain living Person who died for us – Christ the Lord. The early Christians, like Phoebe, Persis, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Gaius, and Philemon, probably knew little about dogmatic theology, but they all had this main prominent feature in their religion – they loved Christ.

It is not a good answer to tell me that you disapprove of a religion of feelings. If you mean by that that you dislike a religion consisting of nothing but feelings, I agree with you entirely. But if you mean to dismiss feelings entirely, you must know little about Christianity. The Bible teaches us plainly that a person can have good feelings without any true religion, but it teaches us no less plainly that there can be no true Christianity without some feeling toward Christ.

It is useless to conceal the truth that if you do not love Christ, your soul is in great danger. You have no saving faith now while you live, and you are unfit for heaven if you die. He who lives without love for Christ cannot be aware of any gratitude or commitment to Him. He who dies without love for Christ could never be happy in heaven, where Christ is all and is in all. Awake to know the danger of your situation.

Open your eyes. Consider your ways and be wise. I can only warn you as a friend, but I do it with all my heart and soul. May God grant that this warning will not be in vain!

In the next place, if you do not love Christ, let me tell you plainly what the reason is. You have no sense of debt to Him. You have no feeling of obligation to Him. You have no abiding recollection of having gotten anything from Him. This being the case, it is not likely, probable, or reasonable that you should love Him.

There is only one remedy for this state of things. That remedy is self-knowledge and the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The eyes of your understanding must be opened. You must find out what you are by nature. You must discover that great secret of your guilt and emptiness in God's sight.

Maybe you never read your Bible at all, or you only read an occasional chapter as a mere matter of form, without interest, understanding, or self-application. Take my advice this day and change your plan. Begin to read the Bible like a person in earnest, and do not rest until you become familiar with it. Read what the law of God requires, as explained by the Lord Jesus in the fifth chapter of Matthew. Read how Paul describes human nature in the first two chapters of his letter to the Romans. Study such passages as these with prayer for the Spirit's teaching, and then say whether you are not a debtor to God and in mighty need of a Friend like Christ.

Maybe you have never known anything of real, wholehearted, earnest prayer. You have regarded religion as a concern of churches, forms, services, and Sundays, but you have never considered it to be something that requires the serious, heartfelt attention of the inward man. Take my advice this day and change your plan. Begin the habit of sincere, earnest pleading with God about your soul. Ask Him for light, teaching, and self-knowledge. Beg Him to show you anything you need to know for the saving of your soul. Do this with all your heart and mind, and I have no doubt that before long you will feel your need of Christ.

The advice I offer might seem simple and old-fashioned, but do not reject it because of that. It is the same good way in which millions have walked already and found peace for their souls. Not to love Christ is to be in imminent danger of eternal ruin. To see your need of Christ

and your amazing debt to Christ is the first step toward loving Him. To know yourself and to find out your real condition before God is the only way to see your need. To search God's Book and ask God for light in prayer is the right course by which to attain saving knowledge. Do not be above taking the advice I offer. Take it and be saved.

In the last place, if you really know anything of love toward Christ, accept two parting words of comfort and counsel. The Lord grant that they may do you good.

For one thing, if you love Christ in deed and truth, rejoice in the thought that you have good evidence about the condition of your soul. True love for Jesus Christ is an evidence of grace.

What if you are sometimes perplexed with doubts and fears? What if you find it hard to say whether your faith is genuine and your grace is real? What if your eyes are often so dimmed with tears that you cannot clearly see your calling and election of God? There is still reason for hope and strong consolation if your heart can testify that you truly love Christ. Where there is true love, there is faith and grace. You would not love Him if He had not done something for you. Your very love is a token for good.

For another thing, if you love Christ, never be ashamed to let others see it and know it. Speak for Him. Witness for Him. Live for Him. Work for Him. If He has loved you and washed you from your sins in His own blood, you never need to keep back from letting others know that you know it and that you love Him in return.

A thoughtless, ungodly English traveler said to a North American Indian convert, "Man, what is the reason that you make so much of Christ and talk so much about Him? What has this Christ done for you that you should make such a big deal about Him?"

The converted Indian did not answer him in words. Instead, he gathered together some dry leaves and moss and made a ring with them on the ground. He picked up a live worm and put it in the middle of the ring. He struck a light and set the moss and leaves on fire. The flame soon rose and the heat scorched the worm. It writhed in agony, and after trying in vain to escape on every side, it curled itself up in the middle, as if about to die in despair. At that moment the Indian reached forth his hand, gently took up the worm, and placed it on his bosom.

“Stranger,” he said to the Englishman, “do you see that worm? I was that perishing creature. I was dying in my sins, hopeless, helpless, and on the brink of eternal fire. It was Jesus Christ who put forth the arm of His power. It was Jesus Christ who delivered me with the hand of His grace and plucked me from everlasting burnings. It was Jesus Christ who placed me, a poor sinful worm, near the heart of His love. Stranger, that is the reason why I talk of Jesus Christ and make much of Him. I am not ashamed of it, for I love Him.”

If we know anything about love for Christ, we should have the mind of this North American Indian! May we never think that we can love Jesus too well, live for Him too thoroughly, confess Him too boldly, or give our all for Him too completely! Of all the things that will surprise us on the resurrection morning, I believe it will surprise us the most that we did not love Christ more before we died.

Chapter 16

Without Christ

Ye were without Christ. (Ephesians 2:12)

The text above describes the state of the Ephesians before they became Christians, but that is not all. It describes the condition of every man and woman who is not converted to God. A more miserable state cannot be conceived! It is bad enough to be without money, without health, without a home, or without friends – but it is far worse to be without Christ.

Let us examine this text now and see what it contains. It might prove to be a message from God to some reader.

Let us first consider when it can be said of a person that he is *without Christ*. The expression *without Christ*, remember, is not one that I made up. The words were not first conceived by me, but were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They were used by Paul when he was reminding the Ephesian Christians what their former condition was, before they heard the gospel and believed. They had no doubt been ignorant and sinful, buried in idolatry and heathenism, and worshippers of the false goddess Diana, but Paul passes over all this completely. He seems to think that this would only partially describe their condition, so he draws a picture, of which the very first feature is the expression before us: *At that time ye were without Christ* (Ephesians 2:12). What does the expression mean?

A person is without Christ when he has no head knowledge of

Him. Millions, no doubt, are in this condition. They do not know who Christ is, what He has done, what He taught, why He was crucified, where He is now, or what He is to mankind. Basically, they are completely ignorant of Him. The heathen, of course, who have not yet heard the gospel come first under this description, but sadly, they are not alone. There are thousands of people living in civilized nations whose ideas about Christ are not any clearer than those of the heathen. Ask them what they know about Jesus Christ, and you will be astounded at the terrible darkness that covers their minds. Visit them on their deathbeds and you will find that they can tell you no more about Christ than about Mohammed. Some of these people are in small villages, and others are in large cities, but all have the same thing in common: they are without Christ.

I am aware that some modern ministers do not take the view that I have just stated. They tell us that all mankind has a part and interest in Christ whether they know Him or not. They say that all men and women, however sinful while they live, will be taken by Christ's mercy to heaven when they die! Such views, I firmly believe, cannot be reconciled with God's Word.

It is written, *This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent* (John 17:3). It is one of the characteristics of the wicked, on whom God will take vengeance at the last day, that they *do not know God* (2 Thessalonians 1:8). An unknown Christ is no Savior. What will the state of the heathen be after death? How will those who never heard the gospel be judged? In what manner will God deal with the helplessly unenlightened and unlearned? All these are questions that we can safely let alone. We can rest assured that God will do what is right. *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* (Genesis 18:25). We must not fly in the face of Scripture, though. If Bible words mean anything, to be ignorant of Christ is to be without Christ.

There is more. A person is without Christ when he has no heart-faith in Him as his Savior. It is quite possible to know all about Christ, yet not to put your trust in Him. There are multitudes who know every article of their church's statement of faith and can tell you articulately that Christ was "born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, dead, and buried.”⁴² They learned it at school. They have it held fast in their memories, but they make no practical use of their knowledge. They put their trust in something that is not “Christ.” They hope to go to heaven because they are moral and well-behaved, because they say their prayers and go to church, and because they have been baptized and go to the Lord’s Table. But as to a living faith in God’s mercy through Christ – a real, intelligent confidence in Christ’s blood and righteousness and intercession – these are things of which they know nothing at all. Of all such people I can see only one true explanation: they are without Christ.

I am aware that many people do not admit the truth of what I have just said. Some tell us that all baptized people are members of Christ by virtue of their baptism. Others tell us that where there is head knowledge, we have no right to question a person’s claim in Christ. To these views I have only one plain answer: the Bible forbids us to say that anyone is joined to Christ until he believes.

Baptism is no proof that we are joined to Christ. Simon Magus was baptized, yet he was distinctly told that he had *neither part nor lot in this matter* (Acts 8:21). Head knowledge is no proof that we are joined to Christ. The demons know Christ well enough, but they have no part in Christ Jesus. God knows, no doubt, who are His from all eternity, but we know nothing of our justification until we believe. The big question is, “Do we believe?” It is written, *He that does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him* (John 3:36). *He that believes not shall be condemned* (Mark 16:16). If Bible words mean anything, then to be without faith is to be without Christ.

The big question is,
“Do we believe?”

I have one more thing to say on this subject. A person is without Christ when the Holy Spirit’s work cannot be seen in his life. Who can avoid seeing, if he uses his eyes, that great numbers of professing Christians know nothing of inward conversion of heart? They will tell you that they believe the Christian religion. They regularly attend their places of worship. They think it is a good thing to be married and buried with all the ceremonies of the church. They would be very offended if

42 This is from the ancient statement of faith known as the Apostles’ Creed.

their Christianity were doubted, but where is the Holy Spirit to be seen in their lives? What are their hearts and affections set upon? Whose is the image and superscription that stands out in their tastes, habits, and ways? Sadly, there can only be one reply: they know nothing by experience of the renewing, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. They are still dead to God. Of all such people, only one account can be given: they are without Christ.

I am very aware, again, that not many will agree with this. The vast majority will tell you that it is extreme, absurd, and unreasonable to require so much in Christians and to claim that each person must be converted. They will say that it is impossible to maintain the high standard to which I have just referred without going out of the world. They say that we can surely go to heaven without being such very great saints.

To all this I can only reply, *For what does the scripture say?* (Romans 4:3). What does God say? It is written, *Except a person be born again from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God* (John 3:3). *Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of the heavens* (Matthew 18:3). *He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked* (1 John 2:6). *If anyone does have not the Spirit of Christ, that person is not of him* (Romans 8:9). *The scripture cannot be broken* (John 10:35). If Bible words mean anything, then to be without the Spirit is to be without Christ.

I recommend the three points I have just discussed for your serious and prayerful consideration. Think much about them. Examine these points carefully from every angle. In order to have a saving interest in Christ, knowledge, faith, and the grace of the Holy Spirit are absolutely needful. He who is without them is without Christ.

How painfully unknowledgeable many people are! They know literally nothing about Christianity. Christ, the Holy Spirit, faith, grace, conversion, and sanctification are mere words and names to them. They could not explain what these things mean to save their lives. Can such ignorance as this take anyone to heaven? Impossible! Without knowledge, you are without Christ!

How painfully self-righteous many people are! They can talk contentedly about having done their duty, having been kind to others, having always been faithful to their church, and having never been

as very bad as some – and therefore they seem to think they must go to heaven! A deep sense of sin and simple faith in Christ's blood and sacrifice seem to have no place in their religion. Their talk is all about doing and never about believing. Will such self-righteousness as this take anyone to heaven? Never! Without faith, you are without Christ!

How painfully ungodly many people are! They live in the habitual neglect of the Lord's Day, of God's Word, of God's ordinances, and of God's sacraments. They think nothing of doing things that God has directly forbidden. They are constantly living in ways that are directly contrary to God's commandments. Can such ungodliness result in salvation? Impossible! Without the Holy Spirit, you are without Christ!

I know very well that at first these statements might seem hard, sharp, rough, and severe. But after all, are they not God's truth as revealed to us in Scripture? If truth, should they not be made known? If necessary to be known, should they not be plainly explained? If I know anything of my own heart, I desire above all things to magnify the riches of God's love to sinners. I want to tell all mankind what wealth of mercy and lovingkindness is laid up in God's heart for all who will seek it.

I cannot find anywhere, though, that insensible, unbelieving, and unconverted people have any part in Christ! If I am wrong, I will be thankful to anyone who will show me a more excellent way. Until I am shown it, though, I must stand fast on the positions I have already laid down. I dare not forsake them lest I be found guilty of handling God's Word deceitfully. I dare not be silent about them lest the blood of souls be required at my hands (Ezekiel 3:18; 33:8). The person without knowledge, without faith, and without the Holy Spirit is a person without Christ!

Let me now turn to another point that I want to consider. What is the actual condition of a person without Christ? This is a part of our present subject that demands very special attention. I would be thankful indeed if I could exhibit it in its true colors. I can easily imagine some reader saying to himself, "Well, suppose I am without Christ. What is the great harm? I hope God will be merciful. I am no worse than many others. I think that things will end up all right." Listen to me, and by God's help, I will try to show that you are sadly deceived. Without Christ, all will not be right, but all will be desperately wrong.

For one thing, to be without Christ is to be without God. The apostle Paul told the Ephesians this in plain words. He ends the famous sentence that begins, *Ye were without Christ*, by saying that they were also *without God in the world* (Ephesians 2:12). What thinking person can wonder that this is so? That person must have very low opinions of God who does not see Him as a most pure, holy, glorious, and spiritual Being. That person must be very blind who does not see that human nature is corrupt, sinful, and defiled.

How then can such a worm as man draw near to God with comfort? How can he look up to Him with confidence and not feel afraid? How can he speak to Him, have dealings with Him, and look forward to dwelling with Him without dread and terror? There must be a Mediator between God and man, and there is only One who can fill the office. That One is Christ. *For there is only one God and likewise only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Timothy 2:5).

Who are you who speaks of God's mercy and God's love separately from and independent of Christ? There is no such love and mercy recorded in Scripture. Know this day that God out of Christ is *a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:29). Beyond all question, He is merciful. He is rich and plenteous in mercy, but His mercy is inseparably connected with the mediation of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. It must flow through Him as the appointed channel, or it cannot flow at all. It is written, *He that does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who has sent him* (John 5:23). *I AM the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes unto the Father, but by me* (John 14:6). Without Christ, we are without God.

For another thing, to be without Christ is to be without peace. Everyone has a conscience within him that must be satisfied before he can be truly happy. As long as this conscience is asleep or half dead, he gets along pretty well, but as soon as a man's conscience wakes up and he begins to think of past sins, present failings, and future judgment, he at once finds out that he needs something to give him inward rest. But what can do it? Repenting, praying, Bible reading, going to church, receiving sacraments, and self-mortification may be tried, and tried in vain. They never yet took off the burden from anyone's conscience; yet peace must be obtained!

There is only one thing that can give peace to the conscience, and

that is the blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled on it (Hebrews 10:22). The great secret of inward peace is a clear understanding that Christ's death was an actual payment of our debt to God and that the merit of that death is transferred to man when he believes. It meets every craving of conscience. It answers every accusation. It calms every fear. It is written, *These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace* (John 16:33). *He is our peace* (Ephesians 2:14). *Justified therefore by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus, the Christ* (Romans 5:1). We have peace through the blood of His cross. His peace is like a deep mine or an ever-flowing stream, but without Christ we are without peace.

For another thing, to be without Christ is to be without hope.

Almost everyone thinks that he possesses at least some sort of hope. It is rare indeed to find someone who will boldly tell you that he has no hope at all about his soul, but how few there are who can give *a reason of the hope* that is in them (1 Peter 3:15)! How few can explain it, describe it,

There is only one hope
that has roots, life,
strength, and firmness.

and show its foundations! For many people, their hope is nothing more than a vague, empty feeling that the day of sickness and the hour of death will prove to be utterly useless and powerless to comfort or to save.

There is only one hope that has roots, life, strength, and firmness, and that is the hope that is built on the great rock of Christ's work and office as man's Redeemer. *For no one can lay another foundation than that laid, which is Jesus the Christ* (1 Corinthians 3:11). He who builds on this cornerstone *shall not be confounded* (1 Peter 2:6).

There is reality about this hope. It will withstand being examined and handled. It will meet every enquiry. Search it thoroughly, and you will find no flaw whatsoever in it. All other hopes beside this are worthless. Like summer-dried fountains, they fail man just when his need is the greatest. They are like unsound ships that look fine as long as they lie quiet in harbor, but when the winds and the waves of the ocean begin to test them, their rotten condition is discovered and they sink beneath the waters. There is no such thing as a good hope without Christ, and *without Christ* is to have *no hope* (Ephesians 2:12).

For another thing, to be without Christ is to be without heaven.

I do not simply mean that there is no entrance into heaven without

Christ, but that without Christ there could be no happiness in being there. Someone without a Savior and Redeemer could never feel at home in heaven. He would feel that he had no lawful right or title to be there. Boldness and confidence and ease of heart would be impossible. He could not hold up his head amid pure and holy angels and under the eyes of a pure and holy God, for he would feel confounded and ashamed. It is the very essence of all true views of heaven that Christ is there.

Who are you who dreams of a heaven in which Christ is not there? Awake to know your foolishness. Know that in every description of heaven that the Bible contains, the presence of Christ is the one essential feature. *In the midst of the throne*, says John, . . . *stood a Lamb as it had been slain* (Revelation 5:6). The very throne of heaven is called *the throne of God and of the Lamb* (Revelation 22:3). The Lamb is the light of heaven, and its temple (Revelation 21:22-23). The saints who dwell in heaven are to be fed by the Lamb and led to *living fountains of waters* (Revelation 7:17). The meeting of the saints in heaven is called *the marriage supper of the Lamb* (Revelation 19:9). A heaven without Christ would not be the heaven of the Bible. To be without Christ is to be without heaven.

I might easily add to these things. I might tell you that to be without Christ is to be without life, without strength, without safety, without foundation, without a friend in heaven, and without righteousness. There are no people as badly off as those who are without Christ!

What the ark was to Noah, what the Passover lamb was to Israel in Egypt, what the manna, the smitten rock, the brazen serpent, the pillar of cloud and fire, and the scapegoat were to the tribes in the wilderness, all this the Lord Jesus is meant to be to man's soul. There are no people so destitute as those who are without Christ!

What the root is to the branches, what the air is to our lungs, what food and water are to our bodies, what the sun is to creation – all this and much more Christ wants to be to us. There are no people so helpless and deserving of our pity as those who are without Christ!

I admit that if there were no such things as sickness and death, if men and women never grew old but lived on this earth forever, then the subject of this book would be of no importance. However, you know that sickness, death, and the grave are sad realities.

If this life was all there were – if there were no judgment, no heaven, no hell, and no eternity – then it would be a waste of time to trouble yourself with such things that this book relates. However, you do have a conscience. You know very well that there is a day beyond the grave when you must stand before God. There is a judgment yet to come.

Surely the subject of this book is no light matter. It is not a small and insignificant thing. It demands the attention of every sensible person. It lies at the very root of that all-important matter of the salvation of our souls. To be without Christ is to be most miserable.

I now ask everyone who is reading this to examine himself and find out his own precise condition. Are you without Christ? Do not allow life to slip by without some serious thoughts and self-inquiry. You cannot always go on as you do now. A day must come when eating, drinking, sleeping, pursuing fashion, being entertained, and spending money will have an end. There will be a day when your place will be empty and you will be only spoken of as one dead and gone. Where will you be then? If you have lived and died without considering your soul, if you have lived and died without God and without Christ, where will you be then? Oh, remember that it is a thousand times better to be without money, health, and friends than to be without Christ!

If you are living without Christ, I invite you in all affection to change your course without delay. *Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near* (Isaiah 55:6). He is sitting at God's right hand, able to save to the uttermost everyone who comes to Him, however sinful and careless they may have been (Hebrews 7:25). He is sitting at God's right hand, willing to hear the prayers of all who feel that their past lives have been all wrong, and who want to be set right. Seek Christ; seek Him without delay. Acquaint yourself with Him. Do not be ashamed to turn to Him. Become one of Christ's friends this year, and you will say one day that it was the happiest year that you ever had.

If you are already following Jesus, I exhort you to be thankful. Awake to a deeper sense of the infinite mercy of having an almighty Savior, a title to heaven, a home that is eternal, and a Friend who never dies! A few more years, and all our family gatherings will be over. What a comfort to think that we have in Christ something that we can never lose!

Awake to a deeper sense of the sorrowful condition of those who

are without Christ. We are often reminded of the many people who are without food, clothing, education, or a church building. Let us be compassionate toward them and help them as much as we are able, but let us never forget that there are people whose condition is far more to be pitied. Who are they? They are those who are without Christ!

Do we have relatives without Christ? Let us feel for them, pray for them, speak to the King about them, and strive to recommend the gospel to them. Let us leave no stone unturned in our efforts to bring them to Christ.

Do we have neighbors without Christ? Let us labor in every way for their souls' salvation. *The night comes, when no one can work* (John 9:4). Happy is he who lives under the abiding conviction that to be in Christ is peace, safety, and happiness, but that to be without Christ is to be on the brink of destruction.

Chapter 17

Thirst Relieved

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink. He that believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (John 7:37-38)

The text above contains one of those mighty sayings of Christ that deserve to be printed in letters of gold. All the stars in heaven are bright and beautiful, yet even a child can see that one star excels another in glory. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, but that heart must indeed be cold and dull that does not feel that some verses are particularly rich and full. This verse is one of those.

In order to see the whole force and beauty of the text, we must remember the place, time, and occasion of these verses. The place was Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judaism, and the stronghold of priests and scribes, of Pharisees and Sadducees. The occasion was the Feast of Tabernacles, one of those great annual feasts when every Jew, if he could, went up to the temple, according to the law. The time was the last day of the feast, when all the ceremonies were drawing to a close, when the water drawn from the fountain of Siloam, according to traditional custom, had been solemnly poured on the altar, and nothing remained for worshippers but to return home.

At this critical moment, our Lord Jesus Christ stood up on a prominent place and spoke to the assembled crowds. I do not doubt that He

read their hearts. He saw them going away with aching consciences and unsatisfied minds, having received nothing from their blind teachers – the Pharisees and Sadducees – and carrying away nothing but a worthless recollection of pompous ceremonies. He saw and pitied them, and cried aloud like a herald, *If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink*. I doubt that this was all our Lord said on this memorable occasion. I suspect it was only the keynote of His address. But this, I imagine, was the first sentence that fell from His lips: *If any man thirsts, let him come unto me*. If anyone wants living, satisfying water, let him come unto Me.

Let me remind you that no prophet or apostle ever used such language as this. *Come thou with us*, Moses said to Hobab (Numbers 10:29). *Come ye to the waters*, Isaiah said (Isaiah 55:1). *Behold the Lamb*, said John the Baptist (John 1:29). *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ*, said Paul (Acts 16:31). No one except Jesus of Nazareth ever said, *Come unto me*. That fact is very significant. He who said, *Come unto me*, knew and felt, when He said it, that He was the eternal Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world.

There are three points in this great saying of our Lord to which I now want to direct your attention:

1. There is a problem: *If any man thirsts*.
2. There is a remedy: *Let him come unto me and drink*.
3. There is a promise: *He that believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water*.

Each of these points concerns us all.

1. In the first place, there is a problem. Our Lord says, *If any man thirsts*. Bodily thirst is notoriously the most painful sensation to which the frame of mortal man is liable. Read the story of the miserable sufferers in the Black Hole at Calcutta.⁴³ Ask anyone who has traveled over desert plains under a tropical sun. Hear what any old soldier will tell you is the main need of the wounded on a battlefield. Consider what the crews of ships lost in the middle of the ocean endure as they are tossed

⁴³ This was a prison or dungeon in Calcutta where British prisoners of war were held for three days in 1756. The conditions were terrible, they had little water, and although the precise numbers reported vary, some reports state that about 140 out of 164 prisoners died during those three days.

about for days in boats without water. Remember the dreadful words of the rich man in the parable: *Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame* (Luke 16:24). The testimony is consistent. There is nothing as terrible and difficult to endure as thirst.

If bodily thirst is so painful, how much more painful is thirst of soul? Physical suffering is not the worst part of eternal punishment. Physical suffering is a light thing, even in this world, compared to the suffering of the mind and inward man. To see

the value of our souls and learn that they are in danger of eternal ruin, to feel the burden of unforgiven sin and not know where to turn for relief, to have a conscience sick and ill at ease and to be ignorant of the remedy, to discover

that we are dying daily and yet are unprepared to meet God, to have some clear view of our own guilt and wickedness and yet to be in utter darkness about how to be forgiven – this is the highest degree of pain. This is pain that drinks up soul and spirit and pierces joints and marrow!

If bodily thirst is so painful, how much more painful is thirst of soul?

There is no doubt that this is the thirst of which our Lord is speaking. It is thirst after pardon, forgiveness, mercy, and peace with God. It is the craving of a truly awakened conscience that desires to be made right with God but does not know how to find it, walking through dry places and unable to get rest.

This is the thirst that the Jews felt when Peter preached to them on the day of Pentecost. It is written that *they were pricked in their heart and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?* (Acts 2:37).

This is the thirst that the Philippian jailor felt when he awoke to consciousness of his spiritual danger and felt the earthquake that made the prison shake under his feet. It is written that he *fell down trembling before Paul and Silas and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* (Acts 16:29-30).

This is the thirst that many of the greatest servants of God seem to have felt when light first broke in on their minds. They have left their experience on record: Augustine seeking rest among the Manichean heretics and finding none; Luther searching after truth among monks

in the Erfurt monastery; John Bunyan agonizing amid doubts and conflicts in his Elstow cottage;⁴⁴ and George Whitefield groaning under self-imposed austerities as an undergraduate at Oxford for lack of clear teaching. I believe they all knew what our Lord meant when He spoke of *thirst*.

Certainly it is not too much to say that all of us should know something of this thirst, if not as much as Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, or Whitefield. Living as we do in a dying world; knowing as we do, if we will admit it, that there is a world beyond the grave and that after death comes the judgment; feeling, as we must do in our better moments, what poor, weak, unstable, imperfect creatures we all are and how unfit we are to meet God; aware as we must be in our inmost heart of hearts that our place in eternity depends upon our use of time here – we ought to feel and to realize something like the thirst for a sense of peace with the living God.

Sadly, nothing proves the fallen nature of man so conclusively as the general, common lack of spiritual appetite! The vast majority of people are now intensely thirsting for money, power, pleasure, status, honor, and distinction. There is no lack of adventurers and volunteers to lead forlorn hopes, to dig for gold, to storm a breach, or to try to cut a way through thick-ribbed ice to the North Pole. The competition for these corruptible crowns is fierce and unceasing!

Few indeed, by comparison, are those who thirst after eternal life. No wonder that in Scripture the natural man is called dead, sleeping, blind, and deaf. No wonder that he is said to need a second birth and a new creation. There is no surer symptom of death in a part of the body than the loss of all feeling. There is no more painful sign of an unhealthy state of soul than an utter absence of spiritual thirst. Woe to that man of whom the Savior can say, *You know not that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked* (Revelation 3:17).

Who is there among you who feels the burden of sin and longs for peace with God? Who is there who really feels the words of our prayer-book confession: “I have erred and strayed like a lost sheep – there is no health in me – I am a miserable offender”? Who is there who enters

44 You can read about John Bunyan’s experience in his brief autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, updated and available from ANEKO Press.

into the fullness of our communion service and can truthfully say, “The remembrance of my sins is grievous, and the burden of them is intolerable”?

If you feel this way, you ought to thank God. A sense of sin, guilt, and poverty of soul is the first stone laid by the Holy Spirit when He builds a spiritual temple. He convinces of sin. Light was the first thing called into being in the physical creation (Genesis 1:3). Light about our own condition is the first work in the new creation. Thirsting soul, I say again, you are the person who ought to thank God. The kingdom of God is near you. It is not when we begin to feel good, but when we feel bad, that we take the first step toward heaven. *Who told thee that thou wast naked?* (Genesis 3:11). From where came this inward light? Who opened your eyes and made you see and feel? Know this day that *flesh and blood has not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in the heavens* (Matthew 16:17). Universities may grant degrees and schools may impart knowledge, but they cannot make people feel sin. To realize our spiritual need and feel true spiritual thirst is the first step in saving Christianity.

Elihu, in the book of Job, said that God *looks upon men, and if any say, I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it did not profit me; God will ransom his soul from [death], and his life shall see the light* (Job 33:27-28). Let him who knows anything of spiritual thirst not be ashamed. Rather, let him lift up his head and begin to hope. Let him pray that God would carry on the work He has begun, and make him feel it even more.

2. I now move on from the problem to the remedy. *If any man thirsts, says our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, let him come unto me and drink.* There is a great simplicity about this little sentence that cannot be too much admired. There is not a word in it of which the literal meaning is not plain to a child. Yet as simple as it appears, it is rich in spiritual meaning. Like the Koh-i-noor diamond, which you may carry between finger and thumb, it is of unspeakable value.⁴⁵ It solves that mighty problem that all the philosophers of Greece and Rome could never solve: “How can man have peace with God?”

⁴⁵ The Koh-i-noor diamond is thought to have been found in the 1300s in India. It weighed 793 carats before it was cut. It now weighs 186 carats and it is estimated to be worth more than one billion dollars. It is currently on display in the Tower of London.

Place this verse in your memory side by side with six other golden sayings of our Lord:

I AM the bread of life; he that comes to me shall never hunger, and he that believes in me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

I AM the light of the world; he that follows me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life. (John 8:12)

I AM the door; whosoever enters in by me shall be saved. (John 10:9)

I AM the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

He that comes to me I will in no wise cast out. (John 6:37)

Add to these six texts the one before you today. Learn all seven by heart. Anchor them in your mind, and never let them go. When your feet touch the cold river, when you are on the bed of sickness and in the hour of death, you will find these seven verses to be priceless.

What is the sum and substance of these simple words? It is this: Christ is the Fountain of living water that God has graciously provided for thirsting souls. From Him, as out of the rock struck by Moses, there flows an abundant stream for all who travel through the wilderness of this world. In Him, as our Redeemer and Substitute, crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification, there is an endless supply of all that we need – pardon, forgiveness, mercy, grace, peace, rest, relief, comfort, and hope.

Christ has bought this rich provision for us at the price of His own precious blood. To open this wondrous fountain, He *suffered for sins, the just for the unjust* (1 Peter 3:18), and *bore our sins in his own body on the tree* (1 Peter 2:24). He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, *that we might be made the righteousness of God in him* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Now He is sealed and appointed to provide relief for all who are laboring and heavy laden. He is the Giver of living water to all who thirst.

It is His role to receive sinners. It is His pleasure to give them pardon, life, and peace. The words of the text are a proclamation He makes to all mankind: *If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink.*

The effectiveness of a medicine depends in great measure on the manner in which it is used. The best prescription from the best physician is useless if we refuse to follow the instructions that accompany it. Listen to a word of exhortation as I now offer some caution and advice about the Fountain of living water.

Those who thirst and want relief must go to Christ Himself. He must not be content with going to His church and His ordinances or meeting with Christians to hear them pray. He must not rest satisfied with privately opening his heart to His ordained ministers. Oh, no! He who is content with only drinking these waters

shall thirst again (John 4:13). He must go much

higher and much further than this. He must

have personal dealings with Christ Himself. All

else in religion is worthless without Him. The

King's palace, the attendant servants, the richly

furnished banqueting house, the very banquet

itself – all are nothing unless we speak with the King. His hand alone

can take the burden off our backs and make us feel free. The hand of

man may take the stone from the grave and show the dead, but only

Jesus can say to the dead, “Come forth and live” (John 11:41-44). We

must deal directly with Christ.

His hand alone can take
the burden off our backs
and make us feel free.

Those who thirst and want relief must actually go to Christ. It is not enough to want, talk, intend, resolve, and hope. Hell, that awful reality, is truly said to be paved with good intentions. Thousands are lost every year in this way, and they perish miserably just outside the harbor. They live hoping and intending, and they die hoping and intending. Oh, no! We must get up and go! If the prodigal son had been content with saying, “Many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I hope someday to return home,” he might have remained forever among the swine. It was when he arose and went to his father that his father ran to meet him, and said, *Bring forth the best robe and put it on him . . . let us eat and be merry* (Luke 15:20-23).

Like him, we must not only come to ourselves and think, but we must actually go to the High Priest, to Christ. We must go to the Physician.

Those who thirst and want to go to Christ must remember that simple faith is the one thing required. By all means, go to Christ with a penitent, broken, and contrite heart, but do not dream of resting on that for acceptance. Faith is the only hand that can carry the living water to our lips. Faith is the hinge on which everything turns in the matter of our justification. It is written again and again that *whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:15-16). *To him that does not work, but believes in him that justifies the ungodly, the faith is counted as righteousness* (Romans 4:5). Happy is he who can lay hold on the principle laid down in that matchless hymn:

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.

How simple this remedy for thirst appears, but oh, how hard it is to persuade some people to receive it! Tell them to do some great thing, to mortify their bodies, to go on a pilgrimage, to give all their goods to feed the poor, and to merit salvation by these things, and they will try to do as they are asked. Tell them to throw out any idea of merit, working, or doing and to come to Christ as empty sinners with nothing in their hands, and, like Naaman, they are ready to turn away in disdain (2 Kings 5:12).

Human nature is the same in every age. There are still some people just like the Jews, and some just like the Greeks. To the Jews, Christ crucified is still a stumbling block, and to the Greeks, He is still foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23). Their lineage, at any rate, has never ceased! Never did our Lord say a truer word than that which He spoke to the proud scribes in the Sanhedrin: *Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life* (John 5:40).

As simple as this remedy for thirst appears, it is the only cure for man's spiritual disease and the only bridge from earth to heaven. Kings and their subjects, preachers and hearers, employers and employees,

high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned – all must alike drink of this water of life, and all must drink in the same way. For two thousand years, people have labored to find some other medicine for weary consciences, but they have labored in vain. Thousands, after blistering their hands and growing grey in hewing out *broken cisterns, that can hold no water* (Jeremiah 2:13), have been compelled to go back to the old Fountain, and have confessed at last that here, in Christ alone, is true peace.

As simple as the old remedy for thirst may appear, it is the root of the inward life of all God's greatest servants in all ages. The saints and martyrs in every era of church history have been people who have gone to Christ daily by faith and found His word true when He said, *My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed* (John 6:55). They have all been people who lived the life of faith in the Son of God and drank daily out of the fullness that is in Him (Galatians 2:20).

The truest and best Christians who have made a mark on the world have been of one mind in this. Church leaders and reformers, Anglican pastors and Puritans, Episcopalians and Nonconformists, have all in their best moments given uniform testimony to the value of the Fountain of life. Separated and contentious as they may sometimes have been in their lives, they have not been divided in their deaths. In their last struggle with the king of terrors, they have simply clung to the cross of Christ and gloried in nothing but the precious blood and the Fountain that is open for all sin and uncleanness.

How thankful we ought to be that we live in a land where the great remedy for spiritual thirst is known. We live in a land of open Bibles, preached gospel, and abundant means of grace. This is a land where the power of Christ's sacrifice is still proclaimed, with more or less fullness, in thousands of pulpits every Sunday! We do not realize the value of our privileges. The very familiarity of the manna makes us think of it in the same way as Israel loathed the *light bread* in the wilderness (Numbers 21:5).

However, turn to the pages of a heathen philosopher like the incomparable Plato, and see how he groped after light like one blindfolded, and how he wearied himself to find the door. Turn to the accounts that trustworthy travelers and missionaries give of the state of the heathen

who have never heard the gospel. Read of the human sacrifices in some dark parts of the world, and of the terrible, self-imposed tortures of religious followers in other parts of the world – and remember that they are all the result of an unquenched spiritual thirst and a blind and unsatisfied desire to get near to God. Learn to be thankful that you live in a land like your own. Sadly, I am afraid that God is not pleased with our unthankfulness! Cold and dead indeed must those hearts be that can study the blind spiritual condition of many nations and not thank God that we live in a land where we are free to follow Jesus.

3. Lastly, I turn to the promise held out to all who come to Christ: *He that believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.* The subject of Scripture promises is a vast and most interesting one. I doubt that it receives the attention it deserves. *Clarke's Scripture Promises* is an old book that is studied far less now, I suspect, than it was in the days of our fathers.⁴⁶ Few Christians realize the number of promises, or the length, breadth, depth, height, and variety of the precious “shalls” and “wills” contained in the Bible for the special benefit and encouragement of all who will use them.

Promises lie at the bottom of nearly every transaction between people in the affairs of this life. The vast majority of Adam's children in every civilized country are acting every day on the faith of promises. The laborer on the land works hard all week because he believes that at the end of the week he will receive his promised wages. The soldier enlists in the army and the sailor joins the navy in the full confidence that those under whom they serve will at some future time give them their promised pay. In the business of great cities, among businessmen, bankers, and tradesmen, nothing could be done without continual faith in promises. Every person of sense knows that checks and bills and credit are the only means by which the immense majority of business transactions are carried on. People of business are compelled to act by faith and not by sight. They believe promises, and they expect to be believed themselves. In fact, promises, faith in promises, and actions springing from faith in promises are the backbone of nine-tenths of all the dealings of people with their fellow humans throughout the land.

⁴⁶ *Clarke's Scripture Promises*, also known as *The Scripture Promises, A Collection of the Promises of Scripture, Precious Bible Promises*, etc., was compiled by Samuel Clarke (1684-1759), an English Nonconformist pastor.

In the same way, promises in the Bible are one great means by which God is pleased to approach the soul of man. The careful student of Scripture cannot fail to observe that God is continually holding out incentives to us to listen to Him, obey Him, and serve Him, promising to do great things if we will only obey and believe. As Peter says, *there are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises* (2 Peter 1:4).

He who has mercifully caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning has shown His perfect knowledge of human nature by spreading throughout the Book a perfect wealth of promises, suitable to every kind of experience and every condition of life. God seems to say, "Do you want to know what I will do for you? Do you want to hear My terms? Then pick up the Bible and read." *Seek ye out that which is written in the book of the LORD and read; if one of these is lacking, none is missing* (Isaiah 34:16).

There is one big difference, though, between the promises of Adam's children and the promises of God, and this difference should never be forgotten. The promises of man are not certain to be fulfilled. Even with the best wishes and intentions, we cannot always keep our word. Disease and death may step in like an armed man and take away from this world the person who has made a promise. War, disease, famine, failure of crops, or hurricanes may strip him of his property and make it impossible for him to fulfil his engagements.

Nothing can prevent His doing what He has said.

The promises of God, on the contrary, are certain to be kept. He is Almighty. Nothing can prevent His doing what He has said. He never changes. He always *determines something* (Job 23:13), and with Him there is *no variableness neither shadow of turning* (James 1:17).

He will always keep His word. As a little girl once told her teacher, there is one thing that God cannot do: "It is impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). The most unlikely and improbable things, when God has once said He will do them, have always come to pass. The destruction of the old world by a flood, the preservation of Noah in the ark, the birth of Isaac, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the raising of David to the throne of Saul, the miraculous birth of Jesus, the resurrection of Christ, the scattering of the Jews all over the earth, and

their continued preservation as a distinct people – who could imagine events more unlikely and improbable than these? Yet God said they should be, and in due time they all came to pass. In truth, with God it is just as easy to do something as to say it. Whatever He promises, He is certain to perform.

Concerning the variety and riches of Scripture promises, far more could be said. The subject is almost inexhaustible. There is hardly a step in a person's life, from childhood to old age, or hardly any position in which anyone can be placed, for which the Bible has not held out encouragement to those who desire to do right in the sight of God. There are "shalls" and "wills" in God's treasury for every condition. There are "shalls" and "wills" about God's infinite mercy and compassion; about His readiness to receive all who repent and believe; about His willingness to forgive, pardon, and absolve the chief of sinners; about His power to change hearts and alter our corrupt nature; and about the encouragements to pray, hear the gospel, and draw near to the throne of grace.

There is an abundant supply of promises in the Word of God about strength for duty, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexity, help in sickness, consolation in death, support under bereavement, happiness beyond the grave, and reward in glory. No one can have any idea of its abundance unless he carefully searches the Scriptures, keeping the subject steadily in view. If anyone doubts it, I can only say, *Come and see* (John 1:39). Like the Queen of Sheba at Solomon's court, you will soon say, *Not even the half was told me* (1 Kings 10:7).

The promise of our Lord Jesus Christ quoted at the beginning of this chapter is somewhat distinct. It is particularly abundant in encouragement to all who feel spiritual thirst and who go to Him for relief, and therefore it deserves particular attention. Most of our Lord's promises refer especially to the benefit of the person to whom they are addressed. The promise before us takes a far wider range. It seems to refer to many others beside those to whom He spoke. What does He say? *He that believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this he spoke concerning the Spirit, which those that believe on him should receive* (John 7:38-39). Undoubtedly these words are figurative, like the earlier words of the sentence like *thirst*

and *drinking*, but all the figures of Scripture contain great truth. I will now try to show what truth the *rivers of living water* has for us.

For one thing, I believe our Lord meant that he who comes to Him by faith will receive an abundant supply of everything that he can desire for the relief of his own soul's needs. The Spirit will convey to him such an abiding sense of pardon, peace, and hope that it will be in his inward man like a wellspring, never dry. He will feel so satisfied with the things of Christ, which the Spirit shall show him (John 16:15), that he will rest from spiritual anxiety about death, judgment, and eternity. He may have his seasons of darkness and doubt because of his own infirmities or the temptations of the devil, but generally speaking, once he has come to Christ by faith, he will find in his heart of hearts an unfailing fountain of consolation.

Let us understand that this is the first thing that the promise before us contains. Our Lord seems to say, "Only come to Me, poor anxious soul, and your spiritual anxiety will be relieved. By the power of the Holy Spirit, I will place in your heart such a sense of pardon and peace, through My atonement and intercession, that you will never completely thirst again. You may have your doubts, fears, and conflicts while you are in the body, but once you have come to Me and have taken Me for your Savior, you will never feel entirely hopeless. The condition of your inward man will be so thoroughly changed that you will feel as if an ever-flowing spring of water were within you."

What will we say to these things? I declare my own belief that whenever a man or woman really comes to Christ by faith, he finds this promise fulfilled. He might be weak in grace and have many misgivings about his own condition; he might not dare to say that he is converted, justified, sanctified, and suited for the inheritance of the saints in light; but for all that, I will boldly say that the humblest and weakest believer in Christ has something within him that he would not want to part with, even though he may not yet fully understand it. What is that something? It is the *rivers of living water* that begin to run in the heart of every child of Adam as soon as he goes to Christ and drinks. In this sense, I believe this wonderful promise of Christ is always fulfilled.

Is this all that is contained in this promise? By no means. There is much more. There is more to come. I believe our Lord meant for us

to understand that he who goes to Him by faith will not only have an abundant supply of everything that he needs for his own soul, but he will also become a source of blessing to the souls of others. The Spirit who dwells in him will make him a fountain of good to his fellow men so that at the last day there will be found to have flowed from him *rivers of living water*.

This is a very important part of our Lord's promise, and it opens up a subject that is seldom realized and understood by most Christians. It is a subject of deep interest, and it deserves far more attention than it receives. I believe it is a truth of God. I believe that just as *none of us live for ourselves* (Romans 14:7), so also no one is converted only for himself. The conversion of one man or woman always leads on, in God's wonderful providence, to the conversion of others.

I do not say for a moment that all believers know it. I think it is far more likely that many live and die in the faith who are not aware that they have done good to any soul. I believe, though, that on the resurrection morning and on the judgment day, when the secret history of all Christians is revealed, we will see that the full meaning of the promise before us has never failed. I doubt if there will be a single believer who will not have been *rivers of living water* to someone else – a channel through whom the Spirit has conveyed saving grace. Even the penitent thief, as short as his time was after he repented, has been a source of blessing to thousands of souls!

Some believers are rivers of living water while they live. Their words, their conversation, their preaching, and their teaching are all means by which the water of life has flowed into the hearts of their fellow men. Such, for example, were the apostles who wrote no epistles, but only preached the Word. Such were Luther, Whitefield, Wesley, Berridge, Rowlands, and thousands of others, of whom I cannot now specifically speak.

Some believers are rivers of living water when they die. Their courage in facing the king of terrors, their boldness in the most painful sufferings, their unswerving faithfulness to Christ's truth even at the stake, and their obvious peace on the edge of the grave have set thousands thinking and have led hundreds to repent and believe. Such, for example, were the early martyrs whom the Roman emperors persecuted.

Such were John Huss and Jerome of Prague. Such were Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, Hooper, and the noble army of Marian martyrs.⁴⁷ The work that they did at their deaths, like Samson, was far greater than the work done during their lives.

Some believers are rivers of living water long after they die. They do good by their books and writings in every part of the world, long after the hands which held the pen are decaying in the dust. Such men were John Bunyan, Richard Baxter, John Owen, George Herbert, and Robert Murray McCheyne. These blessed servants of God probably do more good by their books at this moment than they did by their tongues when they were alive. Being dead, they still speak (Hebrews 11:4).

Finally, some believers are rivers of living water by the beauty of their daily conduct and behavior. There are many quiet, gentle, consistent Christians who make no show and no noise in the world, and yet deeply influence those around them for good without realizing it. They win others *without a word* (1 Peter 3:1). Their love, kindness, kind disposition, patience, and unselfishness silently influence a wide circle and sow seeds of thought and self-inquiry in many minds. One elderly lady who died in great peace gave a fine testimony by saying that under God she owed her salvation to Mr. Whitefield: "It was not any sermon that he preached. It was not anything that he ever said to me. It was the beautiful consistency and kindness of his daily life, in the house where he was staying, when I was a little girl. I said to myself that if I ever have any religion, Mr. Whitefield's God will be my God."

Do not think for a moment that your own soul is the only soul that will be saved if you come to Christ by faith and follow Him.

Let us all lay hold on this view of our Lord's promise, and never forget it. Do not think for a moment that your own soul is the only soul that will be saved if you come to Christ by faith and follow Him. Think of the blessedness of being a river of living water to others. You might be the means of bringing many others to Christ. Live, act, speak, pray, and work while keeping this continually in view.

I knew a family, consisting of a father, mother, and ten children, in

⁴⁷ "Marian martyrs" refers to more than sixty Protestants who were burned at the stake, mainly during the reign of Queen Mary (1553-1558).

which true Christianity began with one of the daughters. At first she was alone in Christ while all the rest of the family was in the world. Yet before she died, she saw both her parents and all her brothers and sisters converted to God; and all this, humanly speaking, began from her influence! Surely we do not need to doubt that a believer can be a river of living water to others. The conversions might not happen in your time, and you might even die without seeing them; but never doubt that conversion generally leads to conversions, and that few go to heaven alone.

When William Grimshaw of Haworth, the “apostle of the north,” died, he left his son graceless and godless. The son was later converted, never having forgotten his father’s advice and example. His last words were, “What will my old father say when he sees me in heaven?” Let us take courage and continue to hope, believing Christ’s promise.

Before I end this chapter, I want to ask you some plain questions.

Do you know anything of spiritual thirst? Have you ever felt genuine deep concern about your soul? I am afraid that many know nothing about it. I have learned, by the painful experience of many years, that people can go on for years attending God’s house without ever feeling their sins or desiring to be saved. The cares of this world, the love of pleasure, and the desire for other things choke the good seed every Sunday and make it unfruitful. People come to church with hearts as cold as the stone pavement on which they walk. They go away as thoughtless and unmoved as the old marble statues that look down on them from the monuments on the walls.

This may be so, but I do not despair of anyone as long as he is alive. That majestic old bell in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, which has struck the hours for so many years, is seldom heard by many during the business hours of the day. The roar and din of traffic in the streets have a strange power to deaden its sound and keep people from hearing it. But when the daily work is over, the doors are locked, the books are put away, and quiet reigns in the great city, the case is different. As the old bell at night strikes eleven, twelve, one, two, and three, thousands hear it who never heard it during the day.

I hope it will be the same way with many people in the matter of their souls. Now, in the abundance of health and strength, in the hurry

and whirl of business, I fear the voice of your conscience is often stifled and you cannot hear it. But the day may come when the great bell of conscience will make itself heard, whether you like it or not. The time may come when you are laid aside in quietness and forced by illness to sit still. You may be forced to look within and consider your soul's concerns. Then, when the great bell of awakened conscience is sounding in your ears, I hope that many of you who are reading this will hear the voice of God and repent, will learn to thirst, and will go to Christ for relief. Yes, I pray to God that you may be taught to feel this before it is too late!

Do you feel anything at this very moment? Is your conscience awake and working? Are you sensible of spiritual thirst and longing for relief? Then hear the invitation that I bring to you in my Master's name this day: *If any man*, no matter who he may be – high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned – *if any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink*. Hear and accept this invitation without delay. Do not wait for anything. Do not wait for anyone. You might end up waiting for *a convenient season* until it is too late (Acts 24:25).

The hand of the living Redeemer is now held out from heaven, but it may soon be withdrawn. The Fountain is open now, but it may soon be closed for ever. *If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink* – without delay. Although you have been a great sinner and have resisted warnings, counsel, and sermons, you may still come. Although you have sinned against light and knowledge and you have sinned against a father's advice and a mother's tears, although you have lived for years without prayer and without keeping the Lord's Day holy, you may still come.

Do not say that you do not know how to come, that you do not understand what it is to believe, or that you must wait for more light. Will a tired man say that he is too tired to lie down? Will a drowning man say that he does not know how to grab hold of the hand stretched out to help him? Will the shipwrecked sailor, with a lifeboat alongside the sinking ship, say that he does not know how to jump in? Oh, cast away these foolish excuses! Arise and come! The door is not shut. The fountain is not yet closed. The Lord Jesus invites you. It is enough that you are thirsting and desire to be saved. Come! Come to Christ without

delay! No one ever went to the Fountain and found it dry. No one ever went away unsatisfied.

Have you come to Christ already and found relief? Then come nearer still. The closer your communion with Christ is, the more comfort you will feel. The more you daily live by the side of the Fountain, the more you will feel in yourself *a fountain of water springing up into eternal life* (John 4:14). You will not only be blessed yourself, but you will be a source of blessing to others.

In this evil world, you might not find all the practical comfort you might desire, but remember that you cannot have two heavens. Perfect happiness is yet to come. The devil is not yet bound. There is a better time coming for all who are aware of their sins and go to Christ, and who commit their thirsting souls to His keeping. When He comes again, they will be completely satisfied. They will remember all the way by which they were led, and they will see the necessity of everything that happened in their lives. Above all, they will wonder that they could have ever lived so long without Christ and that they delayed in going to Him.

There is a pass in Scotland called Glencroe that offers a beautiful illustration of what heaven will be to the souls who come to Christ. The road through Glencroe takes the traveler up a long and steep ascent, with many little turns and windings in its course. But when the top of the pass is reached, a stone is seen by the wayside with these simple words inscribed upon it: "Rest, and be thankful."

Those words describe the feelings with which every thirsting person who comes to Christ will enter heaven. The summit of the narrow way will at length be ours. We will finish our weary journey and will sit down in the kingdom of God. We will look back on our entire lives with thankfulness, and we will see the perfect wisdom of every step in the steep ascent by which we were led. In our glorious rest, we will forget the toil of the upward journey. Here in this world, our sense of rest in Christ at best is weak and partial. We hardly ever seem to fully taste the living water. *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away* (1 Corinthians 13:10). *I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness* (Psalm 17:15). We will drink out of the river of His pleasure and we will thirst no more.

* * * *

Note: There is a passage from an old writer that throws so much light on some points mentioned in this chapter that I make no excuse for giving it to the reader in its entirety. It comes from a work that is little known and even less read. It has done me good, and I think it will do good to others:

When a person is awakened spiritually and arrives at the question, *What must I do to be saved?*, we have the apostolic answer to it: *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house* (Acts 16:30-31). This answer is so old that it seems out of date to many people, but it is still and will always be fresh, new, and pleasant, and it is the only resolution of this great case of conscience as long as conscience and the world lasts. No wit or art of man will ever find a crack or flaw in it or devise another or a better answer. Only this alone can properly and effectively heal the wound of an awakened conscience.

Some people will advise those who are awakened spiritually to “Repent, and mourn for your known sins. Leave them and hate them, and then God will have mercy on you.” Some will answer that their hearts are hard and they cannot seem to repent. He will say that he is dead in sins and his heart is hard, and so he cannot obey God as he is, no matter how much he tries or wants to.

Sincere obedience is, therefore, as impossible to a dead unrenewed sinner as perfect obedience is. The right answer for the awakened sinner is: *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved* (Acts 16:31). Tell him what Christ is, what He has done and suffered to obtain eternal redemption for sinners, and that this was all done according to the will of God and His Father. Give him a plain, straightforward account of the gospel salvation worked out by the Son of God. Plainly tell him the history and mystery of the gospel. It may be that

the Holy Spirit will work faith by this, as He did in those first fruits of the gentiles (Acts 10:44).

If he asks what rationale he has to believe on Jesus Christ, tell him that he has absolute, indispensable necessity for it, for without believing on Him, he will perish eternally. Tell him that he has God's gracious offer of Christ and all His redemption, with a promise, that upon accepting the offer by faith, Christ and salvation with Him is his. Tell him that he has God's direct commandment to believe on Christ's name (1 John 3:23), and that he should make certain to obey it, as well as any command in the moral law. Tell him of Christ's ability and goodwill to save, that no one who ever cast himself upon Jesus was ever rejected by Him. Tell him that desperate cases are the glorious triumphs of His art of saving. Tell him that there is no middle ground between faith and unbelief – that there is no excuse for neglecting the one and continuing in the other. Tell him that believing on the Lord Jesus for salvation is more pleasing to God than all obedience to His law, and that unbelief is the most provoking to God and the most damning to man of all sins. There is no relief to be offered to him against the greatness of his sins, the curse of the law, and the severity of God as Judge, except the free and boundless grace of God in the merit of Christ's atonement by the sacrifice of Himself.

If he asks what it means to believe on Jesus Christ, I find no such question like this in the Word. All people understood some idea of what it means to believe, including the Jews who did not believe on Him (John 6:28-30), the chief priests and Pharisees (John 7:48), and the blind man (John 9:35). When Christ asked the blind man, *Dost thou believe in the Son of God?*, he answered, *Who is he, Lord, that I might believe in him?* (John 9:36). After Jesus answered him, he did not ask, "What is it to believe on Him?" Instead, he answered, *Lord, I believe*, and he worshipped Him (John 9:38). The man both

professed faith in Him and acted in faith. So did the father of the mute son (Mark 9:23-24) and the eunuch (Acts 8:37).

Both Christ's enemies and His disciples knew that faith in Him was believing that the man Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, the Messiah, and the Savior of the world, whom they should receive and look to for salvation in His name (Acts 4:12). This was the common report, published by Christ and His apostles and disciples, and known by all who heard it.

If the spiritually awakened person asks what he is supposed to believe, you can tell him that he does not need to believe that he is in Christ, that his sins are pardoned, and that he is a justified man in order to be saved, but he is to believe God's account concerning Christ (1 John 5:10-12). And this account is that God gives (that is, offers) to us eternal life in His Son, Jesus Christ, and that all who believe this with the heart and rest their souls on these glad tidings will be saved (Romans 10:9-11). He is to believe so that he might be justified (Galatians 2:16).

If the person says that believing is difficult, this is a good doubt, but is easily resolved. It tells of a person who is deeply humbled. Anybody can see his own inability to fully obey the law of God, but few find the difficulty of believing. Ask him what it is that makes believing difficult to him? Is it unwillingness to be justified and saved? Is it unwillingness to be so completely saved by Jesus Christ that He will have to give all praise to God's grace in Him and will allow no boasting in himself? He will surely deny this. Is it a distrust of the truth of the gospel account? This he would not dare admit. Is it a doubt of Christ's ability or goodwill to save? This is to contradict the testimony of God in the gospel. Is it because he doubts that he can have a share of Christ and His redemption? You can tell him that believing on Christ allows him to share in Christ's redemption.

If he says that he cannot believe on Jesus Christ because of

the difficulty of acting in this faith, and that a divine power is needful to bring it out, which he does not find in himself, you must tell him that believing in Jesus Christ is not a work, but is resting on Jesus Christ. You must tell him that this false claim is as unreasonable as if a man, wearied with a journey and not able to go one step further, should argue, "I am so tired that I am not able to lie down," when indeed he can neither stand nor go. The poor wearied sinner can never believe on Jesus Christ until he realizes that he can do nothing for himself. His first step in believing is always to personally appeal to Christ for salvation, as a man hopeless and helpless in himself. By reasoning with him from the gospel in this way, the Lord will (as He has often done) convey faith, joy, and peace by believing. (Robert Trail's *Works*, 1696. Vol. I, 266-269).

Chapter 18

Unsearchable Riches

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of the Christ. (Ephesians 3:8)

If we heard that verse read for the first time, I think we would all feel that it was a very remarkable one, even though we did not know who had written it. It is remarkable on account of the bold and striking figures of speech that it contains: *less than the least of all saints, unsearchable riches of the Christ* – these are indeed “thoughts that breathe and words that burn.”⁴⁸

The sentence is twice as remarkable when we consider the man who wrote it. The writer was none other than the great Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul – the leader of that noble little Jewish army that went forth from Israel two thousand years ago and turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6), that good soldier of Christ who left a deeper mark on mankind than anyone born of woman, except his sinless Master – a mark that abides to this very day. Surely such a sentence from the pen of such a man demands special attention.

Let us fix our eyes closely on this text and notice three things:

First, notice what Paul says of himself: “I am less than the least of all saints.”

48 This phrase is from a poem by the English poet and scholar, Thomas Gray (1716-1771).

Secondly, notice what Paul says of his ministerial duties:

“Grace is given unto me to preach.”

Thirdly, notice what Paul says of the great subject of his preaching: He calls it *the unsearchable riches of the Christ*.

A few words on each of these three points may help to fasten down the whole text in our memories, consciences, hearts, and minds.

In the first place, let us notice what Paul says of himself. The language he uses is remarkably strong. The founder of famous churches, the writer of more than a dozen inspired epistles, the man who was not *inferior in any way to those grandiose apostles* (2 Corinthians 11:5), *in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths often* (2 Corinthians 11:23), the man who spent and was spent for souls (2 Corinthians 12:15) and who counted all things but loss for Christ (Philippians 3:8), the man who could truly say, *To me to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21) – what do we find him saying of himself? He employs an emphatic comparative and superlative. He says that he is *less than the least of all saints*. What a poor creature is the least saint! Yet Paul says that he is less than that man.

Such language as this, I suspect, is almost impossible to understand by many who profess Christ and call themselves Christians. Ignorant alike of the Bible and their own hearts, they cannot understand what a saint means when he speaks so humbly of himself and his attainments. “It is just a way of speaking,” they will tell you. “It can only mean what Paul used to be when he was a novice and first began to serve Christ.” So true it is that *the natural man does not perceive the things of the Spirit of God* (1 Corinthians 2:14). The prayers, praises, conflicts, fears, hopes, joys, and sorrows of the true Christian – the whole experience of the seventh chapter of Romans – are all *foolishness* to the people of the world (1 Corinthians 1:18). Just as a blind person cannot judge the paintings of artists such as Joshua Reynolds or Thomas Gainsborough, and the deaf cannot appreciate Handel’s *Messiah*, so the unconverted person cannot fully understand an apostle’s lowly judgment of himself.

We can rest assured, though, that Paul sincerely felt in his heart what he wrote with his pen. Paul did not just write this way one time. He wrote even more strongly in other places. To the Philippians he

says that he has not attained, nor was already perfect, but he was still pursuing that which he desired (Philippians 3:12). To the Corinthians he says, *I am the least of the apostles, for I am not worthy to be called an apostle* (1 Corinthians 15:9). He told Timothy that he was the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). To the Romans he cries, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* (Romans 7:24).

The plain truth is that Paul saw in his own heart of hearts far more defects and weaknesses than he saw in anyone else. The eyes of his understanding were so fully opened by the Holy Spirit of God that he detected a hundred things wrong in himself that the dull eyes of other people never observed at all. Possessing great spiritual light, Paul had great insight into his own natural corruption, and he was clothed from head to foot with humility (1 Peter 5:5).

Let us clearly understand that humility like Paul's was not a characteristic only of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. On the contrary, it is a common characteristic of the most eminent saints of God in every age.

The more real grace people have in their hearts, the deeper their sense of sin is. The more light the Holy Spirit pours into their souls, the more they discern their own weaknesses, defilements, and darkness. The dead soul feels and sees nothing, but with life comes clear vision, a tender conscience, and spiritual sensibility. Observe what

The more real grace people have in their hearts, the deeper their sense of sin is.

lowly expressions Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, and John the Baptist used about themselves. Study the biographies of saints like William Bradford, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, William Beveridge, Richard Baxter, and Robert Murray McCheyne. Notice that one characteristic is common to them all – a very deep sense of sin.

Superficial and shallow professors of Christianity in the warmth of their first love might talk about perfection, but the great saints in every era of church history, from Paul down to this day, have always been *clothed with humility* (1 Peter 5:5).

Let those who desire to be saved know that the first steps toward heaven are a deep sense of sin and a lowly assessment of ourselves. Let them cast away that weak and foolish belief that the beginning of religion is to think of ourselves as good. Instead, let us lay hold of that

great scriptural principle that we must begin by understanding that we are bad, and that until we really believe that we are bad, we can know nothing of true goodness or saving Christianity. Happy is he who has learned to draw near to God with the prayer of the publican, *God, reconcile me, a sinner* (Luke 18:13).

Let us all seek humility. No grace fits us so well. What are we that we should be proud? Of all creatures born into the world, none are so dependent as the children of Adam. Physically, what body requires such care and attention and is such a daily debtor to half of creation for food and clothing as the human? Mentally, how little do the wisest men know (and they are but few), how ignorant the vast majority of mankind are and what misery they create by their own foolishness and sin! *We are but of yesterday and know nothing* (Job 8:9). Surely there is no created being on earth or in heaven that ought to be so humble as man.

Let us all seek more humility, if we know anything of it now. The more we have of it, the more Christlike we will be. It is written of our blessed Master (though in Him there was no sin) that He, *being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross* (Philippians 2:6-8). Let us also remember the words that precede that passage: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 2:5).

You can depend on it that the nearer people draw to heaven, the more humble they become. In the hour of death, with one foot in the grave, with something of the light of heaven shining down upon them, hundreds of great saints have left their confession on record that they never saw their sins so clearly and felt so deeply their debt to mercy and grace until that hour. Heaven alone, I suppose, will fully teach us how humble we ought to be. It is only when we stand within the veil and look back on all the way of life by which we were led that we will completely understand the need and beauty of humility. Strong language like Paul's will not seem too strong to us in that day. No, indeed! We will cast our crowns before the throne and realize what George Whitefield meant when he said, "The anthem in heaven will be, What hath God wrought!"

In the second place, let us notice what Paul says of his ministerial office. There is much simplicity in the apostle's words about this subject. He says that grace was given unto him that he should preach. The meaning of the sentence is plain: "The privilege of being a messenger of good news has been granted to me. I have been commissioned to be a herald of glad tidings." Of course, Paul's conception of the minister's office included the administration of the sacraments and doing all the other things needful for the edifying of the body of Christ, but here, as in other places, it is evident that the main idea continually before his mind was that the main business of a minister of the New Testament is to be a preacher, an evangelist, God's ambassador, God's messenger, and the proclaimer of God's good news to a fallen world. He says in another place, *Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel* (1 Corinthians 1:17).

I fail to see that Paul ever supports the theory that there was intended to be a priestly ministry today, a sacrificing priesthood in the church of Christ. There is not a word in Acts or in Paul's letters to the churches to warrant such an idea. It is not written, "God has set some in the church, first apostles, then priests" (see 1 Corinthians 12:28). If it were to be found anywhere in the Bible, we would expect it to be found in Paul's pastoral epistles to Timothy and Titus, but we do not find it there. On the contrary, in these very letters we read such expressions as these: God has *manifested in due times . . . his word through preaching* (Titus 1:3); *I am appointed a preacher* (2 Timothy 1:11); *I am ordained a preacher* (1 Timothy 2:7); and *that by me the preaching might be fully known* (2 Timothy 4:17). In fact, one of his last instructions to his friend Timothy, when he left him in charge of an organized church, was this concise sentence: *Preach the word* (2 Timothy 4:2). Basically, I believe that Paul wants us to understand that however various the works for which the Christian minister is set apart, his first, foremost, and main work is to be a preacher and proclaimer of God's Word.

However, while we deny that a sacrificing priesthood has any basis in Scripture, let us be careful in these days that we do not rush into the extreme of undervaluing the office that the minister of Christ holds. There is some danger in this direction. Let us firmly grasp certain fixed principles about the Christian ministry, and however strong our dislike

of the priesthood and however great our dislike for the teachings of Roman Catholicism, let nothing tempt us to let these principles slip out of our hands. Surely there is solid middle ground between a groveling idolatry of the priesthood system on one hand, and a disorderly rejection of all spiritual authority on the other. Surely it does not mean that because we will not be Roman Catholics in this matter of the ministry that we must then follow the teachings of the Quakers or Plymouth Brethren.⁴⁹ This, at any rate, was not in the mind of Paul.

For one thing, let us settle it firmly in our minds that the office of elder is established in Scripture. I do not need to weary you with quotations to prove this point. I will simply advise you to read Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus and judge for yourselves. If these epistles do not authorize a ministry, there is, to my mind, no meaning in words. Take a jury of the first twelve intelligent, honest, impartial, unprejudiced people you can find, and give them a New Testament to examine this question for themselves: "Is the Christian ministry a scriptural thing or not?" I have no doubt what their verdict would be.

For another thing, let us settle it in our minds that the ministerial office is a most wise and useful provision of God. It secures the regular provision of all Christ's ordinances and means of grace. It provides an undying system for promoting the awakening of sinners and the edification of saints. Experience proves that everybody's business soon becomes nobody's business, and if this is true in other matters, it is no less true in the matter of the Christian religion. Our God is a God of order and a God who works by means, and we have no right to expect His cause to be kept up by constant miraculous interpositions while His servants stand idle. For the uninterrupted preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments, no better plan can be devised than the appointment of a regular order of men who will give themselves wholly to Christ's business.

For another thing, let us settle it firmly in our minds that the ministerial office is an honorable privilege. It is an honor to be the ambassador of a king, but how much greater honor is it to be the ambassador of the King of Kings and to proclaim the good news of the conquest achieved

49 Every well-informed person knows that, to the apprehension of most people, the Quakers and Plymouth Brethren appear to ignore the ministerial office altogether.

on Calvary! To directly serve such a Master, to carry His message, to know that if God blesses the results of our work, they are eternal – this is indeed a privilege. Other laborers may work for a corruptible crown, but the minister of Christ works for an incorruptible crown.

Never is a land in worse condition than when the ministers of Christianity have caused their office to be ridiculed and despised. There is a tremendous word in Malachi: *Therefore I have also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways* (Malachi 2:9). Whether people will hear or reject, the office of a faithful ambassador is honorable. It was a fine saying of an old missionary on his deathbed, who died at the age of ninety-six, that “The very best thing that a man can do is to preach the gospel.”

If souls are lost through
unfaithfulness, their
blood will be required
at our hands.

Let me leave this part of my subject with a sincere request that all who pray will never forget to make supplications and prayers and intercession for the ministers of Christ, that there will never be lacking an adequate supply of them at home and in the mission field, that they may be kept sound in the faith and holy in their lives, and that they make take heed to themselves as well as to the doctrine of God’s Word (1 Timothy 4:16).

Please remember that while the office of a minister of Christ is honorable, useful, and scriptural, it is also one of deep and painful responsibility! We *watch for your souls as those that must give account* at the judgment day (Hebrews 13:17). If souls are lost through unfaithfulness, their blood will be required at our hands. If we only had to read services and administer sacraments, wear specific clothing and perform some ceremonies, our job would be comparatively easy. But this is not all we must do. We must deliver our Master’s message, keep back nothing that is profitable, and declare all the counsel of God. If we tell our congregations less than the truth or more than the truth, we may ruin immortal souls forever. Life and death are in the power of the preacher’s tongue. *Woe is me, if I do not preach the gospel!* (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Once more I urge you to pray for us. *Who is sufficient for these things?* (2 Corinthians 2:16). Remember the old saying of the church fathers: “None are in more spiritual danger than ministers.” It is easy

to criticize and find fault with us. We have a *treasure in clay vessels* (2 Corinthians 4:7). We are men *subject to passions like yourselves*, and are not infallible (James 5:17). Pray for us in these trying, tempting, controversial days, that the church may never lack elders and deacons who are sound in the faith, bold as lions, *prudent as serpents and innocent as doves* (Matthew 10:16). The very man who said that grace was given to him to preach is the same man who said, *Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked men, for the faith is not of everyone* (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

Let us notice now, in the last place, what Paul says regarding the great subject of his preaching. He calls it *the unsearchable riches of the Christ*. We would likely expect the converted man of Tarsus to preach Christ. Having found peace through the blood of the cross (Colossians 1:20), we can be sure that he would always tell the story of the cross to others. He never wasted precious time in exalting a mere rootless morality or in talking at length on vague abstractions and empty platitudes, such as the true, noble, earnest, and beautiful things found in the natural man, the germs of goodness in human nature, and the like. He always went to the root of the matter. He showed people their great family disease, their desperate state as sinners, and the Great Physician needed by a sin-sick world.

As expected, too, Paul preached Christ among the gentiles in all places and among all people. Wherever he travelled and stood up to preach – at Antioch, Lystra, Philippi, Athens, Corinth, or Ephesus, among Greeks or Romans, among learned or unlearned, among Stoics and Epicureans, before rich or poor, barbarians, Scythians, bond or free – the main message of Paul's sermons was Jesus and His vicarious death, Jesus and His resurrection. Varying his mode of address according to his audience, as he wisely did, the essence and heart of his preaching was Christ crucified.

In the text before us, though, you will observe that Paul uses a very distinct expression, an expression that unquestionably stands alone in his writings – *the unsearchable riches of the Christ*. It is the strong, burning language of one who always remembered his debt to Christ's mercy and grace, and who loved to show how intensely he felt it by his

words. Paul was not a man to act or speak by halves. He never forgot the road to Damascus, the house of Judas in the street called Strait, the visit of good Ananias, the scales falling from his eyes, and his own marvelous passage from death to life. These things are always fresh and new before his mind. He is not content to only say, "Grace is given me to preach Christ," but he magnifies his subject. He calls it *the unsearchable riches of the Christ*.

What did the apostle Paul mean when he spoke of *unsearchable riches*? This is a difficult question to answer. No doubt he saw in Christ such a limitless provision for all the needs of man's soul that he knew no other phrase to convey his meaning. No matter from what standpoint he viewed Jesus, he saw in Him far more than the mind could conceive or the tongue could tell. What he precisely intended must necessarily be matter of speculation, but it might be useful to record in detail some of the things that most probably were in his mind. It may, it must, it ought to be useful. After all, let us remember that these *riches of the Christ* are riches that you and I need today just as much as Paul needed. Best of all, these riches are treasured up in Christ for us as much as they were two thousand years ago. They are still there. They are still offered freely to all who are willing to have them. They are still the property of everyone who repents and believes. Let us briefly look at some of them.

Record first and foremost in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the person of Christ. That miraculous union of perfect man and perfect God in our Lord Jesus Christ is a great mystery, no doubt, that we cannot begin to fully understand. It is a lofty thing, and our minds cannot reach it. However, as mysterious as that union might be, it is a mine of comfort and consolation to all who can rightly regard it. Infinite power and infinite sympathy are met together and combined in our Savior. If He had been only man, He could not have saved us. If He had been only God (I speak with reverence), He could not have been able to *sympathize with our weaknesses* (Hebrews 4:15), nor have suffered and been tempted (Hebrews 2:18). As God, He is mighty to save (Zephaniah 3:17); as man, He is exactly suited to be our Head, Representative, and Friend. Let thoughtful Christians never be ashamed to believe and hold fast the neglected doctrine of the incarnation and

the union of two natures in our Savior. It is a rich and precious truth that our Lord Jesus Christ is both God and man.

Record next in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the work that Jesus accomplished for us when He lived on earth, died, and rose again. Truly and indeed, He finished the work that His Father gave Him to do (John 17:4). He completed the work of atonement for sin, the work of reconciliation, the work of redemption, the work of satisfaction, and the work of substitution as the just for the unjust (1 Peter 3:18). It makes some people happy, I know, to call these short phrases man-made theological terms or human dogmas, but they will find it hard to prove that each of these much-abused phrases does not honestly contain the substance of plain texts of Scripture, which, for convenience sake, like the word *Trinity*, theologians have packed into a single word. Each phrase is very rich, too.

Record next in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the duties that Christ at this moment fulfills as He lives for us at the right hand of God. He is at the same time our Mediator, Advocate, Priest, Intercessor, Shepherd, Bishop, Physician, Captain, King, Master, Head, Forerunner, Elder Brother, and Bridegroom of our souls. No doubt these offices are worthless to those who know nothing of actual Christianity, but to those who live the life of faith and seek first the kingdom of God, each role is as precious as gold.

Record next in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the names and titles that are applied to Christ in the Scriptures. Every careful Bible reader knows that their number is very great, but I do not have space to select more than a few of them now. Think for a moment of such titles as the Lamb of God, the Bread of Life, the Fountain of Living Waters, the Light of the World, the Door, the Way, the Vine, the Rock, the Cornerstone, the Christian's Robe, and the Christian's Altar. Think of all these names and consider how much they contain. To the careless, worldly person, they are mere words, and nothing more; but to the true Christian, each title, if considered and studied, will be found to have within a wealth of blessed truth.

Lastly, record in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the characteristic qualities, attributes, dispositions, and intentions of Christ's mind toward us as we find them revealed in the

New Testament. In Him there are riches of mercy, love, and compassion for sinners. There are riches of power to cleanse, pardon, forgive, and to save to the uttermost. In Christ there are riches of willingness to receive all who come to Him repenting and believing, and there are riches of ability to change by His Spirit the hardest hearts and worst individuals. There are riches of tender patience to bear with the weakest believers. There are riches of strength to help His people to the end, notwithstanding every foe without and within.

In Jesus Christ there are riches of sympathy for all who are cast down and who bring their troubles to Him. Last, but not least, there are riches of glory to reward when He comes again to raise the dead and gather His people to be with Him in His kingdom. Who can estimate these riches? The children of this world may regard them with indifference or turn away from them with contempt, but those who feel the value of their souls know better. They will say with one voice, "There are no riches like those that are laid up in Christ for His people."

In Christ there are riches
of willingness to receive
all who come to Him
repenting and believing.

Best of all, these riches are unsearchable. They are a mine that, no matter how long it is worked, is never exhausted. They are a fountain that, no matter how many drink its waters, never runs dry. The sun in heaven has been shining for thousands of years, giving light, life, warmth, and productiveness to the whole surface of the globe. There is not a tree or a flower in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America that is not a debtor to the sun. Still the sun shines on for generation after generation, season after season, rising and setting with unbroken regularity, giving to all, taking from none, and to all ordinary eyes it is the same in light and heat that it was on the day of creation – the great common benefactor of mankind.

In the same way, if any illustration can approach the reality, this is how it is with Christ. He is still *the Sun of righteousness* to all mankind (Malachi 4:2). Millions have drawn from Him in days gone by, and looking to Him have lived with comfort and have died with comfort. Untold numbers at this moment are drawing daily supplies of mercy, grace, peace, strength, and help from Him, and are finding all fullness dwelling in Him, yet I do not doubt that half of the riches laid up in

Him for mankind are utterly unknown to us! Surely the apostle Paul might well use that phrase, *the unsearchable riches of the Christ*.

Let me now conclude this chapter with three words of practical application. I will put them in the form of questions, inviting each reader to examine them quietly and try to answer them.

First, let me ask you what you think of yourself. You have seen and heard what Paul thought of himself. Now, what are your thoughts about yourself? Have you found out that important foundational truth – that you are a guilty sinner in the sight of God?

The cry for more education in this day is loud and incessant. Ignorance is universally deplored, but you can be sure that there is no ignorance as common and as harmful as ignorance of ourselves. Yes, people may know arts, sciences, languages, politics, and economics, yet be miserably ignorant of their own hearts and their own condition before God.

Be very sure that self-knowledge is the first step toward heaven. To know God's unspeakable perfection and our own immense imperfection – to see our own unspeakable shortcomings and corruption – is the basis of real Christianity. The more real inward light we have, the more humble and lowly-minded we will be and the more we will understand the value of that despised thing – the gospel of Christ. He who thinks worst of himself and his own efforts is perhaps the best Christian before God. It would be good for anyone if they would pray, night and day, this simple prayer: "Lord, show me myself."

Secondly, what do you think of the ministers of Christ? As strange as that question might seem, I truly believe that the kind of answer a person honestly gives to it is very often a fair test of the condition of his heart.

I am not asking what you think of a lazy, worldly, inconsistent pastor – a sleeping watchman and faithless shepherd. No! I am asking what you think of the faithful minister of Christ who honestly exposes sin and pierces your conscience. Be careful how you answer that question. Too many people today only like those ministers who preach smooth things and leave their sins alone, who flatter their pride and amuse their intellect, but who never sound an alarm or warn them of the wrath to come.

When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?* (1 Kings 21:20). When Micaiah was named to Ahab, he cried, *I hate*

him, for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil (1 Kings 22:8). Sadly, there are many people today like Ahab! They prefer a ministry that does not make them uncomfortable or stir up their conscience. How is it with you? Believe me that he is the best friend who tells you the most truth! It is an evil sign in the church when Christ's witnesses are silenced or persecuted. People hate those who reprove (Amos 5:10). It was a solemn saying of the prophet to Amaziah: *I know that God has determined to destroy thee because thou hast done this and hast not hearkened unto my counsel* (2 Chronicles 25:16).

Last of all, what do you think of Christ Himself? Is He great or little in your eyes? Does He come first or second in your estimation? Do you prefer Him more than His church, His ministers, His sacraments, and His ordinances? Where is He in your heart and your mind's eye?

This is the question of questions! Pardon, peace, rest of conscience, hope in death, and heaven itself all hinge upon our answer. To know Christ is life eternal. To be without Christ is to be without God. *He that has the Son has life; and he that does not have the Son of God does not have life* (1 John 5:12).

The friends of purely secular education, the enthusiastic advocates of reform and progress, and the worshippers of reason, intellect, mind, and science may say what they want and do all they can to fix the world, but they will find their labor in vain if they do not make allowance for the fall of man and if there is no place for Christ in their plans. There is a burning disease at the heart of mankind that will obstruct all their efforts and defeat all their plans – and that disease is sin. Oh, that people would only see and recognize the corruption of human nature and the uselessness of all efforts to improve man that are not based on the remedial system of the gospel! Yes – the plague of sin is in the world, and no waters will ever heal that plague except those that flow from the fountain for all sin – the crucified Christ.

In conclusion, how can any of us boast? As a great minister said on his deathbed, "We are all of us only half awake." The best Christian among us knows only little of his glorious Savior, even after he had learned to believe. We see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). We do not realize the *unsearchable riches* that are in Him. When we

awake in His likeness in another world, we will be amazed that we knew Him so imperfectly and loved Him so little.

Let us seek to know Him better now and live in closer communion with Him. In living this way, we will feel no need of human priests and earthly confessionals. We will feel that “I have all and abound. I want nothing more. Christ dying for me on the cross, Christ ever interceding for me at God’s right hand, Christ dwelling in my heart by faith, Christ soon coming again to gather me and all His people together to part no more – Christ is enough for me. Having Christ, I have unsearchable riches.”

The good I have is from His stores supplied,
The ill is only what He deems the best.
He for my Friend, I’m rich with naught beside,
And poor without Him, though of all possessed:
Changes may come – I take, or I resign,
Content while I am His, and He is mine.

While here, alas! I know but half His love,
But half discern Him, and but half adore;
But when I meet Him in the realms above,
I hope to love Him better, praise Him more,
And feel, and tell, amid the choir divine,
How fully I am His, and He is mine.⁵⁰

50 These are the third and sixth stanzas from the hymn “Long Did I Toil,” written by Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847).

Chapter 19

Needs of the Times

Men who had understanding of the times. (1 Chronicles 12:32)

These words were written about the tribe of Issachar in the days when David first began to reign over Israel. It seems that after Saul's unhappy death, some of the tribes of Israel were undecided what to do. "Under which king?" was the question of the day in Israel. The Israelites were not sure whether they should cling to the family of Saul or accept David as their king. Some hung back and would not commit themselves; others came forward boldly and declared themselves to be for David. Among these last were many of the children of Issachar, and the Holy Spirit gave them a special word of praise. He says that they were *men who had understanding of the times*.

I do not doubt that this sentence, like every sentence in Scripture, was written for our learning. These men of Issachar are set before us as a pattern to be imitated and an example to be followed, for it is a most important thing to understand the times in which we live and to know what those times require. The wise men in the court of Ahasuerus *knew the times* (Esther 1:13). Our Lord Jesus Christ blames the Jews because they did not know the time *of thy visitation* (Luke 19:44) and were *unable to make decisions . . . regarding the signs of the times* (Matthew 16:3). Let us be careful that we do not fall into the same sin. The person who is content to sit ignorantly by his own fireside, wrapped up in his own private affairs, not caring what is going on in the church and the

world, is a miserable patriot and a poor type of Christian. Next to our Bibles and our own hearts, our Lord wants us to study our own times.

I want to consider in this chapter what our own times require at our hands. All ages have their own particular dangers for professing Christians, and all consequently demand special attention to specific duties. I ask you to listen for a few minutes while I try to show you what the times require of Christians. There are five points that I would like to bring before you, and I will mention them plainly and without reserve. *If the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?* (1 Corinthians 14:8).

First and foremost, the times require us to boldly and unflinchingly maintain the entire truth of Christianity and the divine authority of the Bible. We live in an age of abounding unbelief and skepticism. Never, perhaps, since the days of Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian was the truth of Christianity so openly and unashamedly assailed, and never was the assault so deceptively and effectively conducted. The words that Bishop Butler wrote in 1736 are curiously applicable to our own days:

It is come to be taken for granted by many persons, that Christianity is not even a subject of inquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if, in the present age, this was an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world.⁵¹

I often wonder what the good bishop would have said now if he had lived in the present day.

In reviews, magazines, newspapers, lectures, essays, and sometimes even in sermons, people are incessantly waging war against the very foundations of Christianity. Reason, science, geology, anthropology, modern discoveries, free thought, and more are all boldly asserted to be on their side. No educated person, we are constantly told nowadays, can really believe in miracles or that the Bible is completely true and

51 This is from the introduction to *Butler's Analogy*, a book by Joseph Butler (1692-1752) effectively refuting the arguments of deism.

inspired by God. Such ancient doctrines as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the atonement, the duty to keep the Lord's Day holy, the necessity and effectiveness of prayer, the existence of the devil, and the reality of future punishment are quietly put on the shelf as useless old almanacs, or scornfully thrown overboard as not needed! All this is done so cleverly, with such an appearance of sincerity and kindness and with such praise to the capacity and nobility of human nature, that multitudes of unstable Christians are carried away as by a flood and become partially doubtful, if not making a complete shipwreck of faith.

The existence of this plague of unbelief should not surprise us for a moment. It is only an old enemy in new clothing, an old disease in a new form. Since the day when Adam and Eve fell, the devil has never ceased to tempt people not to believe God, and has said, directly or indirectly, "You will not die, even if you do not believe." In the latter days especially, we have the authority of Scripture for expecting an abundant crop of unbelief: *When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?* (Luke 18:8). *Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse* (2 Timothy 3:13). *There shall come in the last days scoffers* (2 Peter 3:3).

Just as you should not be surprised at the widespread skepticism of the times, so you should not be shaken by it or moved from your steadfastness. There is no real cause for alarm. The ark of God is not in danger, even though the oxen seem to shake it (1 Chronicles 13:9). Christianity has survived the attacks of skeptics like Hume, Hobbes, Tindal, Collins, Woolston, Bolingbroke, Chubb, Voltaire, Paine, and Holyoake. These men made a lot of noise in their day and frightened weak people, but they produced no more effect than idle travelers produce by scratching their names on the great pyramid of Egypt.

You can depend on it that Christianity will survive the attacks of the skeptics and atheists of our times. The dramatic creativity of many modern objections to Revelation, no doubt, makes them seem more convincing than they really are. It does not mean, however, that hard knots cannot be untied because our fingers cannot untie them, or that

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challenging difficulties cannot be explained because our eyes cannot see through them or explain them. When you cannot answer a skeptic, be content to wait for more light, but never forsake a great principle. In religion, as in many scientific questions, said Michael Faraday, “the highest philosophy is often a judicious suspense of judgment.” *He that believes shall not make haste* (Isaiah 28:16); he can afford to wait.

When skeptics and infidels have said all they can, we must not forget that there are three great broad facts that they have never explained away, and I am convinced they never can and never will. Let me tell you briefly what they are. They are very simple facts, and anyone can understand them.

The first fact is Jesus Christ Himself. If Christianity is merely an invention of man, and if the Bible is not from God, how can unbelievers explain Jesus Christ? They cannot deny His existence in history. How is it that without force or bribery, without weapons or money, He has made such an immensely deep impact on the world, as He certainly has? Who was He? What was He? Where did He come from? How is it that there never has been anyone like Him, either before or after, since the beginning of time? They cannot explain it. Nothing can explain it but the great foundational principle of revealed Christianity – that Jesus Christ is God, and His gospel is completely true.

The second fact is the Bible itself. If Christianity is merely an invention of man, and if the Bible is of no more authority than any other uninspired volume, how is it that the Book is what it is? How is it that a Book written by a few Jews in a remote corner of the earth, written at distant periods without consultation or collaboration among the writers, written by members of a nation that, compared to Greeks and Romans, did nothing for literature – how is it that this Book stands entirely alone and that there is nothing that even approaches it for high views of God, for true views of man, for solemnity of thought, for grandeur of doctrine, and for purity of morality? What account can the atheist give of this Book, so deep, so simple, so wise, so free from defects? He cannot explain its existence and nature on his principles. The only people who can do that are those who hold that the Book is supernatural and from God.

The third fact is the effect that Christianity has produced on the

world. If Christianity is merely the invention of man and not a supernatural, divine revelation, how is it that it has brought such a complete alteration in the state of mankind? Any well-read person knows that the moral difference between the condition of the world before Christianity was planted and since Christianity took root is the difference between night and day, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the devil. At this very moment, I defy anyone to look at a map of the world and compare the countries where people are Christians with those where they are not Christians, and try to deny that these countries are as different as light and darkness, black and white. How can any skeptic explain this on his principles? He cannot do it. The only people who can are those who believe that Christianity came down from God and is the only divine religion in the world.

Whenever you are tempted to be alarmed at the progress of atheism and agnosticism, look at the three facts I have just mentioned and cast your fears away. Take up your position boldly behind the strength of these three facts, and you can safely defy the utmost efforts of modern skeptics. They may often ask you a hundred questions you cannot answer, and might bring up ingenious problems about various readings, or inspiration, or geology, or the origin of man, or the age of the world that you cannot solve. They may bother and irritate you with wild speculations and theories that you cannot prove false at the time, although you know that what they claim is not true. Be calm and fear not. Remember the three great facts I have mentioned, and boldly challenge skeptics to explain them away. The difficulties of Christianity, no doubt, are great, but they are nothing compared to the difficulties of unbelief.

In the second place, the times require us to have clear and absolute views of Christian doctrine. I cannot withhold my conviction that the professing church today is as much damaged by lack of certainty and clarity about matters of doctrine within, as it is by skeptics and unbelievers without. Many professing Christians today seem utterly unable to distinguish between things that differ. Like people afflicted with color blindness, they are incapable of discerning what is true and what is false, what is sound and what is unsound. If a preacher is clever and eloquent and earnest, the people seem to think he is all right, no

matter how difficult to understand or how sound his sermons may be. They are apparently destitute of spiritual sense and cannot detect error.

Catholicism or Protestantism, an atonement or no atonement, a personal Holy Spirit or no Holy Spirit, future punishment or no future punishment, ritualistic or worldly, nothing seems inappropriate to them; they can swallow it all, if they cannot digest it! Carried away by imagined kindness and compassion, they seem to think that everybody is right and nobody is wrong, that every clergyman is sound and none are unsound, that everyone is going to be saved and nobody is going to be lost. Their religion is made up of negatives, and the only clear thing about them is that they dislike absolutes and think that all strong, definite, and certain views are very narrow and very wrong!

These people live in a kind of mist or fog. They see nothing clearly and do not know what they believe. They have not made up their minds about any great point in the gospel, and they seem content to be honorary members of all schools of thought. They could not tell you what they think is the truth about justification, regeneration, sanctification, the Lord's Supper, baptism, faith, conversion, inspiration, or the future state to save their lives. They are eaten up with a morbid dread of controversy and an ignorant dislike of party spirit, and yet they really cannot define what they mean by these phrases. The only point you can make out is that they admire earnestness, enthusiasm, and friendliness, and they cannot believe that any charismatic, earnest, and kind-hearted person can ever be in the wrong! So they live on undecided, and too often they drift down to the grave undecided, without comfort in their religion, and I am afraid they are often without hope.

The explanation of this boneless, nerveless, jellyfish condition of soul is not difficult to find. To begin with, the heart of man is naturally in the dark about Christianity, has no intuitive sense of truth, and desperately needs instruction and illumination. Besides this, the natural heart in most people hates exertion in religion and intensely dislikes patient, painstaking study. Above all, the natural heart generally likes the praise of others, avoids conflict, and loves to be thought kind and compassionate. The whole result is that a kind of broad religious agnosticism fits an immense number of people, especially young people. They are content to shovel aside all disputed points as rubbish, and if

you accuse them of indecision, they will tell you, “I do not pretend to understand controversy. I refuse to examine opposing points. I think it is all the same in the long run.” Who does not know that such people abound everywhere?

I urge all who read this to beware of this undecided state of mind in the Christian religion. It is a *pestilence that walks in darkness*, and a destruction that kills at noonday (Psalm 91:6). It is a lazy, idle type of soul that keeps people from thinking about and searching for truth, and you will find this nowhere promoted in the Bible. For your own soul’s sake, go to the Scriptures, make up your mind what you believe, and have definite, distinct views of truth and error. Never be afraid to hold clear-cut doctrinal beliefs, and do not let any fear of others or any morbid dread of being thought intolerant, narrow, or controversial cause you to be content with a bloodless, boneless, tasteless, colorless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity.

If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecision.

Observe what I say. If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and you must take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal Christianity. If you do not believe much, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology. The victories have been won by telling people decisively of Christ’s vicarious death and sacrifice, by showing them Christ’s substitution on the cross and His precious blood, by teaching them about justification by faith and urging them to believe on a crucified Savior, and by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, and regeneration by the Spirit. The victories have been won by lifting up the brazen serpent and telling people to look and live – to believe, repent, and be converted. This is the only teaching that for two thousand years God has honored with success and is still honoring today both at home and abroad.

Let the clever advocates of a general and undogmatic theology – the preachers of the gospel of earnestness, niceness, and cold morality – let them, I say, show us at this day any village, town, or city that has been evangelized without “dogma,” by their principles. They cannot do it, and they never will. Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless

thing. It may be beautiful to some minds, but it is childless and barren. There is no getting over facts. The good that is done in the earth may be comparatively small. Evil may abound and ignorant impatience may murmur and cry out that Christianity has failed, but if we want to do good and shake the world, we must fight with the old apostolic weapons and stick to biblical conviction, principles, and uncompromising beliefs. No dogma, no fruits! No clear evangelical doctrine, no evangelization!

The men who have done the most for the Church of England and have made the deepest mark on their day and generation have always been men of most resolute and distinct doctrinal views. It is bold, decided, outspoken men, like Capel Molyneux or our grand old Protestant champion, Hugh McNeile, who make a deep impression, set people thinking, and turn the world upside down. It was “dogma” in the apostolic ages that emptied the heathen temples and shook Greece and Rome. It was “dogma” that awakened Christendom from its slumber at the time of the Reformation and took away from the Pope one third of his subjects. It was “dogma” that a few hundred years ago revived the Church of England in the days of Whitefield, Wesley, Venn, and Romaine, and turned our dying Christianity into a burning flame.

It is “dogma” at this moment that gives power to every successful mission, whether at home or abroad. It is doctrine – clear, ringing doctrine – that, like the ram’s horns at Jericho, casts down the opposition of the devil and sin. Let us cling to unyielding doctrinal views, whatever some may say in these times, and we will do well for ourselves, for others, for the church, and for Christ’s cause all around the world.

In the third place, the times require us to have an awakened and livelier sense of the unscriptural and soul-ruining character of Roman Catholicism. This is a painful subject, but it imperatively demands some plain speaking. The facts of the case are very simple. No intelligent observer can fail to see that the tone of public feeling in England about Romanism has undergone a great change lately. There is no longer that general dislike, dread, and aversion to the religion of the Pope that was once almost universal in this realm. The edge of the old British feeling about Protestantism seems blunted and dull. Some profess to be tired of all religious controversy and are ready to sacrifice God’s truth for the sake of peace.

Some look on Roman Catholicism as simply one among many forms of religion, neither worse nor better than others. Some try to convince us that Catholicism has changed and is not nearly as bad as it used to be. Some boldly point to the faults of Protestants and loudly cry that Roman Catholic beliefs are quite as good as ours. Some think it is fine and kind to maintain that we have no right to think anyone is wrong who is sincere about his beliefs. Yet two great historical facts – (1) that ignorance, immorality, and superstition reigned supreme in England six hundred years ago under the Pope, and (2) that the Reformation was the greatest blessing God ever gave to this land – are both facts that no one but a Roman Catholic ever thought of disputing a couple hundred years ago! In the present day, sadly, it is convenient and fashionable to forget those facts!

The causes of this sad change of feeling are not hard to discover. It arises partly from the untiring zeal of the Roman Catholic Church herself. Her agents never slumber or sleep. They *compass sea and land to make one proselyte* (Matthew 23:15). They go everywhere to promote their cause. This change has also been furthered immensely by the proceedings of many churches and denominations. Some have been discounting the Reformation and have been looking down upon historic Protestantism for many years, with only too much success. It has corrupted, leavened, blinded, and poisoned the minds of many people by constant misrepresentation. It has gradually familiarized people with every distinctive doctrine and practice of Catholicism – the real presence, the mass, auricular confession and priestly absolution, the sacerdotal character of the ministry, the monastic system, and a dramatic, emotional, showy style of public worship. The natural result is that many simple people now see no mighty harm in downright genuine Roman Catholic teaching!

Last, but not least, the artificial benevolence of the day we live in helps on the tendency toward Rome. It is fashionable now to say that all sects should be equal – that the State should have nothing to do with religion, that all creeds should be regarded with equal favor and respect, and that there is a foundation of common truth at the bottom of all types of religion, whether Buddhism, Islam, or Christianity! The consequence is that multitudes of ignorant people begin to think there is

nothing peculiarly dangerous in the beliefs of Catholics any more than in the beliefs of Methodists, Independents, Presbyterians, or Baptists – and that we ought to let Roman Catholicism alone and never expose its unscriptural and Christ-dishonoring character.

The consequences of this changed tone of feeling will be most disastrous and troublesome unless it can be stopped. Catholicism historically discourages Bible reading, forbids people from coming to their own understanding of the Scriptures by simply studying the Word of God, re-establishes the priestly system, blocks up the way to Christ's cross, sets up confession to priests, promotes works and ritual over faith in Jesus, and much more.

I warn all who read this that the times require you to awake and be on your guard. Beware of Roman Catholicism and any religious teaching that knowingly or unknowingly paves the way to it. I urge you to realize the painful fact that biblical Protestantism is gradually ebbing

away, and I entreat you, as Christians and patriots, to resist the growing tendency to forget the blessings of the Protestant Reformation.

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For the sake of our country, for the sake of our children, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, let us not drift back to Roman Catholic ignorance, superstition, priesthood, and immorality. Our fathers tried the religion of the Pope long ago, for centuries, and threw it off at last with disgust and indignation. Let us not put the clock back and return to Egypt. Let us have no peace with Rome until Rome casts aside her errors and is at peace with Christ.

Read your Bibles and fill your minds with scriptural arguments. A Bible-reading people is a nation's surest defense against error. I have no fear for historical Protestantism if the people will only do their duty. Read your Thirty-nine Articles⁵² and *Jewell's Apology*, and see how those neglected documents speak of Roman Catholic doctrines. We clergymen, I fear, are often sadly to blame. We break the first rule, which calls us to preach four times every year against the Pope's supremacy! Too often we behave as if "giant Pope" was dead and buried, and we never

52 The Thirty-nine Articles explained the teachings and practices of the Church of England, especially in regard to the Reformation.

mention him.⁵³ Too often, for fear of giving offense, we neglect to show our people the real nature and evil of the Pope's teachings.

I encourage my readers, in addition to the Bible and the Articles, to read history and see what Rome did in days gone by. Read how she trampled on your country's liberties, plundered your forefathers' pockets, and kept the whole nation ignorant, superstitious, and immoral. Read how Archbishop Laud ruined church and state and brought himself and King Charles to the scaffold by his foolish, obstinate, and God-displeasing effort to eliminate Protestantism from the Church of England. Read how the last Roman Catholic king of England, James the Second, lost his crown by his daring attempt to put down Protestantism and reintroduce Catholicism. Do not forget that Rome never changes. It is her boast and glory that she is infallible and so is always the same.

What has made Italy and Sicily what they were until very recently? Roman Catholicism. What has made the South American nations what they are? Roman Catholicism. What has made Spain and Portugal what they are? Roman Catholicism. What has made Ireland what she is in Munster, Leinster, and Connaught? Roman Catholicism. What makes Scotland, the United States, and England the powerful, prosperous countries they are, and I pray God they may long continue? I answer unhesitatingly, Protestantism, a free Bible, and the principles of the Reformation. Oh, think twice before you cast aside the principles of the Reformation! Think twice before you give way to the prevailing tendency to favor Roman Catholicism and go back to Rome.

The Reformation found Englishmen filled with ignorance, but left them in possession of knowledge. It found them without Bibles, and placed a Bible in every parish. The Reformation found them in darkness, and left them in comparative light. It found them priest-ridden, and left them enjoying the liberty that Christ bestows. It found them strangers to the blood of atonement and to faith and grace and real holiness, and it left them with the key to these things in their hands. It found them blind, and left them seeing. The Reformation found them slaves, and left them free. Let us thank God forever for the Reformation! It lit a

53 "Giant pope" is a reference from *Pilgrim's Progress*, where Bunyan wrote: "I spotted a little cave ahead of me where two giants, Pope and Pagan, lived in old times. It was by their power and tyranny that the men whose bones, blood, ashes, and other remains lay in this place were cruelly put to death."

candle that we should never allow to be extinguished or to burn dim. Surely I have a right to say that the times require of us a renewed sense of the evils of Romanism and of the enormous value of the Protestant Reformation!

In the fourth place, the times require us to have a higher standard of personal holiness and an increased attention to practical Christianity in daily life. I must honestly declare my conviction that since the days of the Reformation, there has never been so much profession of the Christian religion without practice, so much talking about God without walking with Him, and so much hearing God's words without doing them – as there is now. Never was there so much formality and so little reality.

The whole tone of people's minds as to what constitutes practical Christianity seems lowered. The old golden standard of the behavior that is appropriate for a Christian man or woman appears cheapened and in decline. You can see multitudes of so-called religious people continually doing things that in previous days would have been thought utterly inconsistent with living Christianity. They see no harm in such things as worldly entertainment, theater-going, dancing, incessant novel-reading, and Sunday sports and travel, and they cannot in the least understand why you would object to these things! The ancient tenderness of conscience about such things seems to be dying away and becoming extinct, like the dodo bird. When you try to take issue with young communicants who indulge in them, they only stare at you as an old-fashioned, narrow-minded, fossilized person and ask, "What is the harm?" The lack of strictness of holiness among young men, and the amusement and shallowness among young women, are only too common characteristics of the rising generation of professing Christians.

I do not want to be mistaken in what I say. I am not recommending a religion of asceticism. I believe that monasteries, nunneries, complete retirement from the world, and refusal to do our duty in it are all unscriptural and mischievous attempts at remedies. Nor am I urging on people an ideal standard of perfection that has no basis in God's Word. Perfection is a standard that is unattainable in this life and hands over the management of the affairs of society to the devil and the wicked. No. I always want to promote a congenial, cheerful, rugged religion that people can carry everywhere and yet glorify Christ.

The pathway to a higher standard of holiness that I commend to your attention is a very simple one. It is so simple that I can imagine many smirking at it with scorn. As simple as it is, though, it is a path sadly neglected and overgrown with weeds, and it is about time to direct people into it.

We need, then, to examine more closely our good old friends, the Ten Commandments. Expounded and properly developed as they were by Bishop Andrewes⁵⁴ and the Puritans, the two tables of God's law are a perfect mine of practical religion. I think it is an evil sign of our day that many clergymen neglect to have the commandments put up in their new, or restored, churches, and casually tell you, "They are not needed now!" I believe they were never needed as much as they are now!

We need to examine more closely such portions of our Lord Jesus Christ's teaching as the Sermon on the Mount. How rich is that wonderful discourse in food for thought! What a magnificent sentence that is, *Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of the heavens* (Matthew 5:20). Sadly, that verse is rarely used!

Last, but not least, we need to study more closely the latter part of nearly all Paul's epistles to the churches. They are far too much passed over and neglected. Many Bible readers, I am afraid, are well acquainted with the first eleven chapters of the epistle to the Romans, but know very little of the last five chapters. When Thomas Scott expounded the epistle to the Ephesians at the old Lock Chapel, he remarked that the congregations became much smaller when he reached the practical part of that blessed book!

You might think my recommendations are very simple, but I do not hesitate to affirm that attention to them would by God's blessing be most useful to Christ's cause. I believe it would raise the standard of Christianity about such matters as home and family life, separation from the world, diligence in carrying out Christian duties, unselfishness, good attitudes, and general spiritual-mindedness to a degree that is seldom attained now.

There is a common complaint in these latter days that there is a lack

54 Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) was an English bishop in the Church of England. He was also a scholar and was one of the leading men overseeing the translation of the King James version of the Bible.

of power in modern Christianity, and that the true church of Christ, the body of which He is the Head, does not shake the world today as it used to do in former years. Shall I tell you in plain words what the reason is? It is the low quality of spiritual life that is so sadly common among professing Christians. We need more men and women who walk with God and before God, like Enoch and Abraham. Though our numbers at this date far exceed those of our evangelical forefathers, I believe we fall far short of them in our standard of Christian practice.

Where is the self-denial, the wise use of time, the absence of luxury and self-indulgence, the unmistakable separation from earthly things, the clear intent and desire to always be about our Master's business, the singleness of eye, the simplicity of home life, the holy quality of life in society, the patience, the humility, and the universal graciousness that marked so many of our forerunners a hundred or two hundred years ago?

Yes, where is it indeed? We have inherited their principles and we wear their armor, but we have not inherited their holy lives. The Holy Spirit sees it and is grieved. The world sees it and despises us. The world

sees it and cares little for our testimony. It is life – a heavenly, godly, Christlike life – that influences the world. Let us resolve, by God's blessing, to shake off this criticism. Let us awake to a clear view of what the times require of us in this matter. Let us aim at a much higher standard of practice. Let the time be over for us to have been content with a halfhearted holiness. From now on, let us strive

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to walk with God, to be thorough and unmistakable in our daily lives, and to silence, if we cannot convert, a sneering world.

In the fifth and last place, the times require us to more regularly and steadily persevere in the old ways of getting good for our souls. I do not think that any intelligent person can fail to see that there has lately been an immense increase of what I must call, for lack of a better phrase, public religion in the land. Services of all kinds are strangely multiplied. Places of worship are open for prayer and preaching and administration of the Lord's Supper much more than they were a hundred years ago. Church services, religious meetings in large public rooms, and assemblies in large auditoriums have become common and familiar

things, and the crowds who attend them prove that they are popular. This is an age of an immense amount of public religion.

I am not going to find fault with this. On the contrary, I thank God for the revival of the old apostolic plan of aggressiveness in religion and the evident desire to use all means to save some (1 Corinthians 9:22). I thank God for shortened services, home missions, and evangelistic movements like that of Moody and Sankey. Anything is better than sluggishness, apathy, and inaction. If Christ is preached, I rejoice (Philippians 1:18). Prophets and righteous men in England once desired to see those things, and never saw them. If Whitefield and Wesley had been told in their day that a time would come when Church of England archbishops and bishops would not only sanction mission services, but take an active part in them, I can hardly think they would have believed it. Rather, I suspect that they would have been tempted to say, like the Samaritan nobleman in Elisha's time, *If the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?* (2 Kings 7:2).

However, while we are thankful for the increase of public religion, we must never forget that unless it is accompanied by private religion, it is of no real solid value, and may even produce most harmful effects. Constant running after sensational preachers, constant attendance at long, crowded meetings, and constant craving after fresh excitement and emotionally charged pulpit novelties are all calculated to produce a very unhealthy style of Christianity, and in many cases, the end is the utter ruin of the soul.

Sadly, those who pursue these things are often led away by mere temporary emotions, after some fine display of ecclesiastical oratory and excitement, into professing far more than they really feel. After this, they can only continue to find fulfillment by a constant succession of religious excitements. In time, as happens with those who pursue drugs and alcohol, there comes a time when their dose loses its power, and a feeling of exhaustion and discontent begins to creep over their minds. Too often, I fear, this ends in a relapse into utter deadness and unbelief and a complete return to the world. This is all the result of having nothing but a public religion! Oh, that people would remember that it was not the wind, the fire, or the earthquake that showed Elijah the presence of God, but *a still small voice* (1 Kings 19:12).

Now I want to give a warning regarding this subject. I do not want to see a decrease of public religion, but I do want to promote an increase of that religion that is private – private between each person and God. The root of a plant or tree makes no show above ground. If you dig down to it and examine it, you can see that it is a poor, dirty, coarse-looking thing, and is not nearly as beautiful to the eye as the fruit, leaf, or flower. But that despised root, nevertheless, is the true source of all the life, health, vigor, and fertility that your eyes see, and without it the plant or tree would soon die.

In the same way, private religion is the root of all vital Christianity. Without it, we can still make a brave show in the meeting or on the platform, singing loudly, shedding many tears, and having the praise of man, but without it we have no wedding garment and are dead before God. I tell you plainly that the times require all of us to give more attention to our private religion.

Let us pray more earnestly in private and throw our whole souls more into our prayers. There are live prayers and there are dead prayers. There are prayers that cost us nothing and there are prayers that often cost us strong crying and tears. What are yours? When those who profess to follow Jesus backslide in public, the church is often surprised and shocked, but the truth is that they had long ago backslidden on their knees. They had neglected the throne of grace.

Let us read our Bibles in private more, and with more care and diligence. Ignorance of Scripture is the root of all error and makes a person helpless in the hand of the devil. There is less private Bible reading today, I suspect, than there was a hundred years ago. I can never believe that so many men and women would have been *tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine* (Ephesians 4:14), some falling into skepticism, some rushing into the wildest and narrowest extremes, and some going over to Rome, if there had not grown up a habit of lazy, superficial, careless, indifferent reading of God's Word. *Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures* (Matthew 22:29). The Bible in the pulpit must never take the place of the Bible at home.

Let us develop the habit of maintaining more private devotion and communion with Christ. Let us deliberately and resolutely make time for getting alone, for talking with our own souls like David,

for pouring out our hearts to our Great High Priest, Advocate, and Confessor at the right hand of God. We need more confession of sin, but not to priests. The confessional we need is not a booth in a church, but the throne of grace.

I see some professing Christians always running about after spiritual food, always in public, always out of breath and in a hurry, and never allowing themselves time to sit down quietly to contemplate and assess their spiritual condition. I am never surprised that such Christians have a weak, stunted religion and do not grow. I am not surprised if they, like Pharaoh's lean cows, look no better for their public religious feasting, but rather seem to be worse. Spiritual prosperity depends immensely on our private spiritual lives, and private religion cannot nourish us unless we determine that by God's help we will make time, whatever trouble it may cost us, for thought, for prayer, for the Bible, and for private communion with Christ. Sadly, that saying of our Master is sadly overlooked: *Enter into thy chamber, and . . . shut thy door* (Matthew 6:6).

Our evangelical forefathers had far fewer resources and opportunities than we have. They did not have full religious meetings and crowds, except occasionally at a church or in a field when such men as Whitefield, Wesley, or Rowlands preached. Their activities were neither fashionable nor popular, and they often brought more persecution and abuse than praise. But the few weapons they used, they used well.

With less noise and applause from man, they made a far deeper mark for God on their generation than we do with all our conferences, meetings, assemblies, retreats, and multiplied religious mechanisms. Their converts, I suspect, like the old-fashioned cloths and linens, wore better, lasted longer, faded less, kept color, and were more stable, rooted, and grounded than many of the spiritually newborn infants of this day. Why? Because they gave more attention to private Christian devotion than we generally do. They walked closely with God and honored Him in private, so He honored them in public. Oh, let us follow them as they followed Christ! Let us go and do likewise (Luke 10:37).

Let me conclude this chapter with a few words of practical application.

First, do you want to understand what the times require of you in reference to your own soul? Listen and I will tell you. You live in times of remarkable spiritual danger. There have never been more traps and

pitfalls in the way to heaven, and certainly those traps have never been as skillfully prepared and those pitfalls so ingeniously made as we see today.

See what you are about. Look closely at your life. Ponder the paths of your feet. Be careful that you do not come to eternal grief and ruin your own soul. Beware of practical unbelief under the misleading name of free thought. Beware of a helpless state of indecision about doctrinal truth under the compelling idea of not being divisive, and under the harmful influence of so-called tolerance and compassion. Beware of

If only few are in the narrow way of life, resolve that by God's help you will be among the few.

wasting your life away in wishing, intending, and hoping for the day of decision until the door is shut and you are given over to a dead conscience, dying without hope. Awake to a sense of your danger. Arise and give diligence to *make your calling and election sure*, whatever else you leave uncertain (2 Peter 1:10). The kingdom of God is very near. Christ the Almighty Savior, Christ the sinner's

Friend, Christ and eternal life, are ready for you if you will only go to Him. Arise and cast away your excuses. Christ calls you this very day. Do not wait for others. The times are desperately dangerous. If only few are in the narrow way of life, resolve that by God's help you will be among the few (Matthew 7:14).

Next, do you want to understand what the times require of all Christians in reference to the souls of others? Listen and I will tell you. You live in times of great liberty and abounding opportunities of doing good. Never were there so many open doors of usefulness and so many fields ready for the harvest. Be certain to use those open doors and try to reap those fields. Try to do a little good before you die. Strive to be useful. Determine that, by God's help, you will leave the world better in the day of your burial than it was in the day you were born. Remember the souls of relatives, friends, and companions; remember that God often works by weak instruments, and try with holy ingenuity to lead them to Christ. The time is short. The sand is running out of the hourglass of this old world. Redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16), and strive not to go to heaven alone.

Of course, you cannot command success. It is not certain that your

efforts to do good will always do good to others, but it is quite certain that they will always do good to yourself. Exercise is one great secret of health, both for body and soul. *He that fills shall be filled also himself* (Proverbs 11:25). It is a deep and golden saying of our Master, but seldom understood in its full meaning, that *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (Acts 20:35).

Lastly, do you want to understand what the times require of you in reference to Christianity today? Listen and I will tell you. We live in a day when the church of our fathers is in a very perilous, distressing, and critical position. She has been brought into troubled waters. Her very existence is endangered by religionists, atheists, and freethinkers. Her lifeblood is drained away by the behavior of traitors, false friends, and cowardly leaders within. Nevertheless, as long as the church sticks firmly to the Bible and the principles of the Protestant Reformation, I advise you strongly to stick to the church.

The evils are mingled with the good. The wheat never grows without tares (Matthew 13:24-30). Despite that, there is much to gladden us. There is more evangelical preaching than there ever was before in the land. There is more work done both at home and abroad. As Napoleon said at four o'clock on the battlefield of Marengo, "There is yet time to win a victory." Let us stop the quarreling, work together in love, unity, and truth, and work on, fight on, and pray on. Let us work to restore Reformation principles in accord with the truth of God's Word and holy lives in order to see true conversions in the power of God's Holy Spirit so that individuals, families, cities, and entire nations might be won for Christ!

Chapter 20

Christ Is All

Christ is all. (Colossians 3:11)

The words of the text above are few and short, but they contain great things. Like those golden sayings, *To me to live is Christ* (Philippians 1:21) and *I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me* (Galatians 2:20), they are remarkably rich and inspirational.

Christ is all. These three words are the essence and substance of Christianity. If our hearts really feel this way, it is well with our souls. If not, we can be sure we have much yet to learn.

Let me try to set before you in what sense Christ is all, and let me ask you to honestly judge yourself as you read this chapter so that you can be sure that you are ready for the judgment of the last day.

Christ is the mainspring both of doctrinal and practical Christianity. A proper knowledge of Christ is essential to a proper knowledge of sanctification, as well as justification. He who follows after holiness will make no progress unless he gives to Christ His rightful place. I began the book with a plain statement about sin. Let me end it with an equally plain statement about Christ.

First, let us understand that in all the counsels of God concerning man, Christ is all.

There was a time when this earth was not here. As solid as the mountains look, as immeasurable as the sea appears, and as high as

the stars in heaven look – they once did not exist. And man, with all the high thoughts he now has of himself, was a creature unknown.

Where was Christ then?

Even then Christ was *with the God* and *was God* (John 1:1) and was *equal with God* (Philippians 2:6). Even then He was the beloved Son of the Father: *Thou hast loved me*, He says, *before the foundation of the world* (John 17:24). *O Father, clarify thou me with thine own self with that clarity which I had with thee before the world was* (John 17:5). *I was set up with eternal dominion, from the beginning, before the earth was* (Proverbs 8:23). Even then He was the Savior *already ordained from before the foundation of the world* (1 Peter 1:20), and believers were chosen *in him* (Ephesians 1:4).

There came a time when this earth was created in its present order. Sun, moon, and stars, the sea, land, and all their inhabitants were called into being and made out of chaos and confusion. Last of all, man was formed out of the dust of the ground.

Where was Christ then?

Hear what the Scripture says: *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made* (John 1:3). *By him were all things created, that are in the heavens and that are in earth* (Colossians 1:16). *And Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands* (Hebrews 1:10). *When he composed the heavens, I was there. When he set a compass upon the face of the depth, when he established the clouds above, when he strengthened the fountains of the deep, when he gave to the sea his decree that the waters should not pass his commandment, when he appointed the foundations of the earth, I was with him ordering everything* (Proverbs 8:27-30). Can we wonder that the Lord Jesus, in His preaching, would continually draw lessons from nature? When He spoke of the sheep, the fish, the ravens, the corn, the lilies, the fig tree, and the vine, He spoke of things that He Himself had made.

There came a day when sin entered the world. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and fell. They lost that holy nature in which they were first formed. They forfeited the friendship and favor of God and became guilty, corrupt, helpless, hopeless sinners. Sin came as a barrier between themselves and their holy Father in heaven. If He had dealt

with them according to what they deserved, there would have been nothing before them but death, hell, and everlasting ruin.

Where was Christ then?

In that very day, He was revealed to our trembling parents as the only hope of salvation. The very day they fell, they were told that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15) and that a Savior born of a woman would overcome the devil and win for sinful man an entrance to eternal life. Christ was lifted up as the true light of the world in the very day of the fall, and since that day no name has ever been made known by which souls could be saved, except His. By Him all saved souls from Adam onward have entered heaven, and without Him none have ever escaped hell.

There came a time when the world seemed sunk and buried in ignorance of God. After 4,000 years, the nations of the earth appeared to have completely forgotten the God who made them. Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires had done nothing but spread superstition and idolatry. Poets, historians, and philosophers had proved that even with all their intellectual powers, they had no proper knowledge of God, and that man, left to himself, was utterly corrupt. *The world by wisdom knew not God* (1 Corinthians 1:21). Except for a few despised Jews in a corner of the earth, the whole world was dead in ignorance and sin.

What did Christ do then?

He left the glory He had with the Father from all eternity, and He 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, which we all had left undone. As a man, on the cross He suffered the wrath of God that we should have suffered. He brought in everlasting righteousness for us. He redeemed us from the curse of a broken law. He opened a fountain for all sin and uncleanness. He died for our sins. He rose again for our justification. He ascended to God's right hand, and there He sat down, waiting until His enemies will be made His footstool. He sits there now, offering salvation to all who will come to Him, interceding

He sits there now,
offering salvation 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.

for all who believe in Him, and managing by God's appointment all that concerns the salvation of souls.

There is a time coming when sin will be cast out of this world. Wickedness will not always flourish unpunished. Satan will not always reign. Creation will not always groan, being burdened (Romans 8:22). There will be a time of *restitution of all things* (Acts 3:21). There will be a new heaven and a new earth, *in which dwells righteousness* (2 Peter 3:13), and *the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea* (Isaiah 11:9).

Where will Christ be then, and what will He do?

Christ Himself will be King. He will return to this earth and make all things new. He will come *in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory* (Matthew 24:30), and the kingdoms of the world will become His (Revelation 11:15). The heathen will be given to Him for His inheritance, and *the uttermost parts of the earth* for His possession (Psalm 2:8). To Him every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). His dominion shall be *an eternal dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom such that it shall never be corrupted* (Daniel 7:14).

There is a day coming when all people will be judged. The sea will give up the dead that are in it, and death and hell will deliver up the dead that are in them (Revelation 20:13). All who sleep in the grave will awake and come forth, and all will be judged according to their works (Daniel 12:2).

Where will Christ be then?

Christ Himself will be the Judge. The Father *has committed all judgment unto the Son* (John 5:22). *When the Son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then he shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats* (Matthew 25:31-32). *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive according to that which they have done in the body, either good or evil* (2 Corinthians 5:10).

If any reader does not think much of Christ, he is very much unlike God! You are of one mind, and God is of another. You think it is enough to give Christ a little honor, a little reverence, and a little respect, but

in all the eternal counsels of God the Father, in creation, redemption, restitution, and judgment – *Christ is all*.

Certainly we will do well to consider these things. Certainly it is not written in vain that *He that does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who has sent him* (John 5:23).

Secondly, let us understand that *Christ is all* in the inspired books that make up the Bible. In every part of both Testaments, Christ is there. He is dimly and indistinctly found at the beginning, more clearly and plainly found in the middle, and fully and completely found at the end – but He is found in actuality and significantly everywhere.

Christ's sacrifice and death for sinners and Christ's kingdom and future glory are the lights we must bring to bear on any book of Scripture we read. Christ's cross and Christ's crown are the clues we must hold firmly if we want to find our way through Scripture difficulties. Christ is the only key that will unlock many of the dark places of the Word. Some people complain that they do not understand the Bible. The reason is very simple: they do not use the key. To them the Bible is like the hieroglyphics in Egypt. It is a mystery to them simply because they do not know and use the key.

It was Christ crucified who was set forth in every Old Testament sacrifice. Every animal slain and offered on an altar was a practical confession that a Savior was looked for who would die for sinners – a Savior who would take away man's sin, by suffering, as his Substitute and Sin-Bearer, in his place (1 Peter 3:18). It is absurd to think that an unmeaning slaughter of innocent animals, without a distinct purpose in view, could please the eternal God!

It was Christ to whom Abel looked when he offered a better sacrifice than Cain. Not only was the heart of Abel better than that of his brother, but he showed his knowledge of vicarious sacrifice and his faith in an atonement (Hebrews 11:4). He offered the firstlings of his flock, along with the blood, and in so doing declared his belief that without shedding of blood there can be no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 11:4).

It was Christ of whom Enoch prophesied in the days of abounding wickedness before the flood. *Behold*, he said, *the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints to execute judgment upon all* (Jude 1:14-15).

It was Christ to whom Abraham looked when he dwelt in tents

in the land of promise. He believed that in his seed, in one born of his family, all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 22:18). By faith he saw Christ's day, and was glad (John 8:56).

It was Christ of whom Jacob spoke to his sons, as he lay dying. Jacob specified the tribe out of which Christ would be born, and foretold that gathering together unto Him that is yet to be accomplished. *The sceptre shall not be taken from Judah, nor the lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh comes; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be* (Genesis 49:10).

It was Christ who was the substance of the ceremonial law that God gave to Israel by the hand of Moses. The morning and evening sacrifice, the continual shedding of blood, the altar, the mercy seat, the high priest, the Passover, the Day of Atonement, and the scapegoat were all pictures, types, and emblems of Christ and His work. God had compassion upon the weakness of His people. He taught them "Christ" line upon line, and as we teach little children, by comparisons. It was in this sense especially that the law was a *schoolmaster* to lead the Jews *unto Christ* (Galatians 3:24).

It was Christ to whom God directed the attention of Israel by all the daily miracles that were done before their eyes in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud and fire that guided them, the manna from heaven that fed them every morning, and the water from the smitten rock were all figures of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). The brazen serpent, on that memorable occasion when the plague of fiery serpents was sent upon them, was a symbol of Christ (John 3:14).

It was Christ of whom all the judges were types. Joshua, David, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and all the rest whom God raised up to deliver Israel from captivity were all emblems of Christ. As weak and unstable and flawed as some of them were, they were given as examples of better things in the distant future. All were meant to remind the tribes of that far higher Deliverer who was yet to come.

It was Christ of whom David the king was a type. Anointed and chosen when few gave him honor, despised and rejected by Saul and all the tribes of Israel, persecuted and compelled to flee for his life, a man of sorrow all his life, yet in the end a conqueror – in all these things David represented Christ.

It was Christ of whom all the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi spoke. They saw through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). They sometimes dwelt on His sufferings, and sometimes on His glory that would follow (1 Peter 1:11). They did not always mark out for us the distinction between Christ's first coming and His second coming. Like two candles in a straight line, one behind the other, they sometimes saw both the advents at the same time and spoke of them in one breath. They were sometimes moved by the Holy Spirit to write of the times of Christ crucified, and sometimes of Christ's kingdom in the latter days. But Christ dying, or Christ reigning, was the thought you will always find uppermost in their minds.

It is Christ of whom the whole New Testament is full. The Gospels are Christ living, speaking, and moving among men. The Acts are Christ preached, published, and proclaimed. The Epistles are Christ written of, explained, and exalted. Through them all, from first to last, there is one name above every other, and that is the name of Jesus Christ.

I ask every reader to ask himself frequently what the Bible is to him. Is it a Bible in which you have found nothing more than good moral precepts and sound advice? Instead, is it a Bible in which you have found Christ? Is it a Bible in which *Christ is all*? If not, I tell you honestly that until now you have not used your Bible for much good. You are like a man who studies the solar system but neglects to study the sun, which is the center of it all. It is no wonder if you think your Bible is a dull book!

Thirdly, let us understand that *Christ is all* in the religion of all true Christians on earth. In saying this, I want to be sure that I am not misunderstood. I profess the absolute necessity of the election of God the Father and the sanctification of God the Spirit in order to bring about the salvation of everyone who is saved. I profess that there is a perfect harmony and unison in the action of the three Persons of the Trinity in bringing anyone to glory, and that all three cooperate and work a common work in one's deliverance from sin and hell. Just as the Father is, so is the Son, and so is the Holy Spirit. The Father is merciful, the Son is merciful, and the Holy Spirit is merciful. The same three who said at the beginning, "Let us create," also said, "Let us redeem and save." I

profess that everyone who reaches heaven will attribute all the glory of his salvation to Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one God.

At the same time, though, I see clear proof in Scripture that the blessed Trinity prominently and distinctly exalts Christ in the matter of saving souls. Christ is presented as the Word through whom God's love to sinners is made known. Christ's incarnation and atoning death on the cross are the great cornerstone on which the whole plan of salvation rests. Christ is the way and the door by which alone we can approach God. Christ is the root into which all elect sinners must be grafted. Christ is the only meeting place between God and man, between heaven and earth, and between the Holy Trinity and the poor sinful child of Adam.

It is Christ whom God the Father has sealed and appointed to bring life to a dead world (John 6:27). It is Christ to whom the Father has given a people to be brought to glory. It is Christ of whom the Spirit testifies and to whom He always leads a soul for pardon and peace. To sum it up, it has *pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell* (Colossians 1:19). What the sun is in the firmament of the heavens, so Christ is in true Christianity.

I say these things by way of explanation. I want you to clearly understand that in saying that *Christ is all*, I do not mean to reject the work of the Father and of the Spirit. Let me show what I do mean.

Christ is *all* in a sinner's justification before God. Through Him alone we can have peace with a holy God. By Him alone we can enter into the presence of the Most High and stand there without fear. *We have security and access with confidence by the faith of him* (Ephesians 3:12). In Him alone can God be just and can justify the ungodly (Romans 3:26).

With what can any mere human come before God? What can we bring as a plea for acquittal before that glorious Being in whose eyes even the very heavens are not clean? Can we say that we have done our duty to God? Will we say that we have done our duty to our neighbor? Will we present to God our prayers, our rituals, our morality, our improvements, or our church attendance? Will we ask to be accepted because of any of these? Which of these things will survive the searching inspection of God's eye? Which of them will actually justify us? Which of them will carry us safely through the judgment and land us safe in glory?

None, none, none! Take any commandment of the ten and let us examine ourselves by it. We have broken it repeatedly. We cannot answer God one of a thousand. Take any of us and look closely into our ways, and we will see that we are nothing but sinners. There is only one verdict: we are all guilty. We all deserve hell. We all ought to die.

With what can we come before God, then? We must come in the name of Jesus, standing on no other ground and pleading no other plea than this: "Christ died on the cross for the ungodly, and I trust in Him. Christ died for me, and I believe on Him."

The garment of our Elder Brother – the righteousness of Christ – this is the only robe that can cover us and enable us to stand in the light of heaven without shame. *I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness* (Isaiah 61:10 NASB).

The name of Jesus is the only name by which we can obtain an entrance through the gate of eternal glory. If we come to that gate in our own names, we are lost, we will not be allowed in, and we will only knock in vain. If we come in the name of Jesus, it is a passport and Shibboleth (Judges 12:6), and we will enter and live.

We must be content to go to heaven as beggars, saved by free grace, simply as believers in Jesus – or we will never be saved at all.

The mark of the blood of Christ is the only mark that can save us from destruction. When the angels are separating the children of Adam in the last day, if we are not found marked with that atoning blood, it would have been better for us if we had never been born.

Let us never forget that Christ must be all to that soul who desires to be justified! We must be content to go to heaven as beggars, saved by free grace, simply as believers in Jesus – or we will never be saved at all.

Is there a thoughtless, worldly person among the readers of this book? Is there one who thinks he will reach heaven by quickly saying at the end of his life, "Lord, have mercy on me" without Christ? Friend, you are sowing misery for yourself, and unless you change, you will awake to endless misery.

Is there a proud, formal person among the readers of this book?

Is there anyone who thinks he can make himself ready for heaven and good enough to pass muster by his own doings? Brother, you are building a Babel (Genesis 11), and you will never reach heaven in your present condition.

Is there a laboring, heavy-laden person among the readers of this book? Is there someone who wants to be saved and knows he is a vile sinner? I say to such a person, "Come to Christ and He will save you. Come to Christ and cast the burden of your soul on Him. Fear not; only believe."

Do you fear wrath? Christ can deliver you from the wrath to come.

Do you feel the curse of a broken law? Christ can redeem you from the curse of the law.

Do you feel far away? Christ has suffered to bring you near to God.

Do you feel unclean? Christ's blood can cleanse all sin away.

Do you feel imperfect? You will be complete in Christ.

Do you feel as if you were nothing? Christ will be everything to your soul.

No saint ever reached heaven with any story but this: "I was washed and made white *in the blood of the Lamb*" (Revelation 7:14).

Not only is Christ *all* in the justification of a true Christian, but He is also *all* in his sanctification. I do not mean for a moment to undervalue the work of the Spirit, but I say that no one is ever holy until he comes to Christ and is united to Him. Until then, his works are dead works, and he has no holiness at all. You first must be joined to Christ, and then you will be holy. Without Him – separate from Him – you can do nothing (John 15:5).

No one can grow in holiness unless he abides in Christ. Christ is the great root from which every believer must draw his strength to go forward. The Spirit is His special gift, His purchased gift for His people. A believer must not only receive *Christ Jesus the Lord*, but must walk in Him and be *rooted and built up in him* (Colossians 2:6-7).

Do you want to be holy? Then Christ is the manna you must eat daily, like Israel did in the wilderness.

Do you want to be holy? Then Christ must be the rock from which you must daily drink the living water.

Do you want to be holy? Then you must be always looking unto

Jesus. Look to His cross and learn fresh motives for a closer walk with God. Look at His example and take Him for your pattern. Look to Him and you will become like Him. Look to Him and your face will shine without your knowing it. Look less at yourself and more at Christ, and you will find your troubling sins dropping off and leaving you, and your eyes enlightened more and more every day (2 Corinthians 3:18). *With our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who having been offered joy, endured the cross, despising the shame and was seated at the right hand of the throne of God* (Hebrews 12:2).

The true secret of coming up out of the wilderness is to come up leaning on the Beloved (Song of Solomon 8:5). The true way to be strong is to realize our weakness and to understand that Christ must be all. The true way to grow in grace is to make use of Christ as a fountain for every minute's necessities. We ought to avail ourselves of Him as the prophet's wife made use of the oil – not only to pay our debts, but also to live on (2 Kings 4:7). We should strive to be able to say, *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* (Galatians 2:20).

I feel sorry for those who try to be holy without Christ! Your labor is all in vain. You are putting money into a bag with holes (Haggai 1:6). You are pouring water into a sieve. You are rolling a huge round stone uphill. You are building up a wall with untempered mortar. Believe me, you are beginning at the wrong end. You must come to Christ first, and He will give you His sanctifying Spirit. You must learn to say with Paul, *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13).

Christ is not only *all* in the sanctification of a true Christian, but He is *all* in his comfort in this life. A saved person has many sorrows. He has a body like other people – weak and frail. He has a heart like other people, and it is often more sensitive. He has trials and losses to bear like others, and often more. He has his share of bereavements, deaths, disappointments, and crosses. He has the world to oppose, a place in life to fill blamelessly, unconverted relatives to bear with patiently, persecutions to endure, and a death to die.

Who is able to sufficiently handle all these things? What can enable a believer to bear all this? Nothing but the consolation that is found in Christ (Philippians 2:1).

Jesus is indeed the brother *born for adversity* (Proverbs 17:17). He is the friend who *sticks closer than a brother* (Proverbs 18:24), and He alone can comfort His people. He can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, for He Himself suffered (Hebrews 4:15). He knows what sorrow is, for He was a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3). He knows what an aching body is, for His body was racked with pain. He cried, *All my bones are out of joint* (Psalm 22:14). He knows what poverty and weariness are, for He was often wearied and had no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). He knows what family unkindness is, for even His brothers did not believe Him (John 7:5). He had no honor in His own house (Matthew 13:57).

Jesus knows exactly how to comfort His afflicted people. He knows how to pour oil and wine into the wounds of the spirit (Luke 10:34), how to fill up gaps in empty hearts, how to speak a word in season to the weary (Isaiah 50:4), how to heal the broken heart (Psalm 147:3), how to make all our bed in sickness (Psalm 41:3), and how to draw near when we are weak, and say, "Fear not: I am thy salvation" (Lamentations 3:57).

We talk of sympathy being pleasant. There is no sympathy like that of Christ. In all our afflictions, He is afflicted. He knows our sorrows. In all our pain, He hurts, and like the good Physician, He will not measure out to us one drop of sorrow too much. David once said, *In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul* (Psalm 94:19). Many believers, I am sure, could say the same. "If the Lord Himself had not stood by me, the deep waters would have gone over my soul" (Psalm 124:1-5).

It seems amazing how a believer gets through all his troubles. It seems past comprehension how he is carried through the fire and how he passes through the water (Psalm 66:12; Isaiah 43:2). The fact of the matter is that Christ is not only our justification and sanctification, but He is also our consolation.

To those who want unfailing comfort, I entrust you to Christ! In Him alone there is no failure. The rich are often disappointed in their wealth. The educated are disappointed in their books. Husbands are disappointed in their wives. Wives are disappointed in their husbands. Parents are disappointed in their children. Politicians are disappointed when, after many struggles, they attain position and power. They find

out that it is more pain than pleasure, that it is disappointment, annoyance, incessant trouble, worry, vanity, and frustration. No one, though, was ever disappointed in Christ.

Just as Christ is *all* in the comfort of a true Christian in this life, so Christ is *all* in his hope for the time that is to come. Few people, I suppose, are to be found who do not allow themselves some kind of hope about their souls. But the hopes of most people are nothing but worthless notions. They are built on no solid foundation. No living person except the real child of God, the sincere, thoroughgoing Christian, can give a reasonable account of the hope that is in him (1 Peter 3:15). No hope is reasonable that is not based upon truth from Scripture.

A true Christian has a good hope when he looks ahead; the worldly person has none. A true Christian sees light in the distance; the worldly person sees nothing but darkness. Just what is the hope of a true Christian? It is this – that Jesus Christ is coming again, coming without sin, coming with all His people, coming to wipe away every tear, coming to raise His sleeping saints from the grave, and coming to gather all His family together that they may be with Him forever.

No hope is
reasonable that
is not based
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Scripture.

Why is a believer patient? Because he looks for the coming of the Lord. He can endure difficult things without complaining. He knows the time is short. He waits quietly for the King.

Why is a believer temperate in all things? Because he expects his Lord to return soon. His treasure is in heaven, and his good things are yet to come. The world is not his rest, but is only an inn – and an inn is not home (1 Peter 2:11-12; Hebrews 13:14). He knows that *yet a little while, and he that shall come will come and will not tarry* (Hebrews 10:37). Christ is coming, and that is enough.

This is indeed a *blessed hope* (Titus 2:13). Now is the time for school; then will be the eternal holiday. Now is the tossing on the waves of a troublesome world; then we will be in the quiet harbor. Now is the scattering; then the gathering. Now is the time of sowing; then the harvest. Now is the working season; then the wages. Now is the cross; then the crown.

People talk of their expectations and hopes from this world. No

one has such solid expectations as a person who is saved. He can say, *My soul, rest thou only in God, for my hope is from him* (Psalm 62:5).

In all true saving religion, *Christ is all*. He is all in justification, all in comfort, and all in hope. Blessed is that person who knows it, and far more blessed is he who feels it, too. Oh, that people would examine themselves and see if it is true for their own souls!

Fourthly, let us understand that Christ will be *all* in heaven. I cannot dwell long on this point. I do not have the ability to do so, even if I had the room to do so. I can hardly describe things unseen and a world unknown, but I do know that all men and women who reach heaven will find that even there in heaven, *Christ is all*.

Like the altar in Solomon's temple, Christ crucified will be the foremost object in heaven. That altar caught the eye of everyone who entered the temple gates. It was a great brazen altar, twenty cubits broad – as broad as the front of the temple itself (2 Chronicles 3:4; 4:1). In the same way, Jesus will fill the eyes of all who enter glory. In the midst of the throne and surrounded by adoring angels and saints, there will be the Lamb that was slain (Revelation 5:6). *The Lamb is [the] lamp* of the place (Revelation 21:23).

The praise of the Lord Jesus will be the eternal song of all the inhabitants of heaven. They will say with a loud voice, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. . . . Blessing and honour and glory and power, be unto him that is seated upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever* (Revelation 5:12-13).

Serving the Lord Jesus will be one eternal occupation of all the inhabitants of heaven. We will *serve him day and night in his temple* (Revelation 7:15). It is a wonderful thought that we will be able to serve Him without distraction and work for Him without weariness.

The presence of Christ Himself will be one everlasting enjoyment of the inhabitants of heaven. We will *see his face*, hear His voice, and speak with Him as a friend with a friend (Revelation 22:4). Sweet is the thought that no matter who may be missing at the marriage supper, the Master Himself will be there. His presence will satisfy all our desires (Psalm 17:15).

Heaven will be a sweet and glorious home to those who love the *Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption* (Ephesians 6:24)! Here we live by faith

in Him and find peace, although we see Him not. There we shall see Him face to face and find that He is *altogether lovely* (Song of Solomon 5:16). *Better* indeed will it be *to enjoy the good that is present than the wandering of the desire* (Ecclesiastes 6:9).

Sadly, how little prepared for heaven are many who talk about going to heaven when they die, while they clearly have no saving faith and no real acquaintance with Christ. You give Christ no honor here. You have no communion with Him. You do not love Him. What could you do in heaven? It would be no place for you. Its joys would be no joys for you. You could not enter into its happiness. Its duties would be a weariness and a burden to your heart. Oh, repent and change before it is too late!

I hope I have shown how deep the foundations are of that little expression: *Christ is all*.

I might easily add to the things I have said, if space allowed. The subject is not exhausted. I have barely touched the surface of it. There are mines of precious truth connected with it that I have left unopened.

I could show how Christ should be *all* in a visible church. Splendid religious buildings, numerous religious services, inspiring ceremonies, and groups of ordained men are all nothing in the sight of God if the Lord Jesus Himself in all His roles is not honored, magnified, and exalted. That church is just a dead carcass in which Christ is not all.

I could show how Christ ought to be *all* in a ministry. The great work that ordained men are intended to do is to lift up Christ. We are to be like the pole on which the brazen serpent was hung. We are useful only as long as we exalt the great object of faith. We are to be ambassadors to carry tidings to a rebellious world about the King's Son, and if we teach people to think more about us and our duties than about Him, we are not fit for our role. The Spirit will never honor that minister who does not testify of Christ and who does not make Christ all.

I could show the abundant language used in the Bible in describing Christ's various roles and His fullness. High Priest, Mediator, Redeemer, Savior, Advocate, Shepherd, Physician, Bridegroom, Head, Bread of Life, Light of the World, Way, Door, Vine, Rock, Fountain, Sun of Righteousness, Forerunner, Surety, Captain, Prince of Life, Amen, Almighty, Author and Finisher of Faith, Lamb of God, King of Saints, Wonderful, Mighty God, Counsellor, Bishop of Souls – all these and

many more are names given to Christ in Scripture. Each is a fountain of instruction and provides comfort for everyone who is willing to drink of it. Each name supplies matter for useful meditation.

I could say much more, but I have said enough to throw light on the point I want to imprint on the minds of all who read this. I hope I have said enough to show the immense importance of the practical conclusions with which I now desire to finish the subject.

Is Christ all? Then let us learn the utter uselessness of a Christless religion. There are too many baptized men and women who know practically nothing at all about Christ. Their religion consists in a few vague notions and empty expressions. They imagine that they are no worse than others. They go to church. They try to do their duty. They do nobody any harm. They hope God will be merciful to them. They hope that God 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 do they know from experience about His offices and work, His blood, His righteousness, His mediation, His priesthood, or His intercession? Nothing. Nothing 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? It is as if you are speaking a foreign language to them. You can ask them simple Bible questions, but they know no more about them based upon their experience than a Buddhist or a Muslim. Yet this is the religion of hundreds and thousands of people all over the world who are called Christians!

If anyone reading this is this type of person, I warn you plainly that such Christianity will never take you to heaven. It might do very well in the eye of man. It may be good enough for you at a church meeting, at your place of work, in politics, or in your community, but it will never comfort you. It will never satisfy your conscience. It will never save your soul.

I warn you plainly that all ideas and theories about God being merciful without Christ, and except through Christ, are baseless delusions and empty notions. Such theories are purely idols of man's invention. They are all of this world. 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 want to be saved must be content to be saved by Him – or they will not be saved at all.

Let every reader take notice. I give you fair warning. A religion without Christ will never save your soul.

Is Christ all? Then learn the enormous foolishness of joining anything with Christ in the matter of salvation. 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 that God intended Him to fill. Christ alone is not all in all to their souls (1 Corinthians 15:28). No! It is either Christ and the church, Christ and the sacraments, Christ and His ordained ministers, Christ and their own repentance, Christ and their own goodness, Christ and their own prayers, or Christ and their own sincerity and kindness on which they really rest their souls.

Beware of resting the burden of your soul on anything but Christ and Christ alone.

If any of you are this type of Christian, I warn you plainly that your religion is an offense 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 do not care who it is that teaches such religion and on whose word you build. Whether he be pope or cardinal, archbishop or bishop, elder or pastor, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Baptist or Independent, Methodist or Lutheran – whosoever adds anything to Christ teaches you wrong.

I do not care what it is that you add to Christ. Whether it is the necessity of joining the Church of Rome, or of being a Baptist, or of becoming a Free Churchman, or of saying certain prayers, or of being baptized – whatever you add to Christ in the matter of salvation, you do Christ harm.

Pay attention to what you are doing. Beware of giving to Christ's servants the honor due to none but Christ. Beware of giving the Lord's ordinances the honor due unto the Lord. Beware of resting the burden of your soul on anything but Christ and Christ alone.

Is Christ all? Then let all who want to be saved appeal directly to Christ. There are many who hear of Christ with the ear and believe all

they are told about Him. They agree that there is no salvation except in Christ. They acknowledge that only Jesus can deliver them from hell and present them faultless before God. However, they never seem to get beyond this general acknowledgment. They never actually trust completely in Christ for their own souls. They remain in a state of wishing, wanting, feeling, and intending, and they never get any further. They see what we mean. They know it is all true. They hope one day to get the full benefit of it, but as of now they get no benefit whatsoever. The world is their all. Politics is their all. Pleasure is their all. Business is their all. Christ is not their all.

If any reader is this kind of person, I warn you plainly that your soul is in bad condition. You are as truly on the way to hell in your present condition as Judas Iscariot, Ahab, or Cain. There must be actual faith in Christ, or else Christ died in vain as far as you are concerned. It is not looking at the bread that feeds the hungry person, but actually eating it. It is not looking at the lifeboat that saves the shipwrecked sailor, but actually getting into it. It is not knowing and believing that Christ is a Savior that can save your soul, but there must be actual trust and a relationship between you and Christ. You must be able to say, "Christ is my Savior because I have come to Him by faith and have taken Him for my own."

Hear the advice I give you this day and act upon it at once. Stand still no longer waiting for some imaginary state of mind or feelings that will never come. Hesitate no longer under the idea that you must first obtain the Spirit before coming to Christ. Arise and go to Christ just as you are. He waits for you and is as willing to save as He is mighty. He is the appointed Physician for sin-sick souls. Deal with Him as you would with your doctor about the cure of a disease of your body. Make a direct petition to Him and tell Him all your heart. Cry intensely to the Lord Jesus for pardon and peace, as the thief did on the cross. *Lord, remember me* (Luke 23:42). Tell Him that you have heard that He receives sinners, and that you are a sinner. Tell Him you want to be saved, and ask Him to save you. Do not rest until you have actually tasted for yourself that the Lord is gracious. *O taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man that shall trust in him* (Psalm 34:8). Do this and you will find sooner or later, if you are really in earnest, that *Christ is all*.

Is Christ all? Then let all His converted people deal with Him as if they really believed it. Let them lean on Him and trust Him far more than they have done so far. Sadly, many of the Lord's people live far below their benefits! There are many truly Christian souls who rob themselves of their own peace and forsake their own mercies. There are many who do not realize that they are adding their own faith, or the work of the Spirit in their own hearts, to Christ, and so miss the fullness of gospel peace. There are many who make little progress in their pursuit of holiness and shine with a very dim light. Why? Simply because in nineteen out of twenty cases, they do not make Christ their all in all.

I call on everyone who is a believer, for his own sake, to make sure that Christ is really and thoroughly his all in all. Beware of allowing yourself to mingle anything of your own with Christ. Do you have faith? It is a priceless blessing. Happy indeed are they who are willing and ready to trust Jesus. Be careful that you do not make a Christ of your faith. Do not rest on your own faith, but rest on Christ.

Is the work of the Spirit in your soul? Thank God for it. It is a work that will never be overthrown. Beware, though, that you do not unknowingly make a Christ of the work of the Spirit! Do not rest on the work of the Spirit, but on Christ.

Do you have any inward feelings of religion and experience of grace? Thank God for it. Thousands have no more religious feeling than a cat or dog. Beware, though, that you do not make a Christ of your feelings and emotions! They are poor, uncertain things and are sadly dependent on our bodies and outward circumstances. Rest only on Christ.

I urge you to learn to look more and more at the great object of faith, Jesus Christ, and to keep your mind dwelling on Him. In doing so you would find that faith and all the other graces grow, even though you might not notice the growth at the time. He who wants to be a skillful archer must not look at the arrow, but at the target.

Sadly, I fear that there is much pride and unbelief still stuck in the hearts of many believers! Few seem to realize how much they need a Savior. Few seem to understand how completely they are indebted to Him. Few seem to comprehend how much they need Him every day. Few seem to feel how simply and childlike they ought to fasten their souls on Him. Few seem to be aware of how full of love He is to His

poor, weak people and how ready He is to help them! Few, therefore, seem to know the peace, joy, strength, and power to live a godly life that is to be found in Christ.

Change your plan if your conscience tells you that you are guilty. Change your plan and learn to trust Christ more. Physicians love to see patients coming to consult them. It is their job to receive the sick and, if possible, to effect cures. The husband loves his wife to trust him and lean upon him; it is his delight to cherish her and promote her comfort.

Christ loves His people to lean on Him, to rest in Him, to call on Him, and to abide in Him. Let us all learn and strive to do so more and more. Let us live on Christ. Let us live in Christ. Let us live with Christ. Let us live to Christ. In so doing, we will prove that we fully realize that Christ is all. In so doing, we will feel great peace and attain more of that *holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord* (Hebrews 12:14).

J. C. Ryle – A Brief Biography

John Charles Ryle was born into a wealthy, affluent, socially elite family on May 10, 1816 – the firstborn son of John Ryle, a banker, and his wife Susanna (Wirksworth) Ryle. As the firstborn, John lived a privileged life and was set to inherit all of his father’s estate and pursue a career in Parliament. His future promised to be planned and comfortable with no material needs.

J. C. Ryle attended a private school and then earned academic scholarships to Eton (1828) and the University of Oxford (1834), but he excelled in sports. He particularly made his mark in rowing and cricket. Though his pursuit of sports was short lived, he claimed that they gave him leadership gifts. “It gave me a power of commanding, managing, organizing and directing, seeing through men’s capabilities and using every man in the post to which he was best suited, bearing and forbearing, keeping men around me in good temper, which I have found of infinite use on lots of occasions in life, though in very different matters.”

In 1837, before graduation, Ryle contracted a serious chest infection, which caused him to turn to the Bible and prayer for the first time in over fourteen years. One Sunday he entered church late as Ephesians 2:8 was being read – slowly, phrase by phrase. John felt the Lord was speaking to him personally, and he claims to have been converted at that moment through the Word without any commentary or sermon.

His biographer wrote, “He came under conviction, was converted, and from that moment to the last recorded syllable of this life, no doubt

ever lingered in John's mind that the Word of God was living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword."

After graduation from Oxford, John went to London to study law for his career in politics, but in 1841, his father's bank crashed. That was the end of the career in politics, for he had no funding to continue.

In later years, John wrote, "We got up one summer's morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same night completely and entirely ruined. The immediate consequences were bitter and painful in the extreme, and humiliating to the utmost degree."

And at another time, he said, "The plain fact was there was no one of the family whom it touched more than it did me. My father and mother were no longer young and in the downhill of life; my brothers and sisters, of course, never expected to live at Henbury (the family home) and naturally never thought of it as their house after a certain time. I, on the contrary, as the eldest son, twenty-five, with all the world before me, lost everything, and saw the whole future of my life turned upside down and thrown into confusion."

After this financial ruin from abundance, Ryle was a commoner – all in a day. For the first time in his life, he needed a job. His education qualified him for the clergy, so with his Oxford degree, he was ordained and entered the ministry of the Church of England. He proceeded in a totally different direction with his first assignment in the ministry at Exbury in Hampshire, but it was a rural area riddled with disease. His recurring lung infection made a difficult couple of years until he was transferred to St. Thomas in Winchester. With his commanding presence, passionately held principles, and warm disposition, John's congregation grew so large and strong it needed different accommodations.

Ryle accepted a position at that time in Helmington, Suffolk, where he had much time to read theologians like Wesley, Bunyan, Knox, Calvin, and Luther. He was a contemporary of Charles Spurgeon, Dwight Moody, George Mueller, and Hudson Taylor. He lived in the age of Dickens, Darwin, and the American Civil War. All of these influenced Ryle's understanding and theology.

His writing career began from the tragedy of the Great Yarmouth suspension bridge. On May 9, 1845, a large crowd gathered for the official grand opening festivities, but the bridge collapsed and more

than a hundred people plunged into the water and drowned. The incident shocked the whole country but it led Ryle to write his first tract. He spoke of life's uncertainties and God's sure provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. Thousands of copies were sold.

That same year, he married Matilda Plumptre, but she died after only two years, leaving him with an infant daughter. In 1850, he married Jessie Walker, but she had a lingering sickness, which caused Ryle to care for her and their growing family (three sons and another daughter) for ten years until she died. In 1861, he was transferred to Stradbroke, Suffolk, where he married Henrietta Clowes.

Stradbroke, Suffolk, was Ryle's last parish, and he gained a reputation for his straightforward preaching and evangelism. Besides his traveling and preaching, he spent time writing. He wrote more than 300 pamphlets, tracts, and books. His books include *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (7 Volumes, 1856-1869), *Principles for Churchmen* (1884), *Home Truths, Knots Untied, Old Paths*, and *Holiness*.

His *Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century* (1869) is described as having "short, pithy sentences, compelling logic and penetrating insight into spiritual power." This seems to be the case with most of his writing as he preached and wrote with five main guidelines: (1) Have a clear view of the subject, (2) Use simple words, (3) Use a simple style of composition, (4) Be direct, and (5) Use plenty of anecdotes and illustrations.

In all of his success with writing, he used the royalties to pay his father's debts. He may have felt indebted to that financial ruin, for he said, "I have not the least doubts, it was all for the best. If I had not been ruined, I should never have been a clergyman, never preached a sermon, or written a tract or book."

In spite of all of the trials that Ryle experienced – financial ruin, loss of three wives, his own poor health – he learned several life lessons. First, care and tend to your own family. Second, swim against the tide when you need to. He was evangelical before it was popular and he held to principles of Scripture: justification by faith alone, substitutionary atonement, the Trinity, and preaching. Third, model Christian attitudes toward your opponents. Fourth, learn and understand church history.

Important benefits come from past generations. Fifth, serve in old age; “die in the harness.” And, sixth, persevere through your trials.

These were life principles that Ryle learned as he lived his life, as he preached, as he wrote, and as he spread the gospel. He was forever a supporter of evangelism and a critic of ritualism.

J. C. Ryle was recommended by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli to be Bishop of Liverpool in 1880 where he then worked to build churches and mission halls to reach the whole city. He retired in 1900 at the age of 83 and died later that year. His successor described him as “a man of granite with a heart of a child.”

G. C. B. Davies said “a commanding presence and fearless advocacy of his principles were combined with a kind and understanding attitude in his personal relationships.”

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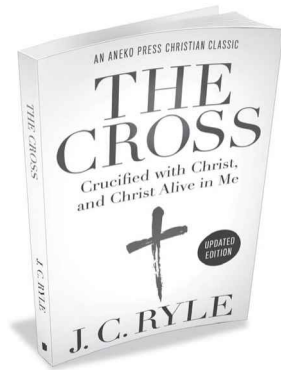
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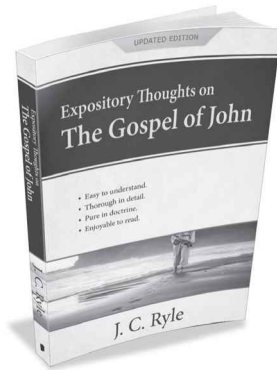




The Cross, by J. C. Ryle

I want to tell you what perhaps the greatest Christian who ever lived (the Apostle Paul) thought of the cross of Christ. Believe me, the cross is one of deepest importance. This is no mere question of controversy; this is not one of those points on which men may agree to differ and feel that differences will not shut them out of heaven. A man must be right on this subject, or he is lost forever. Heaven or hell, happiness or misery, life or death, blessing or cursing in the last day – all hinges on the answer to this question: “What do you think about the cross of Christ?”

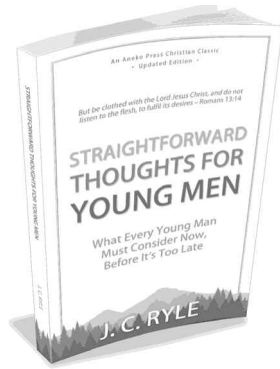
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Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of John,
by J. C. Ryle

Wisdom, encouragement, and exhortation is contained in these pages. Not because of the author's brilliance, but because of the words of truth contained in the gospel of John. And just as the Apostle John didn't draw any attention to himself, so also J. C. Ryle clearly and wonderfully directs his words and our thoughts towards the inspired words of scripture. If we truly love God, we will love His word; and the more study His word, the more we will love God.

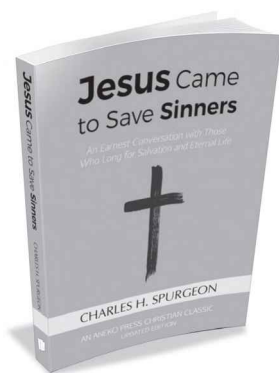
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Straightforward Thoughts for Young Men,
by J. C. Ryle

Young men, you form a large and very important class in the population of this country; but where, and in what condition, are your souls? I am growing old myself, but there are few things that I can 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, and 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 walking in the right way and preserve him from faults and sins, which may hurt his prospects both for time and eternity, I shall be very thankful.

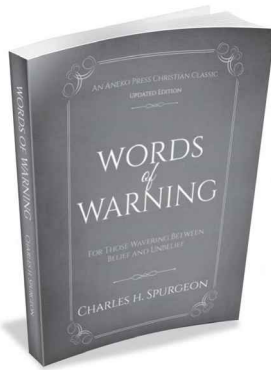
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Jesus Came to Save Sinners, by Charles H. Spurgeon

This is a heart-level conversation with you, the reader. Every excuse, reason, and roadblock for not coming to Christ is examined and duly dealt with. If you think you may be too bad, or if perhaps you really are bad and you sin either openly or behind closed doors, you will discover that life in Christ is for you too. You can reject the message of salvation by faith, or you can choose to live a life of sin after professing faith in Christ, but you cannot change the truth as it is, either for yourself or for others. As such, it behooves you and your family to embrace truth, claim it for your own, and be genuinely set free for now and eternity. Come and embrace this free gift of God, and live a victorious life for Him.

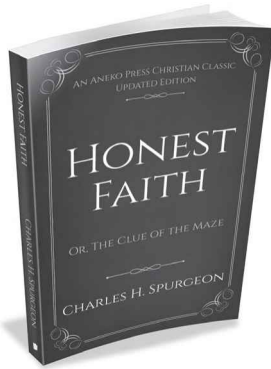
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Words of Warning,
by Charles H. Spurgeon

This book, *Words of Warning*, is an analysis of people and the gospel of Christ. Under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Charles H. Spurgeon sheds light on the many ways people may refuse to come to Christ, but he also shines a brilliant light on how we can be saved. Unsaved or wavering individuals will be convicted, and if they allow it, they will be led to Christ. Sincere Christians will be happy and blessed as they consider the great salvation with which they have been saved.

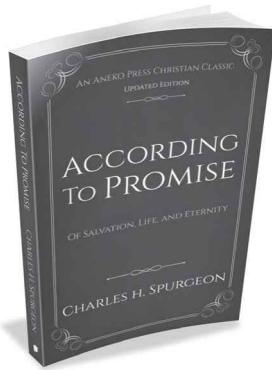
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Honest Faith, by Charles H. Spurgeon

The paragraphs of this little book are not supposed to be an argument. It was not my aim to convince an opponent but to assist a friend. How I have personally threaded the labyrinth of life thus far may be of helpful interest to some other soul who is in a maze. I hope that these pages will assist some true heart to say “he fought his doubts and gather’d strength.” Let no man’s heart fail him, for the prevalent skepticisms of today are but “spectres of the mind.” Face them, and they fly.

Available where books are sold.

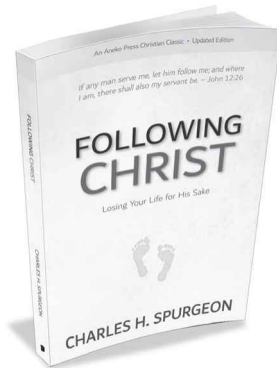


According to Promise,
by Charles H. Spurgeon

The first part of this book is meant to be a sieve to separate the chaff from the wheat. Use it on your own soul. It may be the most profitable and beneficial work you have ever done. He who looked into his accounts and found that his business was losing money was saved from bankruptcy.

The second part of this book examines God's promises to His children. The promises of God not only exceed all precedent, but they also exceed all imitation. No one has been able to compete with God in the language of liberality. The promises of God are as much above all other promises as the heavens are above the earth.

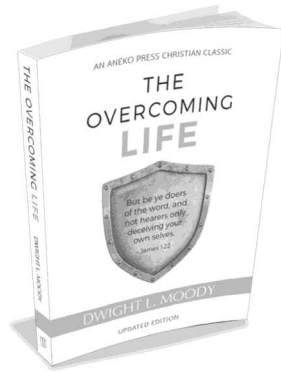
Available where books are sold.



Following Christ, by Charles H. Spurgeon

You cannot have Christ if you will not serve Him. If you take Christ, you must take Him in all His qualities. You must not simply take Him as a Friend, but you must also take Him as your Master. If you are to become His disciple, you must also become His servant. God-forbid that anyone fights against that truth. It is certainly one of our greatest delights on earth to serve our Lord, and this is to be our joyful vocation even in heaven itself: *His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face* (Revelation 22:3-4).

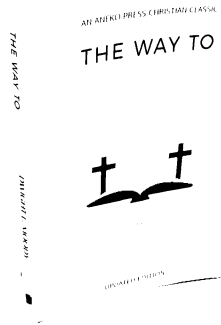
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The Overcoming Life,
by Dwight L. Moody

Are you an overcomer? Or, are you plagued by little sins that easily beset you? Even worse, are you failing in your Christian walk, but refuse to admit and address it? No Christian can afford to dismiss the call to be an overcomer. The earthly cost is minor; the eternal reward is beyond measure.

Available where books are sold.



The Way to God, by Dwight L. Moody

There is life in Christ. Rich, joyous, wonderful life. It is true that the Lord disciplines those whom He loves and that we are often tempted by the world and our enemy, the devil. But if we know how to go beyond that temptation to cling to the cross of Jesus Christ and keep our eyes on our Lord, our reward both here on earth and in heaven will be 100 times better than what this world has to offer.

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