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# Holiness

## Part One

*Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*

J. C. Ryle

*“Follow...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”*

Hebrews 12:14

*Holiness, Part One* by J. C. Ryle, contains the introduction and chapters one through ten of the original 20 chapters, which were first published in one volume in London, 1879. (*Holiness, Part Two* is also available from Chapel Library, containing chapters eleven through twenty.)

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## Foreword

One of the most encouraging and hopeful signs I have observed for many a long day 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 exponent 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, 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 him will be grateful for this new edition of his great book on ‘Holiness.’ I shall never forget the satisfaction, spiritual and mental, with which I read it some twenty years ago after having stumbled across it in a second-hand book shop.

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

The characteristics of Bishop Ryle’s method and style are obvious. He is pre-eminently and always scriptural and expository. He never starts with a theory into which he tries to fit various Scriptures. 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 enunciation of doctrine. It is strong and virile and entirely free from the sentimentality that is often described as “devotional.”

The Bishop had drunk deeply from the wells of the great classical Puritan writers of the seventeenth century. Indeed, it would be but 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 “patent” method by which it can be attained; but he invariably produces that “hunger and thirst after righteousness” which is the only indispensable condition to being “filled.” May this book be widely read, that God’s name be increasingly honoured and glorified.

— *D. M. Lloyd-Jones, Westminster Chapel, London.*

## Introduction

### **The Purpose**

The twenty chapters contained in this volume are a humble contribution to a cause which is exciting much interest in the present day—I mean the cause of scriptural holiness. It is a cause which everyone who loves Christ, and desires to advance His kingdom in the world, should endeavour to help forward. Everyone can do something, and I wish to add my mite.

The reader will find little that is directly controversial in these papers. I have carefully abstained 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 divines. If in anything I am still in error, I hope I shall 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.

### **The Need for a Holy Life**

I have had a deep conviction for many years that practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians in this country. Politics, or controversy, or party-spirit [*factionous contention*], or worldliness, have eaten out the heart of lively piety in too many of us. The subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background. The standard of living has become painfully low in many quarters. The immense importance of “adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour” (Tit 2:10), and making it lovely and beautiful by our daily habits and tempers, has been far too much overlooked. Worldly people sometimes complain with reason that “religious” persons, so-called, are not so amiable and unselfish and good-natured as

others 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 does positive harm. It is despised by keen-sighted and shrewd men of the world, as an unreal and hollow thing, and brings religion into contempt. It is my firm impression that we want a thorough revival about scriptural holiness, and I am deeply thankful that attention is being directed to the point.

### The Confusion

It is, however, of great importance that the whole subject should be placed on right foundations, and that the movement about it should not be damaged by crude, disproportioned, and one-sided statements. If such statements abound, we must not be surprised. Satan knows well the power of true holiness, and the immense injury which increased attention to it will do to his kingdom. It is his interest, therefore, to promote strife and controversy about this part of God's truth. Just as in time past he has succeeded in mystifying and confusing men's minds about *justification*, so he is labouring in the present day to make men "darken counsel by words without knowledge" about *sanctification*. May the Lord rebuke him! I cannot, however, give up the hope that good will be brought out of evil, discussion will elicit truth, and variety of opinion 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 mind of the Spirit."

I now feel it a duty, in sending forth this volume, 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 shall therefore put my hints into the form of questions, and I shall request my readers to take them as "Cautions for the Times" on the subject of holiness.

### The Questions

1. 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 now-a-days in handling the doctrine of sanctification?* Is it wise to proclaim in so bald, naked, and unqualified a way as many do, that the holiness of converted people is by faith only, and not at all by personal exertion? Is it according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.

That faith in Christ is the root of all holiness...

- that the first step towards a holy life is to believe on Christ,
- that until we believe we have not a jot of holiness,
- that union with Christ by faith is the secret of both beginning to be holy and continuing holy,
- 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 which overcomes the world,
- that by faith the elders obtained a good report—

all these are truths which no well-instructed Christian will ever think of denying. But surely the Scriptures teach us that in following holiness the true Christian needs personal exertion and work as well as faith. The very same apostle who says in one place, "The life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God," says in another place, "I fight...I run...I keep under my body;" and in other places, "Let us cleanse ourselves...let us labour...let us lay aside every weight" (Gal 2:20; 1Co 9:26-27; 2Co 7:1; Heb 4:11; 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 "worketh not," but simply trusts, rests, and leans on Christ (Rom 4:5). Sanctifying faith is a grace of which the very life is action: it "worketh by love," and, like a main-spring, moves the whole inward man (Gal 5:6). After all, the precise phrase "sanctified by faith" is only found once in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus said to Saul, "I send thee, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." 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 me they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified." (Compare Act 26:18 with 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 that simply believe are justified. Righteousness is imputed "to him that worketh not but believeth" (Rom 4:5). It is thoroughly scriptural and right to say "faith alone justifies." But it is not equally scriptural and right to say "faith alone sanctifies." The saying requires very large qualification. Let one fact suffice. We are frequently told that a man is "justified by faith without the deeds of the law," by Paul. 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 whereby we are *visibly and demonstratively* justified before man, is a faith which "if it hath not works is dead, being alone"<sup>1</sup> (Jam 2:17). I may be told, in reply, that no one of course means to disparage "works" as an essential part of a holy life. It would be well, however, to make this more plain than many seem to make it in these days.

<sup>1</sup> "There is a double justification by God: the one authoritative, the other declarative or demonstrative." The first is St. Paul's scope, when he speaks of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. The second is St. James scope, when he speaks of justification by works." — *Thomas Goodwin on Gospel Holiness; Works*, vol. 7, p. 181.

2. I ask, in the second place, ***whether it is wise to make so little as some appear to do, comparatively, of the many practical exhortations to holiness in daily life which are to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the latter part of most of St. Paul's epistles?*** Is it according to the proportion of God's Word? I doubt it.

That a life of daily self-consecration and daily communion with God should be aimed at by everyone who professes to be a believer; 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—all this, I repeat, no well-taught child of God will dream of disputing. But surely the New Testament teaches us that we want something more than *generalities* about holy living, which often prick no conscience and give no offense. The *details* and particular ingredients of which holiness is composed in daily life, ought to be fully set forth and pressed on believers by all who profess to handle the subject. True holiness does not consist merely of believing and feeling, but of doing and bearing, and a practical exhibition of active and passive grace. Our tongues, our tempers, our natural passions and inclinations—our conduct as parents and children, masters and servants, husbands and wives, rulers and subjects—our dress, our employment of time, our behaviour in business, our demeanour in sickness and health, in riches and in poverty—all these are matters which are fully treated 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. They dig down lower. They go into particulars. They specify minutely what a holy man ought to do and be in his own family, and by his own fireside, if he abides in Christ. I doubt whether this sort of teaching is sufficiently attended to in the movement of the present day. When people talk of having received “such a blessing,” and of having found “the higher life,” after hearing some earnest advocate of “holiness by faith and self-consecration,” while their families and friends see no improvement and no increased sanctity in their daily tempers and behaviour, immense harm is done to the cause of Christ. True holiness, we surely ought to remember, does not consist merely of inward sensations and impressions. It is much more than tears, and sighs, and bodily excitement, and a quickened pulse, and a passionate feeling of attachment to our own favourite preachers and our own religious party, and a readiness to quarrel with everyone who does not agree with us. It is something of “the image of Christ,” which can be seen and observed by others in our private life, habits, character, and doings (Rom 8:29).

3. I ask, in the third place, ***whether it is wise to use vague language about perfection, and to press on Christians a standard of holiness as attainable in this world, for which there is no warrant to be shown either in Scripture or experience?*** I doubt it.

That believers are exhorted to “perfect holiness in the fear of God”—to “go on to perfection,” to “be perfect,” no careful reader of his Bible will ever think of denying (2Co 7:1; Heb 6:1; 2Co 13:11). But I have yet to learn that there is a single passage in Scripture which teaches that a literal perfection, a complete and entire freedom from sin, in thought or 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-round consistency in every relation of life, a thorough soundness in every point of doctrine—this 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” (1Pe 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 of them all, when writing about himself, ever talks of feeling free from imperfection? On the contrary, men like David, and St. Paul, and St. John, declare in the strongest language that they feel in their own hearts weakness and sin. The holiest men of modern times have always been remarkable for deep humility. Have we ever seen holier men than the martyred John Bradford, or Hooker, or Usher, or Baxter (1615-1691), or Rutherford (1600-1661), or M'Cheyne (1813-1843)? 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 face of such facts as these I must protest against the language used in many quarters, in these last days, about ***perfection***. I must think that those who use it either know very little of the nature of sin, or of the attributes of God, or of their own hearts, or of the Bible, or of the meaning of words. When a professing Christian coolly tells me that he has got beyond such hymns as “Just as I am,” and that they are below his present experience, though they suited him when he first took up religion, I must think his soul is in a very unhealthy state! When a man can talk coolly of the possibility of “living without sin” while in the body, and can actually say that he has “never 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 does immense harm. It disgusts and alienates from religion far-seeing men of the world, who know it is incorrect and untrue. It depresses some of the best of God's children, who feel they never can attain to “perfection” of this kind. It puffs up many weak brethren, who fancy they are something when they are nothing. In short, it is a dangerous delusion.

4. In the fourth place, ***is it wise to assert so positively and violently, as many do, that the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans does not describe the experience of the advanced saint, but the experience of the unregenerate man, or of the weak and unestablished believer?*** I doubt it.

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<sup>2</sup> It was a common practice in the Church of England to use the title “Saint” with the names of the original apostles.— *Editor*

I admit fully that the point has been a disputed one for eighteen centuries, in fact ever since the days of St. Paul. I admit fully that eminent Christians like John and Charles Wesley, and 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 admit fully that many cannot see what I and many others do see: viz., that Paul says nothing in this chapter which does not precisely tally with the recorded experience of the most eminent saints in every age, and that he does say several things which no unregenerate man or weak believer would ever think of saying, and cannot say. So, at any rate, it appears to me. But I will not enter into any detailed discussion of the chapter.<sup>3</sup>

What I do lay stress upon is the broad fact that the best commentators in every era of the Church have almost invariably applied the seventh chapter of *Romans* to advanced believers. The commentators who do not take this view have been, with a few bright exceptions, the Romanists, the Socinians, and the Arminians. Against them is arrayed the judgment of almost all the Reformers, almost all the Puritans, and the best modern evangelical divines. I shall be told, of course, that no man is infallible, that the Reformers, Puritans, and modern divines I refer to may have been entirely mistaken, and the Romanists, Socinians, and Arminians may have been quite right! Our Lord has taught us, no doubt, to “call no man master.” But while I ask no man to call the Reformers and Puritans “masters,” I do ask people to read what they say on this subject, 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 the *Epistle to the Romans* to be interpreted? What is the true sense of its words?” At any rate let us remember that there is a great fact which cannot be got over. On one side stand the opinions and interpretation of Reformers and Puritans, and on the other the opinions and interpretations of Romanists, Socinians, and Arminians. Let that be distinctly understood.

In the face of such a fact as this I must enter my protest against the sneering, taunting, contemptuous language which has been frequently used of late by some of the advocates of what I must call the Arminian view of the seventh of *Romans*, in speaking of the opinions of their opponents. To say the least, such language is unseemly, and only defeats its own end. A cause which is defended by such language is deservedly suspicious. Truth needs no such weapons. If we cannot agree with men, we need not speak of their views with discourtesy and contempt. An opinion which is backed and supported by such men as the best Reformers and Puritans may not carry conviction to all minds in this century, but at any rate it would be well to speak of it with respect.

5. In the fifth place, ***is it wise to use the language which is often used in the present day about the doctrine of “Christ in us”?*** I doubt it. Is not this doctrine often exalted to a position which it does not occupy in Scripture? I am afraid that it is.

That the true believer is one with Christ, and Christ in him, no careful reader of the New Testament will think of denying for a moment. 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, with Him we sit in heavenly places. We have five plain texts where we are distinctly taught that Christ is “in us” (Rom 8:9-10; Gal 2:20; 4:19; Eph 3:17; Col 3:11).

But we must be careful that we understand what we mean by the expression. That “Christ dwells in our hearts by faith,” and carries on His inward work by His Spirit, is dear and plain. But if we mean to say that beside, and over, and above this there is some mysterious indwelling of Christ in a believer, we must be careful what we are about. Unless we take care, we shall find ourselves ignoring the work of the Holy Ghost. We shall be forgetting that in the Divine economy of man’s salvation election is the special work of God the Father—atonement, mediation, and intercession, the special work of God the Son—and sanctification, the special work of God the Holy Ghost. We shall be forgetting that our Lord said, when He went away, that He would send us another Comforter, who should “abide with us” for ever, and, as it were, take His place (Joh 14:16). In short, under the idea that we are honouring Christ, we shall find that we are dishonouring His special and peculiar gift—the Holy Ghost. Christ, no doubt, as God, is everywhere—in our hearts, in heaven, in the place where two or three are met together in His name. But we really must remember that Christ, as our risen Head and High Priest, is *especially* at God’s right hand interceding for us until He comes the second time; and that Christ 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 (Joh 15:26). A comparison of the ninth and tenth verses of the eighth chapter of *Romans* seems to me to show this plainly. It convinces me that “Christ in us” means Christ in us “by his Spirit.” Above all, the words of St. John are most distinct and express: “Hereby we know that He abideth in us by the Spirit which He hath given us” (1Jo 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 great danger of giving an extravagant and unscriptural importance to the idea contained in the expression; and I do fear that many use it now-a-days without exactly knowing what they mean, and unwittingly, perhaps, dishonour the mighty work of the Holy Ghost. If any readers think that I am needlessly scrupulous about the point, I recommend to their notice a curious book by Samuel Rutherford (author of the well-known letters), called “The Spiritual Antichrist.” They will there see that two 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, and Dell, and Towne, and other false teachers, against whom good Samuel Rutherford contended, be with strange notions of “Christ in us,” and then proceeded to build on the doctrine 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, and believed, and acted!

<sup>3</sup> Those who care to go into the subject will find it fully discussed in the Commentaries of Willet, Elton, Chalmers (1780-1847), and Haldane, and in Owen (1616-1683) on *Indwelling Sin*, and in the work of Stafford on the *Seventh of Romans*.

The root of this huge error was a forced and unscriptural interpretation of such texts as “I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal 2:20). And the natural result of it was that many of the unhappy followers of this school came to the comfortable conclusion that believers were not responsible, whatever they might do! Believers, forsooth, were dead and buried; and only Christ lived in them, and *undertook* everything for them! The ultimate consequence was, that some thought they might sit still in a carnal security, their personal accountableness being entirely gone, and might commit any kind of sin without fear! Let us never forget that truth, distorted and exaggerated, 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 some neglect this in the present day.

6. 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, so called, as many do draw in the present day?*** Is this according to the proportion of God’s Word? I doubt it.

There is, unquestionably, nothing new in this teaching. It is well known that Romish 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 be old or new, Romish or English, I am utterly unable to see that it has any warrant of Scripture. The Word of God always speaks of two great divisions of mankind, and two only. It speaks of the *living* and the *dead in sin*, the believer and the unbeliever, the converted and the unconverted, the travellers in the narrow way and the travellers 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 measures of sin and of grace; but it is only the difference between the higher and lower end of an inclined plane. *Between* these two great classes there is an enormous gulf; they 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-fangled divisions which the Bible has not made, and thoroughly dislike the notion of a “second conversion.”

That there is a vast difference between one degree of grace and another—that spiritual life admits of growth, and that believers should be continually urged on every account to grow in grace—all this I fully concede. But the theory of a sudden, mysterious transition of a believer into a state of blessedness and *entire consecration*, at one mighty bound, I cannot receive. 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 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 sudden, instantaneous leaps from *conversion* to *consecration* I fail to see in the Bible.

I doubt, indeed, whether we have any warrant for saying that a man can possibly be *converted* without being consecrated to God! More consecrated he doubtless can be, 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 men 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, and breadth, and depth, and height, of that great first change which Scripture calls the new birth, the new creation, 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 had previously a singularly low and inadequate view of “conversion,” if indeed they knew anything about conversion at all. In short, I have almost suspected that when they were *consecrated*, they were in reality *converted* for the first time!

I frankly confess I prefer the old paths. I think it wiser and safer to press on 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 man that he needs a *second conversion*, and that he may some day or other pass by one enormous step into a state of *entire consecration*. I decline to teach it, because I cannot see any warrant for such teaching in Scripture. I decline to teach it, because I think the tendency of the doctrine is thoroughly mischievous, depressing the humble-minded and meek, and puffing up the shallow, the ignorant, and the self-conceited, to a most dangerous extent.

7. In the seventh and last place, ***is it wise to teach believers that they ought not to 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 according to the proportion of God’s Word? I doubt it.

It is a simple fact that the expression “yield yourselves” is only to be found in one place in the New Testament, as a duty urged upon believers. That place is in the sixth chapter of *Romans*, and there within six verses the expression occurs five times (see Rom 6:13-19). But even there the word will not bear 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 (see Rom 12:1). The expression therefore stands alone. But, 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, and are addressed as responsible for doing energetically what Christ would have them do. They are not told to “yield themselves” up as passive agents and sit still,

but to arise and work. A holy violence, a conflict, a warfare, a fight, a soldier's life, a wrestling, are spoken of as characteristic of the true Christian. The account of "the armour of God" in the sixth chapter of *Ephesians*, one might think, settles the question.<sup>4</sup>

Again, it would be easy to show that the doctrine of sanctification without personal exertion, by simply "yielding ourselves to God," is precisely the doctrine of the antinomian fanatics in 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 receive it we cannot do better than put Bunyan's old book in the fire! If Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* simply *yielded himself to God*, and never fought, or struggled, or wrestled, I have read the famous allegory in vain. But the plain truth is, that men will persist in confounding two things that differ, justification and sanctification:

- In *justification* the word to be addressed to man is "believe—only believe;"
- In *sanctification* the word must be "watch, pray, and fight."

What God has divided let us not mingle and confuse.

### The Travesty

I leave the subject of my introduction here, and hasten 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 which 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 want of established, solid religion. In no other way can I account for the ease with which people are, like children, "tossed to and fro, and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14). There is an Athenian love of novelty abroad, and a morbid distaste for anything old and regular, and in the beaten path of our forefathers. Thousands will crowd 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 which is sensational, and exciting, and rousing to the feelings. There is an unhealthy appetite for a sort of spasmodic and hysterical Christianity. The religious life of many is little better than spiritual dram-drinking, and the "meek and quiet spirit," which St. Peter commends, is clean forgotten (1Pe 3:4). Crowds, and crying, and hot rooms, and high-flown singing, and an incessant rousing of the emotions, are the only things which many care for. Inability to distinguish differences in doctrine is spreading far and wide, and so long as the preacher is "clever" and "earnest," hundreds seem to think it must be all right, and call you dreadfully "narrow and uncharitable" if you hint that he is unsound! Moody and Haweis, Dean Stanley and Canon Liddon, Mackonochie and Pearsall Smith, all seem to be alike in the eyes of such people. All this is sad, very sad. But if, in addition to this, the true-hearted advocates of increased holiness are going to fall out by the way and misunderstand one another, it will be sadder still. We shall indeed be in evil plight.

### The Solution

For myself, I am aware that I am no longer a young minister. My mind perhaps stiffens, 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* of Sibbes and of Manton, and in *The Life, Walk, and Triumph of Faith* of William Romaine. But I must express a hope that my younger brethren who have taken up *new* views of holiness will beware of multiplying needless 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 more pressed 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, then I ask them to take care where they tread, and to explain very clearly and distinctly what they mean.

Finally, I must deprecate, and I do it in love, the use of uncouth and new-fangled terms and phrases in teaching sanctification. I plead that a movement in favour of holiness cannot be advanced by new-coined phraseology, or by disproportioned and one-sided statements, or by overstraining and isolating particular texts, or by exalting one truth at the expense of another, or by allegorizing and accommodating texts (squeezing out of them meanings which the Holy Ghost never put in them), or by speaking contemptuously and bitterly of those who do not entirely see things with our eyes, and do not work exactly in our ways. These things do not make for peace; they rather 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 which 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 endeavour to follow after peace as well as holiness. What "God has joined together let not man put asunder" (Mar 10:9).

It is my heart's desire, and prayer to God daily, that personal holiness may increase greatly among professing Christians in England. But I trust that all who endeavour to promote it will adhere closely to the proportion of Scripture, will carefully distinguish things that differ, and will separate "the precious from the vile" (Jer 15:19).

<sup>4</sup> Old Sibbe's sermon on "Victorious Violence" deserves the attention of all who have his works – Vol. 7, p. 30 (Richard Sibbes, 1577-1635).

# 1. Sin

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

## Knowledge of Sin Is Fundamental

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

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

## I. Definition of Sin

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

I say, then, that “sin,” speaking generally, is, as the Ninth Article<sup>5</sup> of the Church of England declares, “the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone (*quam longissime* is the Latin) from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always against the spirit; and, therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation.” Sin, in short, is *that vast moral disease which affects the whole human race*, of every rank, and class, and name, and nation, and people, and tongue; a disease from which there never was but one born of woman that was free. Need I say that One was Christ Jesus the Lord?

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

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

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

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

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<sup>5</sup> The confession of faith of the Church of England is called the *Thirty-nine Articles*. It was derived in 1563 and reflects the teachings of the protestant Reformation.



## II. Origin and Source of Sin

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

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

The fairest babe that has entered life this year, and become the sunbeam of a family, is not, as its mother perhaps fondly calls it, a little “angel,” or a little “innocent,” but a little “sinner.” Alas! as it lies smiling and crowing in its cradle, that little creature carries in its heart the seeds of every kind of wickedness! Only watch it carefully, as it grows in stature and its mind develops, and you will soon detect in it an incessant tendency to that which is selfish and bad, and a backwardness to that which is good. You will see in it the buds and germs of deceit, evil temper, selfishness, self-will, obstinacy, greediness, envy, jealousy, passion—which, if indulged and let alone, will shoot up with painful rapidity. Who taught the child these things? Where did he learn them? The Bible alone can answer these questions!

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

## III. Extent of Sin

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

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

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

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

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

Let us remember, besides this, that every part of the world bears testimony to the fact that sin is the universal disease of all mankind. Search the globe from east to west and from pole to pole, search every nation of every clime in the four quarters of the earth, search every rank and class in our own country from the highest to the lowest—and under every circumstance and condition, the report will be always the same. The remotest islands in the Pacific Ocean, completely separate from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, beyond the reach alike of Oriental luxury and Western arts and literature—islands inhabited by people ignorant of books, money, steam, and gunpowder—uncontaminated by the vices of modern civilization—in these very islands have always been found, when first discovered, the abode of the vilest forms of lust, cruelty, deceit, and superstition. If the inhabitants have known nothing else, they have always known how to sin! Everywhere the human heart is naturally “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). For my part, I know no stronger proof of the inspiration of *Genesis* and the Mosaic account of the

origin of man, than the power, extent, and universality of sin. Grant that mankind have all sprung from one pair, and that this pair fell (as Genesis 3 tells us), and the state of human nature everywhere is easily accounted for. Deny it; as many do, and you are at once involved in inexplicable difficulties. In a word, the uniformity and universality of human corruption supply one of the most unanswerable instances of the enormous “difficulties of infidelity.”

#### *Sin in the life of the believer*

After all, I am convinced that the greatest proof of the extent and power of sin is the pertinacity with which it cleaves to man even after he is converted and has become the subject of the Holy Ghost’s operations. To use the language of the Ninth Article,<sup>6</sup> “this infection of nature doth remain...even in them that are regenerate.” So deeply planted are the roots of human corruption, that even after we are born again, renewed, “washed, sanctified, justified,” and made living members of Christ, these roots remain alive in the bottom of our hearts, and, like the leprosy in the walls of the house, we never get rid of them until the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved. Sin, no doubt, in the believer’s heart, has no longer dominion. It is checked, controlled, mortified, and crucified by the expulsive power of the new principle of grace.

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

#### **IV. Offensiveness of Sin**

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

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

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

- that sin is “the abominable thing that God hateth,”
- that God “is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon that which is evil,”
- that the least transgression of God’s law makes us “guilty of all,”
- that “the soul that sinneth shall die,”
- that “the wages of sin is death,”
- that God shall “judge the secrets of men,”
- that there is a worm that never dies, and a fire that is not quenched,
- that “the wicked shall be turned into hell” and “shall go away into everlasting punishment,” and
- that “nothing that defiles shall in any wise enter heaven.”

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

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

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<sup>6</sup> The Church of England’s *Thirty-nine Articles*, a conservative confession of faith.

## V. Deceitfulness of Sin

One point only remains to be considered on the subject of sin, which I dare not pass over. That point is its *deceitfulness*. It is a point of most serious importance, and I venture to think it does not receive the attention which it deserves. You may see this deceitfulness in the incredible proneness of men to regard sin as less sinful and dangerous than it is in the sight of God; and in their readiness to extenuate<sup>7</sup> it, make excuses for it, and minimize its guilt. “It is but a little one! God is merciful! God is not extreme to mark what is done amiss! We mean well! One cannot be so particular! Where is the mighty harm? We only do as others!” Who is not familiar with this kind of language?

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

I fear we do not sufficiently realize the extreme subtlety of our soul’s disease. We are too apt to forget that temptation to sin will rarely present itself to us in its true colours, saying, “I am your deadly enemy, and I want to ruin you for ever in hell.” Oh, no! Sin comes to us, like Judas, with a kiss; and like Joab, with an outstretched hand and flattering words. The forbidden fruit seemed good and desirable to Eve; yet it cast her out of Eden. The walking idly on his palace roof seemed harmless enough to David; yet it ended in adultery and murder. Sin rarely seems sin at first beginnings. Let us then watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. We may give wickedness smooth names, but we cannot alter its nature and character in the sight of God. Let us remember St. Paul’s words: “Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). It is a wise prayer in our Litany, “From the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, good Lord, deliver us.”

### *Self-abasement*

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

With my whole heart I subscribe to that passage in Hooker’s Sermon on Justification, which begins, “Let the holiest and best things we do be considered. We are never better affected unto God than when we pray; yet when we pray, how are our affections many times distracted! How little reverence do we show unto the grand majesty of God unto whom we speak! How little remorse of our own miseries! How little taste of the sweet influence of His tender mercies do we feel! Are we not as unwilling many times to begin, and as glad to make an end, as if in saying, ‘call upon me’ (Psa 50:15), He had set us a very burdensome task? What I say may seem somewhat extreme; therefore, let every one judge, even as his own heart shall tell him, and not otherwise; I will but only make a demand! If God should yield unto us, not as unto Abraham (if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yea, or if ten good persons could be found in a city, for their sakes this city should not be destroyed), but rather if He should make us an offer thus large: 1) search all the generations of men since the fall of our father Adam, 2) find one man that hath done one action which hath passed from him pure, without any stain or blemish at all, and 3) for that one man’s only action neither man nor angel should feel the torments which are prepared for both. Do you think that this ransom to deliver men and angels could be found to be among the sons of men, the best things which we do have somewhat in them to be pardoned?”<sup>8</sup>

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

### *Be thankful for grace*

On the other hand, I ask my readers to observe how *deeply thankful* we ought to be for the glorious gospel of the grace of God. There is a remedy revealed for man’s need, as wide and broad and deep as man’s disease. We need not be afraid to look at sin, and

<sup>7</sup> **extenuate** – to attempt to lessen magnitude or seriousness by providing partial excuses; to belittle.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hooker (1586-1647): “Learned Discourse of Justification.”

study its nature; origin, power, extent, and vileness, if we only look at the same time at the almighty medicine provided for us in the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Though sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded. Yes...

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

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

### Practical Application

In bringing this mighty subject to a close, I feel that I have only touched the surface of it. It is one which cannot be thoroughly handled in a paper like this. He that would see it treated fully and exhaustively must turn to such masters of experimental theology as Owen, Burgess, Manton, Charnock, and the other giants of the Puritan school. On subjects like this there are no writers to be compared to the Puritans. It only remains for me to point out some practical issues to which the whole doctrine of sin may be profitably turned in the present day.

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

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

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

(b) Next, a scriptural view of sin is one of the *best tests of the extravagantly broad and liberal theology* which is so much in vogue today. The tendency of modern thought is to reject creeds and every kind of bounds in religion. It is thought grand and wise to condemn no opinion whatsoever, and to pronounce all earnest and clever teachers to be trustworthy, however heterogeneous and mutually destructive their opinions may be. Everything forsooth is true, and nothing is false! Everybody is right, and nobody is wrong! Everybody is likely to be saved, and nobody is to be lost! The atonement and substitution of Christ, the personality of the devil, the miraculous element in Scripture, the reality and eternity of future punishment, all these mighty foundation-stones are coolly tossed overboard, like lumber, in order to lighten the ship of Christianity, and enable it to keep pace with modern science. Stand up for these great verities, and you are called narrow, old-fashioned, and a theological fossil! Quote a text, and you are told that all truth is not confined to the pages of an ancient Jewish book, and that free inquiry has found out many things since the book was completed.

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

which they are leaving out in their calculations. And, above all, we must tell them that nothing will ever make them feel rest, but submission to the old doctrines of man's ruin and Christ's redemption, and simple child-like faith in Jesus.

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

(d) In the next place, a right view of sin is one of the *best antidotes to the overstrained theories of Perfection*, of which we hear so much in these times. I shall say but little about this, and in saying it I trust I shall not give offense. If those who press on us perfection mean nothing more than an all-round consistency, and a careful attention to all the graces which make up the Christian character, reason would that we should not only bear with them, but agree with them entirely. By all means let us aim high. But if men really mean to tell us that here in this world a believer can attain to entire freedom from sin, live for years in unbroken and uninterrupted communion with God, and feel for months together not so much as one evil thought, I must honestly say that such an opinion appears to me very unscriptural.

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

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

Into the causes of this state of things I cannot pretend to enter fully, and can only suggest conjectures for consideration. It may be that a certain profession of religion has become so fashionable and comparatively easy in the present age, that the streams which were once narrow and deep have become wide and shallow, and what we have gained in outward show we have lost in quality. It may be that the vast increase of wealth in the last twenty-five years has insensibly introduced a plague of worldliness, and self-indulgence, and love of ease into social life. What were once called luxuries are now comforts and necessaries, and self-denial and "enduring hardness" are consequently little known. It may be that the enormous amount of controversy which marks this age has insensibly dried up our spiritual life. We have too often been content with zeal for orthodoxy, and have neglected the sober realities of daily practical godliness. Be the causes what they may, I must declare my own belief that the result remains. There has been of late years a lower standard of personal holiness among believers than there used to be in the days of our fathers. The whole result is that *the Spirit is grieved!* The matter calls for much humiliation and searching of heart.

### *Remedies*

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

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

Whatever some may lease<sup>9</sup> to think or say, there can be no doubt that an increased feeling about holiness is one of the signs of the times. Conferences for the promotion of “spiritual life” are becoming common in the present day. The subject of “spiritual life” finds a place on Congress platforms almost every year. It has awakened an amount of interest throughout the land, for which we ought to be thankful. Any movement, based on sound principles, which helps to deepen our spiritual life and increase our personal holiness, will be a real blessing to the church. It will do much to draw us together and heal our unhappy divisions. It may bring down some fresh out-pouring of the grace of the Spirit, and be “life from the dead” in these later times. But sure I am, as I said in the beginning of this paper, we must begin low, if we would build high. I am convinced that the first step towards attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the amazing sinfulness of sin.

## 2. Sanctification

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

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

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

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

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

I. Let us consider, firstly, the *true nature* of sanctification.

II. Let us consider, secondly, the *visible marks* of sanctification.

III. Let us consider, lastly, wherein *justification and sanctification* agree and are like one another, and wherein they differ.

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

### I. The Nature of Sanctification

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

Sanctification is that inward spiritual work which the Lord Jesus Christ works in a man by the Holy Ghost, when He calls him to be a true believer. He not only 1) washes him from his sins in His own blood, but He also 2) separates him from his natural love of sin and the world, 3) puts a new principle in his heart, and 4) makes him practically godly in life. The instrument by which the

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<sup>9</sup> lease – give or allow.

Spirit effects this work is generally the Word of God, though He sometimes uses afflictions and providential visitations “without the word” (1Pe 3:1). The subject of this work of Christ by His Spirit is called in Scripture a “sanctified” man.<sup>10</sup>

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

The Lord Jesus has undertaken everything that His people’s souls require; not only to deliver them from the *guilt* of their sins by His atoning death, but from the *dominion* of their sins, by placing in their hearts the Holy Spirit; not only to justify them, but also to sanctify them. He is, thus, not only their “righteousness,” but their “sanctification” (1Co 1:30). Let us hear what the Bible says: “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified.” “Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it.” “Christ gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” “Christ bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.” “Christ hath reconciled (you) in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight” (Joh 17:19; Eph 5:25-26; Tit 2:14; 1Pe 2:24; Col 1:21-22). Let the meaning of these five texts be carefully considered. If words mean anything, they teach that Christ undertakes the sanctification, no less than the justification of His believing people. *Both* are alike provided for in that “everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure,” of which the Mediator is Christ. In fact, Christ in one place is called “He that sanctifieth,” and His People, “they who are sanctified” (Heb 2:11).

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

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

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

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

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

(4) Sanctification, again, is the **only sure mark of God’s election**. The names and number of the elect are a secret thing, no doubt, which God has wisely kept in His own power, and not revealed to man. It is not given to us in this world to study the pages

<sup>10</sup> There is mention in the Scripture of a twofold sanctification, and consequently there is a twofold holiness. The first is common unto persons and things, consisting of the peculiar dedication, consecration, or separation of them unto the service of God, His own appointment, whereby they become holy. Thus the priests and Levites of old, the ark, the altar, the tabernacle, and the temple, were sanctified and made holy; and, indeed, in all holiness whatever, there is a peculiar dedication and separation unto God. But in the sense mentioned, his was solitary and alone. No more belonged unto it but this sacred separation, nor was there any other effect of this sanctification. But, secondly, there is another kind of sanctification and holiness, wherein this separation to God is not the first thing done or intended, but a consequent and effect thereof. This is real and internal, by the communicating of a principle of holiness unto our natures, attended with its exercise in acts and duties of holy obedience unto God. This is that which we inquire after.” — *John Owen (1616-1683) on the Holy Spirit, Works*, Vol. 3 p.370, Goold’s edition.

of the book of life, and see if our names are there. But if there is one thing clearly and plainly laid down about election, it is this—that elect men and women may be known and distinguished by holy lives. It is expressly written that they are...

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

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

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

(5) Sanctification, again, is **a thing that will always be seen**. Like the Great Head of the Church, from whom it springs, it “cannot be hid.” “Every tree is known by his own fruit” (Luk 6:44). A truly sanctified person may be so clothed with humility, that he can see in himself nothing but infirmity and defects. Like Moses, when he came down from Mount Sinai, he may not be conscious that his face shines. Like the righteous, in the mighty parable of the sheep and the goats, he may not see that he has done anything worthy of his Master’s notice and commendation: “When saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?” (Mat 25:37). But whether he sees it himself or not, others will always see in him a tone, and taste, and character, and habit of life unlike that of other men. The very idea of a man being “sanctified,” while no holiness can be seen in his life, is flat nonsense and a misuse of words. Light may be very dim; but if there is only a spark in a dark room it will be seen. Life may be very feeble; but if the pulse only beats a little, it will be felt. It is just the same with a sanctified man: his sanctification will be something felt and seen, though he himself may not understand it. A “saint” in whom nothing can be seen but worldliness or sin, is a kind of monster not recognised in the Bible!

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

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

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

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

(b) More *sanctified* he certainly may be, because every grace in his new character may be strengthened, enlarged, and deepened. This is the evident meaning of our Lord’s last prayer for His disciples, when He used the words, “Sanctify them;” and of Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians; “The very God of peace sanctify you” (Joh 17:17; 1Th 5:23). In both cases the expression plainly implies the possibility of increased sanctification; while such an expression as “justify them” is never once in Scripture applied to a believer, because he cannot be more justified than he is. I can find no warrant in Scripture for the doctrine of “imputed sanctification.” It is a doctrine which seems to me to confuse things that differ, and to lead to very evil consequences. Not least, it is a doctrine which is flatly contradicted by the experience of all the most eminent Christians. If there is any point on which God’s holiest saints agree it is this: that they see more, and know more, and feel more, and do more, and repent more, and believe more, as they get on in spiritual life, and in proportion to the closeness of their walk with God. In short, they “grow in grace,” as Peter exhorts believers to do; and “abound more and more,” according to the words of Paul (2Pe 3:18; 1Th 4:1).

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



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

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

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

Believing all this, I shall never hesitate to tell people that inward conflict is no proof that a man is not holy, and that they must not think they are not sanctified because they do not feel entirely free from inward struggle. Such freedom we shall doubtless have in heaven; but we shall never enjoy it in this world. The heart of the best Christian, even at his best, is a field occupied by two rival camps, and the "company of two armies" (Song 6:13). Let the words of the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Articles be well considered by all churchmen: "The infection of nature doth remain in them that are regenerated." "Although baptized and born again in Christ, we offend in many things; and if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."<sup>11</sup>

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

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

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

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

The favourite idea of many, that dying men need nothing except absolution and forgiveness of sins to fit them for their great change, is a profound delusion. We need the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the work of Christ; we need renewal of the heart as

<sup>11</sup> "The devil's war is better than the devil's peace. Suspect dumb holiness. When the dog is kept out of doors he howls to be let in again." "Contraries meeting, such as fire and water, conflict one with another. When Satan findeth a sanctified heart, he tempteth with much importunity. Where there is much of God and of Christ, there are strong injections and firebrands cast in at the windows, so that some of much faith have been tempted to doubt." – *Rutherford's Trial of Faith*, p.403 (1600-1661).

well as the atoning blood; we need to be sanctified as well as to be justified. It is common to hear people saying on their deathbeds, "I only want the Lord to forgive me my sins, and take me to rest." But those who say such things forget that the rest of heaven would be utterly useless if we had no heart to enjoy it! What could an unsanctified man do in heaven, if by any chance he got there? Let that question be fairly looked in the face, and fairly answered. No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element, and where all around him is not congenial to his tastes, habits, and character. When an eagle is happy in an iron cage, when a sheep is happy in the water, when an owl is happy in the blaze of noonday sun, when a fish is happy on the dry land—then, and not till then, will I admit that the unsanctified man could be happy in heaven.<sup>12</sup>

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

## II. The Visible Evidence of Sanctification

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

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

(2) True sanctification does not consist in temporary *religious feelings*. This again is a point about which a warning is greatly needed. Mission services and revival meetings are attracting great attention in every part of the land, and producing a great sensation. The Church of England seems to have taken a new lease of life, and exhibits a new activity; and we ought to thank God for it. But these things have their attendant dangers as well as their advantages. Wherever wheat is sown the devil is sure to sow tares. Many, it may be feared, appear moved and touched and roused under the preaching of the gospel, while in reality their hearts are not changed at all. A kind of animal excitement from the contagion of seeing others weeping, rejoicing, or affected, is the true account of their case. Their wounds are only skin deep, and the peace they profess to feel is skin deep also. Like the stony-ground hearers, they "receive the word with joy" (Mat 13:20); but after a little they fall away, go back to the world, and are harder and worse than before. Like Jonah's gourd, they come up suddenly in a night and perish in a night.

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

(3) True sanctification does not consist in *outward formalism* and external devoutness. This is an enormous delusion, but unhappily a very common one. Thousands appear to imagine that true holiness is to be seen in an excessive quantity of bodily religion—in constant attendance on church services, reception of the Lord's Supper, and observance of fasts and saints' days, in multiplied bowings and turnings and gestures and postures during public worship, in self-imposed austerities and petty self-denials, in wearing peculiar dresses, and the use of pictures and crosses. I freely admit that some people take up these things from conscientious motives, and actually believe that they help their souls. But I am afraid that in many cases this external religiousness is made a substitute for inward holiness; and I am quite certain that it falls utterly short of sanctification of heart. Above all, when I see that many followers of this outward, sensuous, and formal style of Christianity are absorbed in worldliness, and plunge headlong into its pomps and vanities,

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<sup>12</sup> "There is no imagination wherewith man is besotted, more foolish, none so pernicious as this—that persons not purified, not sanctified, not made holy in their life, should afterwards be taken into that state of blessedness which consists in the enjoyment of God. Neither can such persons enjoy God, nor would God be a reward to them. Holiness indeed is perfected in heaven: but the beginning of it is invariably confined to this world." - *Owen on Holy Spirit*, p.575. Goold's edition. John Owen (1616-1683): chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell and vice-chancellor of Oxford University, but most of his life served as a minister in congregational churches. His written works span forty years and run to twenty-four volumes representing among the best resources for theology in the English language. Born to Puritan parents in the Oxfordshire village of Stadham.

without shame, I feel that there is need of very plain speaking on the subject. There may be an immense amount of “bodily service,” while there is not a jot of real sanctification.

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

True holiness does not make a Christian evade difficulties, but face and overcome them. Christ would have His people show that His grace is not a mere hot-house plant, which can only thrive under shelter, but a strong, hardy thing which can flourish in every relation of life. It is doing our duty in that state to which God has called us—like salt in the midst of corruption and light in the midst of darkness—which is a primary element in sanctification. It is not the man who hides self in a cave, but the man who glorifies God as master or servant, parent or child, in the family and in the street, in business and in trade, who is the scriptural type of a sanctified man. Our Master Himself said in His last prayer, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (Joh 17:15).

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

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

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

(7) Genuine sanctification will show itself in an *habitual endeavour* to do Christ’s will, and to live by His practical precepts. These precepts are to be found scattered everywhere throughout the four *Gospels*, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount. He that supposes they were spoken without the intention of promoting holiness, and that a Christian need not attend to them in his daily life, is really little better than a lunatic, and at any rate is a grossly ignorant person. To hear some men talk, and read some men’s writings, one might imagine that our blessed Lord, when He was on earth, never taught anything but doctrine, and left practical duties to be taught by others! The slightest knowledge of the four Gospels ought to tell us that this is a complete mistake. What His disciples ought to be and to do is continually brought forward in our Lord’s teaching. A truly sanctified man will never forget this. He serves a Master who said, “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you” (Joh 15:14).

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

(9) Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual *attention to the active graces* which our Lord so beautifully exemplified, and especially to the grace of charity. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (Joh 13:34-35.) A sanctified man will try to do good in the world, and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will aim to be like his Master, full of kindness and love to every one; and this not in word only, by calling people “dear,” but by deeds and actions and self-denying work, according as he has opportunity. The selfish Christian professor, who wraps himself up in his own conceit of superior knowledge, and seems to care nothing whether others sink or swim, go to heaven or hell, so long as he walks to church

or chapel in his Sunday best, and is called a “sound member”—such a man knows nothing of sanctification. He may think himself a saint on earth, but he will not be a saint in heaven. Christ will never be found the Saviour of those who know nothing of following His example. Saving faith and real converting grace will always produce some conformity to the image of Jesus<sup>13</sup> (Col 3:10).

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

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

### III. The Distinction Between Justification and Sanctification

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Such are the points on which justification and sanctification agree.

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

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

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<sup>13</sup> “Christ in the Gospel is proposed to us as our pattern and example of holiness; and as it is a cursed imagination that this was the whole end of his life and death namely, to exemplify and confirm the doctrine of holiness which He taught—so to neglect His being our example, in considering Him by faith to that end, and labouring after conformity to Him, is evil and pernicious. Wherefore let us be much in the contemplation of what He was, and what He did, and how in all duties and trials He carved Himself, until an image or idea of His perfect holiness is implanted in our minds, and we are made like unto Him thereby.” — *Owen on the Holy Ghost*, p.513; Goold’s edition.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Practical Application

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let us feel convinced, whatever others may say, that holiness is happiness, and that the man who gets through life most comfortably is the *sanctified* man. No doubt there are some true Christians who from ill-health, or family trials, or other secret causes, enjoy little sensible comfort, and go mourning all their days on the way to heaven. But these are exceptional cases. As a general rule, in the long run of life, it will be found true that "sanctified" people are the happiest people on earth. They have solid comforts

which the world can neither give nor take away. “The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness.” “Great peace have they that love thy law.” It was said by One who cannot lie, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” But it is also written, “There is no peace unto the wicked” (Pro 3:17; Psa 119:165; Mat 11:30; Isa 48:22).

**Post Script:** The subject of sanctification is of such deep importance, and the mistakes made about it so many and great, that I make no apology for strongly recommending “Owen on the Holy Spirit” to all who want to study more thoroughly the whole doctrine of sanctification. No single paper like this can embrace it all. I am quite aware that Owen’s<sup>14</sup> writings are not fashionable in the present day, and that many think fit to neglect and sneer at him as a Puritan! Yet the great divine who in Commonwealth times was Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, does not deserve to be treated in this way. He had more learning and sound knowledge of Scripture in his little finger than many who depreciate him have in their whole bodies. I assert unhesitatingly that the man who wants to study experimental theology will find no books equal to those of Owen and some of his contemporaries, for complete, scriptural, and exhaustive treatment of the subjects they handle.

## 3. Holiness

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

### Are We Holy?

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

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

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

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

I shall endeavour, by God’s help...

I. to examine *what true holiness is*,

II. the reason *why holiness is so important*, and

III. in conclusion, I shall try to point out *the only way in which holiness can be attained*.

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

### I. The Definition of True, Practical Holiness

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

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

- not knowledge, Balaam had that;

- nor great profession, Judas Iscariot had that;

- nor doing many things, Herod had that nor zeal for certain matters in religion, and Jehu had that;

- nor morality and outward respectability of conduct, the young ruler had that;

- nor taking pleasure in hearing preachers, the Jews in Ezekiel’s time had that;

- nor keeping company with godly people; Joab and Gehazi and Demas had that.

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

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

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<sup>14</sup> Owen authored *The Mortification of Sin*, *Temptation*, and *Indwelling Sin*—each of which offers sound insight into this subject of holiness.

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

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

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

He will remember...

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

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

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

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

(f) A holy man will follow after *charity and brotherly kindness*. He will endeavour to observe the golden rule of doing as he would have men do to him, and speaking as he would have men speak to him (Joh 13:34). He will be full of affection towards his brethren, towards their bodies, their property, their characters, their feelings, their souls. "He that loveth another," says Paul, "hath fulfilled the law" (Rom 13:8). He will abhor all lying, slandering, backbiting, cheating, dishonesty, and unfair dealing, even in the least things. The shekel and cubit of the sanctuary were larger than those in common use. He will strive to adorn his religion by all his outward demeanour, and to make it lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all around him. Alas, what condemning words are the 13th chapter of *1 Corinthians*, and the Sermon on the Mount, when laid alongside the conduct of many professing Christians!

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

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

(i) A holy man will follow after the *fear of God*. I do not mean the fear of a slave, who only works because he is afraid of punishment, and would be idle if he did not dread discovery. I mean rather the fear of a child, who wishes to live and move as if he was always before his father's face, because he loves him. What a noble example Nehemiah gives us of this! When he became Governor

at Jerusalem he might have been chargeable to the Jews and required of them money for his support. The former Governors had done so. There was none to blame him if he did. But he says, "So did not I, because of the fear of God" (Neh 5:15).

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

(k) A holy man will follow after *faithfulness in all the duties and relations in life*. He will try, not merely to fill his place as well as others who take no thought for their souls, but even better, because he has higher motives, and more help than they. Those words of Paul should never be forgotten, "Whatever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord," "Not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Col 3:23; Rom 12:11). Holy persons should aim at doing everything well, and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything ill if they can help it. Like Daniel, they should seek to give no "occasion" against themselves, except "concerning the law of their God" (Dan 6:5). They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants, good neighbours, good friends, good subjects, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good by their firesides. Holiness is worth little indeed, if it does not bear this kind of fruit. The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to His people, when He says, "What do ye more than others?" (Mat 5:47).

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

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

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

### *Holiness and Sin*

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

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

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

And sanctification in the very best is an *imperfect work*. The history of the brightest saints that ever lived will contain many a "but," and "howbeit," and "notwithstanding," before you reach the end. The gold will never be without some dross, and the light will never shine without some clouds, until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem. The sun himself has spots upon his face. The holiest men have many a blemish and defect when weighed in the balance of the sanctuary. Their life is a continual warfare with sin, the world, and the devil; and sometimes you will see them not overcoming, but overcome. The flesh is ever lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and "in many things they offend all" (Gal 5:17; Jam 3:2).

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

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

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



Well says Owen, “I do not understand how a man can be a true believer unto whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble.”

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

## II. Why True, Practical Holiness Is So Important

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(e) We must be holy, because this is the ***only sound evidence that we are true children of God.*** Children in this world are generally like their parents. Some, doubtless, are more so, and some less, but it is seldom indeed that you cannot trace a kind of family likeness. And it is much the same with the children of God. The Lord Jesus says, “If ye were Abraham’s children ye would do the works of Abraham.” “If God were your Father ye would love me” (Joh 8:39, 42). If men have no likeness to the Father in heaven, it

is vain to talk of their being His “sons.” If we know nothing of holiness we may flatter ourselves as we please, but we have not got the Holy Spirit dwelling in us: we are dead, and must be brought to life again. We are lost, and must be found. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they,” and they only, “are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14). We must show by our lives the family we belong to. We must let men see by our good conversation that we are indeed the children of the Holy One, or our son-ship is but an empty name. “Say not,” says Gurnall, “that thou hast royal blood in thy veins, and art born of God, except thou canst prove thy pedigree by daring to be holy.”

(f) We must be holy, because this is the *most likely way to do good to others*. We cannot live to ourselves only in this world. Our lives will always be doing either good or harm to those who see them. They are a silent sermon which all can read. It is sad indeed when they are a sermon for the devil’s cause, and not for God’s. I believe that far more is done for Christ’s kingdom by the holy living of believers than we are at all aware of. There is a reality about such living which makes men feel, and obliges them to think. It carries a weight and influence with it which nothing else can give. It makes religion beautiful, and draws men to consider it, like a lighthouse seen afar off. The day of judgment will prove that many besides husbands have been won “*without the word*” by a holy life (1Pe 3:1). You may talk to persons about the doctrines of the *Gospels*, and few will listen, and still fewer understand. But your life is an argument that none can escape. There is a meaning about holiness which not even the most unlearned can help taking in. They may not understand justification, but they can understand charity.

I believe there is far more harm done by unholy and inconsistent Christians than we are aware of. Such men are among Satan’s best allies. They pull down by their lives what ministers build with their lips. They cause the chariot wheels of the gospel to drive heavily. They supply the children of this world with a never ending excuse for remaining as they are. “I cannot see the use of so much religion,” said an irreligious tradesman not long ago; “I observe that some of my customers are always talking about the gospel, and faith, and election, and the blessed promises, and so forth; and yet these very people think nothing of cheating me of pence and half-pence, when they have an opportunity. Now, if religious persons can do such things, I do not see what good there is in religion.” I grieve to be obliged to write such things, but I fear that Christ’s name is too often blasphemed because of the lives of Christians. Let us take heed lest the blood of souls should be required at our hands. From murder of souls by inconsistency and loose walking, good Lord, deliver us! Oh, for the sake of others, if for no other reason, let us strive to be holy!

(g) We must be holy, because *our present comfort depends much upon it*. We cannot be too often reminded of this. We are sadly apt to forget that there is a close connection between sin and sorrow, holiness and happiness, sanctification and consolation. God has so wisely ordered it, that our well-being and our well-doing are linked together. He has mercifully provided that even in this world it shall be man’s *interest* to be holy. Our justification is not by works—our calling and election are not according to our works—but it is vain for anyone to suppose that he will have a lively sense of his justification, or an assurance of his calling, so long as he neglects good works, or does not strive to live a holy life. “Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments;” “hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts” (1Jo 2:3; 3:19). A believer may as soon expect to feel the sun’s rays upon a dark and cloudy day, as to feel strong consolation in Christ while he does not follow Him fully. When the disciples forsook the Lord and fled, they escaped danger, but they were miserable and sad. When, shortly after, they confessed Him boldly before men, they were cast into prison and beaten; but we are told “they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Act 5:41). Oh, for our own sakes, if there were no other reason, let us strive to be holy! He that follows Jesus most fully will always follow Him most comfortably.

(h) Lastly, we must be holy, because *without holiness on earth we shall never be prepared to enjoy heaven*. Heaven is a holy place. The Lord of heaven is a holy Being. The angels are holy creatures. Holiness is written on everything in heaven. The book of Revelation says expressly, “There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie” (Rev 21:27).

I appeal solemnly to everyone who reads these pages: how shall we ever be at home and happy in heaven, if we die unholy? Death works no change. The grave makes no alteration. Each will rise again with the same character in which he breathed his last. Where will our place be if we are strangers to holiness now?

Suppose for a moment that you were allowed to enter heaven without holiness. What would you do? What possible enjoyment could you feel there? To which of all the saints would you join yourself, and by whose side would you sit down? Their pleasures are not your pleasures, their tastes not your tastes, their character not your character. How could you possibly be happy, if you had not been holy on earth?

Now perhaps you love the company of the light and the careless, the worldly-minded and the covetous, the reveller and the pleasureseeker, the ungodly and the profane. There will be none such in heaven.

Now perhaps you think the saints of God too strict and particular, and serious. You rather avoid them. You have no delight in their society. There will be no other company in heaven.

Now perhaps you think praying, and Scripture-reading, and hymn singing, dull and melancholy, and stupid work—a thing to be tolerated now and then, but not enjoyed. You reckon the Sabbath a burden and a weariness; you could not possibly spend more than a small part of it in worshipping God. But remember, heaven is a never-ending Sabbath. The inhabitants thereof rest not day or night, saying, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,” and singing the praise of the Lamb. How could an unholy man find pleasure in occupation such as this?

Think you that such an one would delight to meet David, and Paul, and John, after a life spent in doing the very things they spoke against? Would he take sweet counsel with them, and find that he and they had much in common? Think you, above all, that he would rejoice to meet Jesus, the Crucified One, face to face, after cleaving to the sins for which He died, after loving His ene-

mies and despising His friends? Would he stand before Him with confidence, and join in the cry, “This is our God; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation?” (Isa 25:9). Think you not rather that the tongue of an unholy man would cleave to the roof of his mouth with shame, and his only desire would be to be cast out! He would feel a stranger in a land he knew not, a black sheep amidst Christ’s holy flock. The voice of Cherubim and Seraphim, the song of Angels and Archangels and, all the company of heaven, would be a language he could not understand. The very air would seem an air he could not breathe.

I know not what others may think, but to me it does seem clear that heaven would be a miserable place to an unholy man. It cannot be otherwise. People may say, in a vague way, “they hope to go to heaven;” but they do not consider what they say. There must be a certain “meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.” Our hearts must be somewhat in tune. To reach the holiday of glory, we must pass through the training school of grace. We must be heavenly-minded, and have heavenly tastes, in the life that now is, or else we shall never find ourselves in heaven, in the life to come.

### Practical Applications

And now, let me say a few words by way of application.

(1) For one thing, let me ask everyone who may read these pages, ***Are you holy?*** Listen, I pray you, to the question I put to you this day. Do you know anything of the holiness of which I have been speaking?

I do not ask whether you attend your church regularly, whether you have been baptized and received the Lord’s Supper, or whether you have the name of Christian. I ask something more than all this: *Are you holy, or are you not?*

I do not ask whether you approve of holiness in others, whether you like to read the lives of holy people, and to talk of holy things, and to have on your table holy books, or whether you mean to be holy and hope you will be holy some day. I ask something further: *Are you yourself holy this very day, or are you not?*

And why do I ask so straitly, and press the question so strongly? I do it because the Scripture says, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” It is written, it is not my fancy; it is the Bible, not my private opinion; it is the word of God, not of man—“*Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*” (Heb 12:14).

Alas, what searching, sifting words are these! What thoughts come across my mind, as I write them down! I look at the world, and see the greater part of it lying in wickedness. I look at professing Christians, and see the vast majority having nothing of Christianity but the name. I turn to the Bible, and I hear the Spirit saying, “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.”

Surely it is a text that ought to make us consider our ways, and search our hearts. Surely it should raise within us solemn thoughts, and send us to prayer.

#### *Typical Responses to the Question*

You may try to put me off by saying you “feel much, and think much about these things: far more than many suppose.” I answer, “This is not the point. The poor lost souls in hell do as much as this.” The great question is not what you *think*, or what you *feel*, but what you **DO**.

You may say, “It was never meant that all Christians should be holy, and that holiness, such as I have described, is only for great saints, and people of uncommon gifts.” I answer, “I cannot see that in Scripture. I read that *every man* who hath hope in Christ purifieth himself” (1Jo 3:3). “Without holiness *no man* shall see the Lord.”

You may say, “It is impossible to be so holy and to do our duty in this life at the same time: the thing cannot be done.” I answer, “You are mistaken. It *can* be done. With Christ on your side nothing is impossible. It *has* been done by many. David, Obadiah, Daniel, and the servants of Nero’s household, are all examples that go to prove it.”

You may say, “If I were so holy I would be unlike other people.” I answer, “I know it well. It is just what you ought to be. Christ’s true servants always were unlike the world around them—a separate nation, a peculiar people—and you must be so too, if you would be saved!”

You may say, “At this rate very few will be saved.” I answer, “I know it. It is precisely what we are told in the Sermon on the Mount.” The Lord Jesus said so 1,900 years ago. “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matt. 7:14). Few will be saved, because few will take the trouble to seek salvation. Men will not deny themselves the pleasures of sin and their own way for a little season. They turn their backs on an “inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” “Ye *will* not come unto me,” says Jesus, “that ye might have life” (Joh 5:40).

You may say, “These are hard sayings: the way is very narrow.” I answer, “I know it. So says the Sermon on the Mount.” The Lord Jesus said so 1,900 years ago. He always said that men must take up the cross daily, and that they must be ready to cut off hand or foot, if they would be His disciples. It is in religion as it is in other things, “there are no gains without pains.” That which costs nothing is worth nothing.

Whatever we may think fit to say, *we must be holy, if we would see the Lord*. Where is our Christianity if we are not? We must not merely have a Christian name, and Christian knowledge, we must have a Christian *character* also. We must be saints on earth, if ever we mean to be saints in heaven. God has said it, and He will not go back: “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” “The Pope’s calendar,” says Jenkyn, “only makes saints of the *dead*, but Scripture requires sanctity in the *living*.” “Let not men deceive themselves,” says Owen; “sanctification is a qualification indispensably necessary unto those who will be under the conduct of the Lord Christ unto salvation. He leads none to heaven but whom He sanctifies on the earth. This living Head will not admit of dead members.”

Surely we need not wonder that Scripture says, “Ye must be born again” (Joh 3:7). Surely it is clear as noon-day that many professing Christians need a complete change—new hearts, new natures—if ever they are to be saved. Old things must pass away; they must become new creatures. “Without holiness no man,” be he who he may, “shall see the Lord.”

(2) Let me, for another thing, speak a little to believers. I ask you this question, “***Do you think you feel the importance of holiness as much as you should?***”

I own I fear the temper of the times about this subject. I doubt exceedingly whether it holds that place which it deserves in the thoughts and attention of some of the Lord’s people. I would humbly suggest that we are apt to overlook the doctrine of growth in grace, and that we do not sufficiently consider how very far a person may go in a profession of religion, and yet have no grace, and be dead in God’s sight after all. I believe that Judas Iscariot seemed very like the other Apostles. When the Lord warned them that one would betray Him, no one said, “Is it Judas?” We had better think more about the churches of Sardis and Laodicea than we do.

I have no desire to make an idol of holiness. I do not wish to dethrone Christ, and put holiness in His place. But I must candidly say, I wish sanctification was more thought of in this day than it seems to be, and I therefore take occasion to press the subject on all believers into whose hands these pages may fall. I fear it is sometimes forgotten that God has married together justification and sanctification. They are distinct and different things, beyond question, but one is never found without the other. All justified people are sanctified, and all sanctified are justified. What God has joined together let no man dare to put asunder. Tell me not of your justification, unless you have also some marks of sanctification. Boast not of Christ’s work *for you*, unless you can show us the Spirit’s work *in you*. Think not that Christ and the Spirit can ever be divided. I doubt not that many believers know these things, but I think it good for us to be put in remembrance of them. Let us prove that we know them by our lives. Let us try to keep in view this text more continually: “Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

I must frankly say I wish there was not such an excessive *sensitiveness* on the subject of holiness as I sometimes perceive in the minds of believers. A man might really think it was a dangerous subject to handle, so cautiously is it touched! Yet surely when we have exalted Christ as “the way, the truth, and the life,” we cannot err in speaking strongly about what should be the character of His people. Well says Rutherford, “The way that crieth down duties and sanctification, is not the way of grace. Believing and doing are blood-friends.”

I would say it with all reverence, but say it I must. I sometimes fear if Christ were on earth now, there are not a few who would think His preaching *legal*; and if Paul were writing his Epistles, there are those who would think he had better not write the latter part of most of them as he did. But let us remember that the Lord Jesus *did* speak the Sermon on the Mount, and that the *Epistle to the Ephesians* contains six chapters and not four. I grieve to feel obliged to speak in this way, but I am sure there is a cause.

That great divine, John Owen, the Dean of Christ Church, used to say, more than two hundred years ago, that there were people whose whole religion seemed to consist in going about complaining of their own corruptions, and telling everyone that they could do nothing of themselves. I am afraid that after two centuries the same thing might be said with truth of some of Christ’s professing people in this day. I know there are texts in Scripture which warrant such complaints. I do not object to them when they come from men who walk in the steps of the Apostle Paul, and fight a good fight, as he did, against sin, the devil, and the world. But I never like such complaints when I see ground for suspecting, as I often do, that they are only a cloak to cover spiritual laziness, and an excuse for spiritual sloth. If we say with Paul, “O wretched man that I am,” let us also be able to say with him, “I press toward the mark.” Let us not quote his example in one thing, while we do not follow him in another (Rom 7:24; Phi 3:14).

I do not set up myself to be better than other people, and if anyone asks, “What are you, that you write in this way.” I answer, “I am a very poor creature indeed.” But I say that I cannot read the Bible without desiring to see many believers more spiritual, more holy, more single-eyed, more heavenly-minded, more whole-hearted than they are in the nineteenth century. I want to see among believers more of a pilgrim spirit, a more decided separation from the world, a conversation more evidently in heaven, a closer walk with God, and therefore I have written as I have.

Is it not true that we need a higher standard of personal holiness in this day? Where is our patience? Where is our zeal? Where is our love? Where are our works? Where is the power of religion to be seen, as it was in times gone by? Where is that unmistakable tone which used to distinguish the saints of old, and shake the world? Verily our silver has become dross, our wine mixed with water, and our salt has very little savour. We are all more than half asleep. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us awake, and sleep no more. Let us open our eyes more widely than we have done hitherto. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us.” “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God” (Heb 12:1; 2Co 7:1). “Did Christ die,” says Owen, “and shall sin live? Was He crucified in the world, and shall our affections to the world be quick and lively? Oh, where is the spirit of him, who by the cross of Christ was crucified to the world, and the world to him!” (Gal 6:14).

### **III. Advice to All Who Desire to Be Holy**

Let me, in the last place, offer a *word of advice to all who desire to be holy*. Would you be holy? Would you become a new creature? Then you must *begin with Christ*. You will do just nothing at all, and make no progress till you feel your sin and weakness, and flee to Him. He is the root and beginning of all holiness, and the way to be holy is to come to Him by faith and be joined to Him. Christ is not wisdom and righteousness only to His people, but sanctification also. Men sometimes try to make themselves holy first of all, and sad work they make of it. They toil and labour, and turn over new leaves, and make many changes; and yet, like the woman with the issue of blood, before she came to Christ, they feel “nothing bettered, but rather worse” (Mar 5:26). They run in vain, and labour in vain; and little wonder, for they are beginning at the wrong end. They are building up a wall of sand; their

work runs down as fast as they throw it up. They are baling water out of a leaky vessel: the leak gains on them, not they on the leak. Other foundation of “holiness” can no man lay than that which Paul laid, even Christ Jesus. “Without Christ we can do nothing” (Joh 15:5). It is a strong but true saying of Traill’s, “Wisdom out of Christ is damning folly; righteousness out of Christ is guilt and condemnation; sanctification out of Christ is filth and sin; redemption out of Christ is bondage and slavery.”

Do you want to attain holiness? Do you feel this day a real hearty desire to be holy? Would you be a partaker of the Divine nature? Then *go to Christ*. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Linger not. Think not to make yourself ready. Go and say to Him, in the words of that beautiful hymn...

*“Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, flee to Thee for dress; Helpless, look to Thee for grace.”*

There is not a brick nor a stone laid in the work of our sanctification till we go to Christ. Holiness is His special gift to His believing people. Holiness is the work He carries on in their hearts, by the Spirit whom He puts within them. He is appointed a “Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance” as well as remission of sins. “To as many as receive Him, He gives power to become sons of God” (Act 5:31; Joh 1:12-13). Holiness comes...

- not of blood, parents cannot give it to their children;
- nor yet of the will of the flesh, man cannot produce it in himself;
- nor yet of the will of man, ministers cannot give it by baptism.

Holiness comes from Christ. It is the result of vital union with Him. It is the fruit of being a living branch of the True Vine. Go then to Christ and say, “Lord, not only save me from the guilt of sin, but send the Spirit, whom Thou didst promise, and save me from its power. Make me holy. Teach me to do Thy will.”

Would you continue holy? Then *abide in Christ*. He says Himself, “Abide in me and I in you. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit” (Joh 15:4-5). It pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell, a full supply for all a believer’s wants. He is the Physician to whom you must daily go, if you would keep well. He is the Manna which you must daily eat, and the Rock of which you must daily drink. His arm is the arm on which you must daily lean, as you come up out of the wilderness of this world. You must not only be rooted, you must also be *built up* in Him. Paul was a man of God indeed, a holy man, a growing, thriving Christian—and what was the secret of it all? He was one to whom Christ was “all in all.” He was ever “looking unto Jesus.” “I can do all things,” he says, “through Christ which strengtheneth me.” “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. The life that I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God.” (Heb 12:2; Phi 4:13; Gal 2:20.) Let us go and do likewise.

May all who read these pages know these things by experience, and not by hearsay only. May we all feel the importance of holiness, far more than we have ever done yet! May our years be *holy years* with our souls, and then they will be happy ones! Whether we live, may we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, may we die unto the Lord; if He comes for us, may we be found in peace, without spot, and blameless!

## 4. The Fight

*“Fight the good fight of faith.”—1 Timothy 6:12*

IT is a curious fact that there is no subject about which most people feel such deep interest as “fighting.” Young men and maidens, old men and little children, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all feel a deep interest in wars, battles and fighting.

This is a simple fact, whatever way we may try to explain it. We should call that Englishman a dull fellow who cared nothing about the story of Waterloo, or Inkermann, or Balaclava, or Lucknow. We should think that heart cold and stupid which was not moved and thrilled by the struggles at Sedan and Strasburg, and Metz, and Pans, during the war between France and Germany.

### **There Is a Spiritual Warfare**

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

This warfare, I am aware, is a thing of which many know nothing. Talk to them about it, and they are ready to set you down as a madman, an enthusiast, or a fool. And 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 watchings and fatigues. It has its sieges and assaults. It has its victories and its defeats. Above all, it has *consequences* which are awful, tremendous, and most peculiar. In earthly warfare the consequences to nations are often temporary and remediable. In the spiritual warfare it is very different. Of that warfare, the consequences, when the fight is over, are unchangeable and eternal.

It is of this warfare that Paul spoke to Timothy, when he wrote those burning words, “Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life.” It is of this warfare that I propose to speak in this paper. I hold the subject to be closely connected with that of sancti-

fication and holiness. He that would understand the nature of true holiness must know that the Christian is “a man of war.” If we would be holy we must fight.

## I. True Christianity Is a Fight

The first thing I have to say is this: *True Christianity is a fight.*

True Christianity! Let us mind that word “true.” There is a vast quantity of religion current in the world which is not true, genuine Christianity. It passes muster; it satisfies sleepy consciences; but it is not good money. It is not the real thing which was called Christianity eighteen hundred years ago. There are thousands of men and women who go to churches and chapels every Sunday, and call themselves Christians. Their names are in the baptismal register. They are reckoned Christians while they live. They are married with a Christian marriage service. They mean to be buried as Christians when they die. But you never see any “fight” about their religion! Of spiritual strife, and exertion, and conflict, and self-denial, and watching, and warring, they know literally nothing at all. Such Christianity may satisfy man, and those who say anything against it may be thought very hard and uncharitable; but it certainly is not the Christianity of the Bible. It is not the religion which the Lord Jesus founded, and His apostles preached. It is not the religion which 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, indolence, and security. He must never imagine for a moment that he can sleep and doze along the way to heaven, like one travelling in an easy carriage. If he takes his standard of Christianity from the children of this world, he may be content with such notions; but he will find no countenance 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. Wretched indeed is that man’s idea of religion who fancies that it consists in perpetual controversy! He who is never satisfied unless he is engaged in some strife between church and church, chapel and chapel, sect and sect, faction and faction, party and party, knows nothing yet as he ought to know. No doubt it may be absolutely needful sometimes to appeal to law courts, in order to ascertain the right interpretation of a church’s Articles, and rubrics,<sup>15</sup> and formularies.<sup>16</sup> But, as a general rule, the cause of sin is never so much helped as when Christians waste their strength in quarrelling with one another, and spend their time in petty squabbles.

### *The Christian’s Principal Fight: The Flesh, The World, The Devil*

No, indeed! The principal fight of the Christian is with the world, the flesh, and the devil. These are his never-dying foes. These are the three chief 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 prone to evil, and a heart 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 keep that heart from going astray, the Lord Jesus bids us “watch and pray.” The spirit may be ready, but the flesh is weak. There is need of a daily struggle and a daily wrestling in prayer. “I keep under my body,” cries Paul, “and bring it into subjection.” “I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” “Mortify your members which are upon the earth.” (Mar 14:38; 1Co 9:27; Rom 7:23, 24; Gal 5:24; Col 3:5.)

He must fight **the world**. The subtle influence of that mighty enemy must be daily resisted, 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 blame, the secret desire to keep in with the world, the secret wish to do as others in the world do and not to run into extremes—all these are spiritual foes which beset the Christian continually on his way to heaven, and must be conquered. “The friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jam 4:4). “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” “The world is crucified to me, and I unto the world.” “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.” “Be not conformed to this world.” (1Jo 2:15; Gal 6:14; 1Jo 5:4; Rom 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 walking up and down in it,” and striving to compass one great end—the ruin of man’s soul. Never slumbering and never sleeping, he is always “going about as a lion seeking whom he may devour.” An unseen enemy, he is always near us, about our path and about our bed, and spying out all our ways. A “murderer and a liar” from the beginning, he labours night and day to cast us down to hell. Sometimes by leading into superstition, sometimes by suggesting infidelity, sometimes by one kind of tactics and sometimes by another, he is always carrying on a campaign against our souls. “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.” This mighty adversary must be daily resisted if we wish to be saved. But “this kind goeth not out” but by watching and praying, and fighting, and putting on the whole armour of God. The strong man armed will never be kept out of our hearts without a daily battle. (Job 1:7; 1Pe 5:8; Joh 8:44; Luk 22:31; Eph 6:11.)

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<sup>15</sup> **rubric** – an authoritative rule or direction.

<sup>16</sup> **formularies** – a collection of religious prayers or procedures.

### *The Seriousness of Christian Warfare*

Some men may think these statements too strong. You fancy that I am going too far, and laying on the colours too thickly. You are secretly saying to yourself, that men and women in England may surely 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 maxim of the wisest general that 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 saith the Scripture? (1) "Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life." (2) "Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (3) "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the ruler of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand." (4) "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." (5) "Labour for the meat that endureth unto everlasting life." (6) "Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace but a sword." (7) "He that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one." (8) "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith: quit you like men, be strong" (9) "War a good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience." (1Ti 6:12; 2Ti 2:3; Eph 6:11-13; Luk 13:24; Joh 6:27; Mat 10:34; Luk 22:36; 1Co 16:13; 1Ti 1:18, 19.)

Words such as these appear to me 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 that pretends to condemn "fighting" and teaches that we ought to sit still and "yield ourselves to God," appears to me to misunderstand his Bible, and to make a great mistake.

What says the Baptismal Service of the Church of England? No doubt that Service is uninspired, and, like every uninspired composition, it 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 Ghost," "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."

Of course we all know that in myriads of cases baptism is a mere form, and that parents bring their children to the font without faith or prayer or thought, and consequently receive no blessing. The man who supposes 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, at any rate, 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 that doubts it had better take up his Prayer-book, and read, mark, and learn its contents. The worst thing about many very zealous Anglican Churchmen is their total ignorance of what their own Prayer-book contains.

### *The Importance of Christian Warfare*

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 ceremonial, about which men may differ, and yet reach heaven at last. 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 grace there will be conflict. The believer is a soldier. There is no holiness without a warfare. Saved souls will always be found to have fought a fight.

(1) It is a fight of **absolute necessity**. Let us not think that in this war we can remain neutral and sit still. Such a line of action may be possible in the strife of nations, but it is utterly impossible in that conflict which concerns the soul. The boasted policy of noninterference, the "masterly inactivity" which pleases so many statesmen, the plan of keeping quiet and letting things alone—all this will never do in the Christian warfare. Here at any rate no one can escape serving under the plea 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 leadeth to destruction. We have no choice or option. We must either fight or be lost.

(2) It is a fight of **universal necessity**. No rank, or 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* beset with snares, traps, and pitfalls for the soul. All have near them a busy, restless, malicious devil. All, from the queen in her palace down to the pauper in the workhouse, all must fight, if they would be saved.

(3) It is a fight of **perpetual necessity**. It admits of no breathing time, no armistice, no truce. On week-days 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 ones like the government of kingdoms—the Christian's warfare must unceasingly go on. The foe we have to do with keeps no holidays, never slumbers, and never sleeps. So long as we have breath in our bodies we must keep on our armour, and remember 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 till 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,

they drink, they dress, they work, they amuse themselves, they get money, they spend money, they go through a scanty round of formal religious services 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 appear to know nothing at all. Let us take care that this case is not our own. The worst state of soul is “when the strong man armed keepeth the house, and his goods are at peace” and when he leads men and women “captive at his will,” and they make no resistance. The worst chains are those which are neither felt nor seen by the prisoner (Luk 11:21; 2Ti 2:26).

We may *take comfort* about our souls if we know anything of an inward fight and conflict. It is the invariable companion of genuine Christian holiness. It is not everything, I am well aware, 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 would? (Gal 5:17). Are we conscious of two principles within us, contending for the mastery? 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 state than many. The most part of 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 marks about him, and of these two we have one. He may be known by his *inward warfare*, as well as by his *inward peace*.

## II. True Christianity Is the Fight of Faith

I pass on to the second thing which I have to say in handling my subject: *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 quick 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.

### (1) Faith in the Truth of God's Written Word

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, behaves as he behaves, for one simple reason—he believes certain propositions revealed and laid down in Holy Scripture. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6).

A religion without doctrine or dogma is a thing which many are fond of talking of in the present day. 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 shall find it a simple impossibility. We might as well talk of a body without bones and sinews. No man will ever be anything or do anything in religion, unless he believes something. Even those who profess to hold the miserable and uncomfortable views of the Deists are obliged to confess that they believe *something*. With all their bitter sneers against dogmatic theology and Christian credulity, as they call it, 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 engraven on his heart certain great principles which he believes. What they are he may hardly know, and may certainly not be able to define or write down. But there they are, and, consciously or unconsciously, they form the roots of his religion. Wherever you see a man, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, wrestling manfully with sin, and trying to overcome it, you may be sure there are certain great principles which that man believes. The poet who wrote the famous lines:

*“For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,  
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right,”*

was a clever man, but a poor divine. There is no such thing as right living without faith and believing.

### (2) Faith in the Person, Work and Office of the Lord Jesus Christ

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

He sees his own many sins, his weak heart, a tempting world, a busy devil; and if he looked only at them he might well despair. But he sees also a mighty Saviour, an interceding Saviour, a sympathizing Saviour—His blood, His righteousness, His everlasting priesthood—and he believes that all this is his own. He sees Jesus, and casts his whole weight on Him. Seeing Him he cheerfully fights on, with a confidence that he will prove “more than conqueror through Him that loved him” (Rom 8:37).

### (3) Faith in Christ's Presence and Readiness to Help

Habitual lively 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 admits of degrees. All men do not believe alike, and even the same person has his ebbs and flows of faith, and believes more heartily at one time than another. According to the degree of his faith the Christian fights well or ill, wins victories, or suffers occasional repulses, comes off triumphant, or loses a battle. He that has 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" which quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one. It is the man who can say, "I know whom I have believed," who can say in time of suffering, "I am not ashamed."

He who wrote those glowing words, "We faint not," and "Our light affliction which endureth but for a moment worketh in us a far more 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." It is the man who said, "I live by the faith of the Son of God," who said in the same epistle, "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." It is the man who said, "To me to live is Christ," who said in the same epistle, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." "I can do all things through Christ." The more faith the more victory! The more faith the more inward peace! (Eph 6:16; 2Ti 1:12; 2Co 4:17-18; Gal 2:20; 6:14; Phi 1:21; 4:11, 13.)

### *The Victories of Faithful Christian Soldiers*

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

Let us take down our Bibles and read with attention the eleventh chapter of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Let us mark the long list of worthies whose names are thus recorded, from Abel down to Moses, even before Christ was born of the virgin Mary, and brought life and immortality into full light by the gospel. Let us note well what battles they won against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And then let us remember that *believing* did it all. These men looked forward to the promised Messiah. They saw Him that is invisible. "By faith the elders obtained a good report" (Heb 11:2, 27).

Let us turn to the pages of early Church history. Let us see how the primitive Christians held fast their religion even unto death, and were not shaken by the fiercest persecutions of heathen Emperors. For centuries there were never wanting men like Polycarp and Ignatius, who were ready to die rather than deny Christ. Fines, and prisons, and torture, and 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 which began with a few fishermen and publicans in Palestine! And then 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—Wycliffe, Huss, Luther, Ridley, Latimer, and Hooper. Let us mark 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! And then 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 made the greatest marks in the spiritual revivals of eighteenth century Britain and America. Let us observe how men like Wesley, Whitefield, Venn, and Romaine, stood alone in their day and generation, and revived true 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 our land. Let us observe how men like William Wilberforce, and Havelock, and Hedley Vicars, have witnessed for Christ in the most difficult positions, and displayed a banner for Christ even at the regimental mess-table, or on the floor of the House of Commons. Let us mark how these noble witnesses never flinched to the end, and won the respect even of their worst adversaries. And then let us remember that *believing* in an unseen Christ is the key to all their characters. By faith they lived, and walked, and stood, and overcame.

Would anyone live the life of a Christian soldier? Let him pray for faith. It is the gift of God; and a gift which those who ask shall never ask for in vain. You must believe before you do. If men do nothing in religion, it is because they do not believe. Faith is the first step toward heaven.

Would anyone fight the fight of a Christian soldier successfully and prosperously? Let him pray for a continual increase of faith. Let him abide in Christ, get closer to Christ, tighten his hold on Christ every day that he lives. Let his daily prayer be that of the disciples, "Lord, increase my faith" (Luk 17:5). Watch jealously over your faith, if you have any. It is the citadel of the Christian character, on which the safety of the whole fortress depends. It is the point which Satan loves to assail. All lies at his mercy if faith is overthrown. Here, if we love life, we must especially stand on our guard.

### **III. True Christianity Is a Good Fight**

The last thing I have to say is this: *True Christianity is a good fight.*

"Good" is a curious 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, to prevent the weak from being trampled down by the strong—but still it is an evil. It entails an awful amount of bloodshed and suffering. It hurries into eternity myriads 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 far and wide poverty, taxation, and national distress. It disarranges all the 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 man should cry night and day, "Give peace in our time." And yet there is one warfare which is emphatically "good," and one fight in which there is no evil. That warfare is the Christian warfare. That fight is the fight of the soul.

Now what are the reasons why the Christian fight is a “good fight”? What are the points in which his warfare is superior to the warfare of this world? Let me examine this matter, and open it out in order. I dare not pass the subject and leave it unnoticed. I want no one to begin the life of a Christian soldier without counting the cost. I would not keep back from anyone that if he would be holy and see the Lord he must fight, and that the Christian fight though spiritual is real and severe. It needs courage, boldness, and perseverance. But I want my readers to know that there is abundant encouragement, if they will only begin the battle. The Scripture does not call the Christian fight “a good fight” without reason and cause. Let me try to show what I mean.

(a) The Christian’s fight is good ***because fought under the best of generals***. The Leader and Commander of all believers is our Divine Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, a Saviour 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, 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 sickly 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!

(b) The Christian’s fight is good, ***because fought with the best of helps***. Weak as each believer is in himself, the Holy Spirit dwells in him, and his body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Chosen by God the Father, washed in the blood of the Son, renewed by the Spirit, he does not go a warfare at his own charges, and is never alone. God the Holy Ghost 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 commissariat is never defective. His bread and his water are sure. Weak as he seems in himself, like a worm, he is strong in the Lord to do great exploits. Surely this is good!

(c) The Christian fight is a good fight, ***because fought with the best of promises***. To every believer belong exceeding great and precious promises—all Yea and Amen in Christ—promises sure to be fulfilled, because made by One who cannot lie, and has power as well as will to keep His word. “Sin shall not have dominion over you.” “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” “He that has begun a good work will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” “When thou passeth through the waters I will be with thee, and through the floods, they shall not overflow thee.” “My sheep shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand.” “Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.” “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life,....nor things present, nor things to come,....shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 6:14; 16:20; Phi 1:6; Isa 43:2; Joh 10:28; 6:37; Heb 13:5; Rom 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 say 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!

(d) The Christian’s fight is a good fight, ***because 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 every believer, without exception, is “more than conqueror through him that loved him” (Rom 8:37). No soldiers of Christ are ever lost, missing, or left dead on the battlefield. No mourning will ever need to be put on, and no tears to be shed for either private or officer in the army of Christ. The muster roll, when the last evening comes, will be found precisely the same that it was in the morning. The English Guards marched out of London to the Crimean campaign a magnificent body of men; but many of the gallant fellows laid their bones in a foreign grave, and never saw London again. Far different shall be the arrival of the Christian army in “the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). Not one shall be found lacking. The words of our great Captain shall be found true: “Of them which thou hast given me I have lost none” (Joh 18:9). Surely this is good!

(e) The Christian’s fight is good, ***because it does good to the soul of him that fights it***. All other wars have a bad, lowering, and demoralizing tendency. They call forth 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 call forth the best things that are left in man. It promotes humility and charity, it lessens selfishness and worldliness, it induces men to set their affections on things above. The old, the sick, 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 long before. 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.” Surely this is good!

(f) The Christian’s fight is a good fight, ***because it does good to the world***. All other wars have a devastating, ravaging, and injurious effect. The march of an army through a land is an awful scourge to the inhabitants. Wherever it goes it impoverishes, wastes, and does harm. Injury to persons, 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 progress of drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, profligacy, and dishonesty. Even their enemies are obliged to respect them. Go where you please, you will rarely find that barracks and garrisons do good to the neighbourhood. But go where you please, you will find that the presence of a few true Christians is a blessing. Surely this is good!

(g) Finally, 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 to her successful warriors medals, Victoria Crosses, pensions, peerages, honours, and titles. But it can give nothing that will last and endure for ever, nothing that can be carried beyond the grave. Palaces like

Blenheim and Strathfieldsay can only be enjoyed for a few years. The bravest generals and soldiers must go down 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 get little praise of man while he lives, and go down to the grave with little honour; but he shall have that which is far better, because far more enduring. He shall have "a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1Pe 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 see not the hand of God over them, the face of God smiling on them, 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.

### Practical Application

And now let me conclude my whole subject with a few words of practical application. Our lot is cast in times when the world seems thinking of little else but battles and fighting. The iron is entering into the soul of more than one nation, and the mirth of many a fair district is clean gone. Surely in times like these a minister may fairly call on men to remember their spiritual warfare. Let me say a few parting words about the great fight of the soul.

(1) It may be ***you are struggling hard for the rewards of this world***. Perhaps, you are straining every nerve to obtain money, or place, or power, or pleasure. If that be your case, take care. Your sowing will lead to a crop of bitter disappointment. Unless you mind what you are about, your latter end will be to lie down in sorrow (Isa 50:11).

Thousands have trodden the path you are pursuing, and have awoke too late to find it end in misery and eternal ruin. They have fought hard for wealth, and honour, and office, and promotion, and turned their backs on God, and Christ, and heaven, and the world to come. And 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 your own happiness' sake 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 religious principle. Remember how Greeks, and Romans, and 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 men can do so much for a corruptible crown, how much more should you do for one which is incorruptible! Awake to a sense of the misery of being a slave. For life, and happiness, and liberty, arise and fight.

Fear not to begin and enlist under Christ's banner. The great Captain of your salvation rejects none that come to Him. Like David in the cave of Adullam, He is ready to receive all who apply to Him, however unworthy they may feel themselves. None who repent and believe are too bad to be enrolled in the ranks of Christ's army. All who come to Him by faith are admitted, clothed, armed, trained, and finally led on to complete victory. Fear not to begin this very day. There is yet room for you.

Fear not to go on fighting, if you once enlist. The more thorough and whole-hearted you are as a soldier, the more comfortable will you find your warfare. No doubt you will often meet with trouble, fatigue, and hard fighting, before your warfare is accomplished. But let none of these things move you. Greater is He that is for you than all they that be against you. Everlasting liberty or everlasting captivity are the alternatives before you. Choose liberty, and fight to the last.

(2) ***It may be you know something of the Christian warfare***, and are a tried and proved soldier already. If that be 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 which we cannot remember too well.

(a) Let us remember that if we would fight successfully we must put on the whole armour of God, and never lay it aside till we die. Not a single piece of the armour can be dispensed with. The girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, the helmet of hope—each and all are needful. Not a single day can we dispense with any part of this armour. Well says an old veteran in Christ's army, who died 200 years ago, "In heaven we shall appear, not in armour, 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." (Gurnall's *Christian Armour*.)

(b) Let us remember the solemn words of an inspired warrior, who went to his rest 1,800 years ago: "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2Ti 2:4). May we never forget that saying!

(c) Let us remember that some have seemed good soldiers for a little season, and talked loudly of what they would do, and yet turned back disgracefully in the day of battle.

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

(e) Let us remember that the eye of our loving Saviour is upon us, morning, noon, and night. He will never suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for He suffered Himself being tempted. 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 our profession (Heb 4:14).

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

(g) Finally, let us remember that the time is short, and the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. A few more battles and the last trumpet shall sound, and the Prince of Peace shall come to reign on a renewed earth. A few more struggles and conflicts, and then we shall bid an eternal good-bye to warfare, and to sin, to sorrow, and to death. Then let us fight on to the last, and never surrender. Thus saith the Captain of our salvation, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev 21:7).

Let me conclude with the words of John Bunyan, in one of the most beautiful parts of *Pilgrim's Progress (part 2)*. He is describing the end of one of his best and holiest pilgrims:

"After this it was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant-for-truth was sent for by a summons, by the same party as the others. And he had this word for a token that the summons was true, 'The pitcher was broken at the fountain' (Ecc 12:6). When he understood it, he called for his friends, and told them of it. Then said he, 'I am going to my Father's house; and though with great difficulty I have got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the troubles I have been at to arrive where I am: My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought His battles, who will now be my rewarder.' When the day that he must go home was come, many accompanied him to the river-side, into which, as he went down, he said, 'O death where is thy sting?' And as he went down deeper, he cried, 'O grave, where is thy victory?' So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

May our end be like this! May we never forget that without fighting there can be no holiness while we live, nor crown of glory when we die!

## 5. The Cost

*"Which of you, intending to build a house, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost?"—Luke 14:28*

THIS text is one of great importance. Few are the people who are not often obliged to ask themselves, "What does it cost?"

In buying property, in building houses, in furnishing rooms, in forming plans, in changing dwellings, in educating children, it is wise and prudent to look forward and consider. Many 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 specially 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 really holy man? This, after all, is the grand question. For want of thought about this, thousands, after seeming to begin well, turn away from the road to heaven, and are lost for ever in hell. Let me try to say a few words which may throw light on the subject.

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

II. I will explain, secondly, *why it is of such great importance* to count the cost.

III. I will give, in the last place, *some hints* which may help men to count the cost rightly.

We are living in strange times. Events are hurrying on with singular rapidity. We never know "what a day may bring forth"; how much less do we know what may happen in a year! We live in a day of great religious profession. Scores of professing Christians in every part of the land are expressing a desire for more holiness and a higher degree of spiritual life. Yet nothing is more common than to see 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. Surely these are times when we ought often to sit down and "count the cost," and to consider the state of our souls. We must mind what we are about. If we *desire* to be truly holy, it is a good sign. We may thank God for putting the desire into our hearts. But still *the cost ought to be counted*. No doubt Christ's way to eternal life is a way of pleasantness. But it is folly to shut our eyes to the fact that His way is narrow, and the cross comes before the crown.

### I. What It Costs to Be a True Christian

I have, first, to 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 Christian'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 man 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;" "Christ gave himself a ransom for all" (1Co 6:20; 1Ti 2:6). But all this is wide of the question. The point I want to consider is another one altogether. It is what a man must be *ready to give up* if he wishes to be saved. It is the amount of sacrifice a man must submit to if he intends to serve Christ. It is in this sense that I raise the question, "What does it cost?" And I believe firmly that it is a most important one.

I grant freely that it costs little to be a mere outward Christian. A man has only got to attend a place of worship twice on Sunday, and to be tolerably 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 entails no self-denial or self-sacrifice. If this is saving Christianity, and will take us to heaven when we die, we must alter the description of the way of life, and write, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to heaven!"

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

Let me try to show precisely and particularly what it costs to be a true Christian. Let us suppose that a man is disposed to take service with 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 and desire 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 particularly, one by one, the things that his religion will cost him.

(1) For one thing, it will cost him *his self-righteousness*. He must cast away all pride and high thoughts, and conceit of his own goodness. He must be content to go to heaven as a poor sinner saved only by free grace, and owing all to the merit and righteousness of another. He must really feel as well as say the Prayer-book words, that he has "erred and gone astray like a lost sheep," and 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 sacrament-receiving, and to trust in nothing but Jesus Christ.

Now this sounds hard to some. I do not wonder. "Sir," said a godly ploughman to the well-known James Hervey, of Weston Favell, "it is harder to deny proud self than sinful self. But it is absolutely necessary." Let us set down this item first and foremost in our account. To be a true Christian it will cost a man his self-righteousness.

(2) For another thing, it will cost a man *his sins*. He must be willing to give up every habit and practice which 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 labour to keep it under, whatever 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 which he loves. He must count *all* sins as his deadly enemies, and 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 sometimes almost get the mastery over him. But he must never give way to them. He must keep up a perpetual war with his sins. It is written, "Cast away from you all your transgressions;" "Break off thy sins...and iniquities;" "Cease to do evil" (Eze 18:31; Dan 4:27; Isa 1:16).

This also sounds hard. I do not wonder. 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. Though wickedness "be sweet in the sinner's mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not," yet it must be given up, if he wishes 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 stick to their sins. Let us set down that item second in our account. To be a Christian it will cost a man his sins.

(3) For another thing, it will cost a man his *love of ease*. He must take pains and trouble, if he means to run a successful race towards heaven. He must daily watch and stand on his guard, like a soldier on enemy's ground. He must take heed to his behaviour every hour of the day, in every company, and in every place, in public as well as in private, among strangers as well as home. He must be careful over his time, his tongue, his temper, his thoughts, his imagination, his motives, 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 there is none of them that he can safely neglect. "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (Pro 13:4).

This also sounds hard. There is nothing we naturally dislike so much as "trouble" about our religion. We hate trouble. We secretly wish we could have a "vicarious" Christianity, and could be good by proxy, and have everything done for us. Anything that requires exertion and labour is entirely against the grain of our hearts. But the soul can have "no gains without pains." Let us set down that item third in our account. To be a Christian it will cost a man his love of ease.

(4) In the last place, it will cost a man *the favour of the world*. He must be content to be thought ill of by man if he pleases God. He must count it no strange thing to be mocked, ridiculed, slandered, persecuted, and even hated. He must not be surprised to find his opinions and practices in religion despised and held up to scorn. He must submit to be thought by many a fool, an enthusiast, and a fanatic—to have his words perverted and his actions misrepresented. In fact, he must not marvel if some call him mad. The Master says, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (Joh 15:20).

I dare say this also sounds hard. We naturally dislike unjust dealing and false charges, and think it very hard to be accused without cause. We should not be flesh and blood if we did not wish to have the good opinion of our neighbours. It is always unpleasant to be spoken against, and forsaken, and lied about, and to stand alone. But there is no help for it. The cup which our Master drank must be drunk by His disciples. They must be "despised and rejected of men" (Isa 53:3). Let us set down that item last in our account. To be a Christian it will cost a man the favour of the world.

Such is the account of what it costs to be a true Christian. I grant the list is a heavy one. But where is the item that could be removed? Bold indeed must that man 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 grant it costs much to be a true Christian. But who in his sound senses can doubt that it is worth any cost to have the soul saved? When the ship is in danger of sinking, the crew think nothing of casting overboard the precious cargo. When a limb is mortified, a man will submit to any severe operation, and even to amputation, to save life. Surely a Christian should be willing to give up anything which stands between him and heaven. A religion that costs nothing is worth nothing! A cheap Christianity, without a cross, will prove in the end a useless Christianity, without a crown.

## II. The Importance of “Counting the Cost”

I have now, in the second place, to explain *why “counting the cost” is of such great importance to a man’s soul*. I might easily settle this question by laying down the principle, that no duty enjoined by Christ can ever be neglected without damage. I might show how many shut their eyes throughout life to the nature of saving religion, and refuse to consider what it really costs to be a Christian. I might describe how at last, when life is ebbing away, they wake up, and make a few spasmodic efforts to turn to God. I might tell you how they find to their amazement that repentance and conversion are no such easy matters as they had supposed, and that it costs “a great sum” to be a true Christian. They discover that habits of pride and sinful indulgence, and love of ease, and worldliness, are not so easily laid aside as they had dreamed. And so, after a faint struggle, they give up in despair, and leave the world hopeless, graceless, and unfit to meet God! They had flattered themselves all their days that religion would be easy work when they once 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.”

### *Those Who Need to Be Exhorted to “Count the Cost”*

But there is one class of persons to whom especially I wish to address myself in handling this part of my subject. It is a large class, an increasing class, and a class which in these days is in peculiar danger. Let me in a few plain words try to describe this class. It deserves our best attention.

The persons I speak of are not thoughtless about religion: they think a good deal about it. They are not ignorant of religion; they know the outlines of it pretty well. But their great defect is that they are not “rooted and grounded” in their faith. Too often they have picked up their knowledge second hand, from being in religious families, or from being trained in religious ways, but have never worked it out by their own inward experience. Too often they have hastily taken up a profession of religion under the pressure of circumstances, from sentimental feelings, from animal excitement, or from a vague desire to do like others around them, but without any solid work of grace in their hearts. Persons like these are in a position of immense danger. They are precisely those, if Bible examples are worth anything, who need to be exhorted to “count the cost.”

For want of “counting the cost,” *myriads of the children of Israel* perished miserably in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan. They left Egypt full of zeal and fervour, as nothing could stop them. But when they found dangers and difficulties in the way, their courage soon cooled down. They had never reckoned on trouble. They had thought the promised land would be all before them in a few days. And so, when enemies, privations, hunger, and thirst began to try them, they murmured against Moses and God, and would fain<sup>17</sup> have gone back to Egypt. In a word, they had “not counted the cost,” and so lost everything, and died in their sins.

For want of “counting the cost,” *many of our Lord Jesus Christ’s hearers* went back after a time, and “walked no more with him” (Joh 6:66). When they first saw His miracles, and heard His preaching, they thought, “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 hard doctrines to be believed, and hard work to be done, and hard treatment to be borne, their faith gave way entirely, and proved to be nothing at all. In a word, they had not “counted the cost,” and so made shipwreck of their profession (1Ti 1:19).

For want of “counting the cost,” *King Herod* returned to his old sins, and destroyed his soul. He liked to hear John the Baptist preach. He “observed” and honoured him as a just and holy man. He even “did many things” which were right and good. But when he found that he must give up his darling Herodias, his religion entirely broke down. He had not reckoned on this. He had not “counted the cost” (Mar 6:20).

For want of “counting the cost,” *Demas* forsook the company of Paul, forsook the gospel, forsook Christ, forsook heaven. For a long time he journeyed with the great Apostle of the Gentiles, and was actually a “fellow-labourer.” But when he found he could not have the friendship of this world as well as the friendship of God, he gave up his Christianity and clave to the world. “Demas hath forsaken me,” says Paul, “having loved this present world” (2Ti 4:10). He had not “counted the cost.”

For want of “counting 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 old Christians. They run for a time with such zeal and fervour that they seem likely to outstrip all others. They talk and work for spiritual objects with such enthusiasm that they make older believers feel ashamed. But when the novelty and freshness

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<sup>17</sup> **fain** – preferably, rather, gladly.

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 exemplified. "Temptation or persecution arises because of the word, and they are offended" (Mat 13:21). Little by little their zeal melts away, and their love becomes cold. By and by their seats are empty in the assembly of God's people, and they are heard of no more among Christians. And why? They had "never counted the cost."

For want of "counting the cost," *hundreds of professed converts*, under [some] religious "revivals," go back to the world after a time, and bring disgrace on religion. They begin with a sadly mistaken notion of what is true Christianity. They fancy it consists in nothing more than a so-called "coming to Christ," and having strong inward feelings of joy and peace. And so, when they find after a time, 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. And why? Because they had really never known what Bible Christianity is. They had never learned that we must "count the cost."<sup>18</sup>

For want of "counting the cost," the *children of religious parents* often turn out ill, and bring disgrace on Christianity. Familiar from their earliest years with the form and theory of the gospel; taught even from infancy to repeat great leading texts; accustomed every week to be instructed in the gospel, or to instruct others in Sunday schools—they often grow up professing a religion without knowing why, or without ever having thought seriously about it. And then when the realities of grown-up life begin to press upon them, they often astound every one by dropping all their religion, and plunging right into the world. And why? They had never thoroughly understood the sacrifices which Christianity entails. They had never been taught to "count the cost."

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<sup>18</sup> I should be very sorry indeed if the language I have used above about revivals was misunderstood. To prevent this I will offer a few remarks by way of explanation.

For true revivals of religion no one can be more deeply thankful than I am. Wherever they may take place, and by whatever agents they may be effected, I desire to bless God for them, with all my heart. "If Christ is preached," I rejoice, whoever may be the preachers. If souls are saved, I rejoice, by whatever section of the Church the Word of life has been ministered.

But it is a melancholy fact that, in a world like this, you cannot have good without evil. I have no hesitation in saying, that one consequence of the revival movement has been the rise of a theological system which I feel obliged to call defective and mischievous in the extreme.

The leading feature of the theological system I refer to, is this: an extravagant and disproportionate magnifying of three points in religion, viz.: instantaneous conversion, the invitation of unconverted sinners to come to Christ and the possession of inward joy and peace as a test of conversion. I repeat that these three grand truths (for truths they are) are so incessantly and exclusively brought forward, in some quarters, that great harm is done.

*Instantaneous conversion*, no doubt, ought to be pressed on people. But surely they ought not to 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 pressed on all hearers. It is the very corner-stone of gospel preaching. But surely men ought to be told to repent as well as to believe. They should be told why they are to come to Christ, and what they are to come for, and whence their need arises.

The *nearness of peace and comfort* in Christ should be proclaimed to men. But surely they should be taught that the possession of strong inward joys and high frames of mind is 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 defects of the theological system I have in view appear to me to be these: (1) The work of the Holy Ghost 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. (2) 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 incessantly telling a sinner to "come to Christ" is of little use, unless you tell him why he needs to come, and show him fully his sins. (3) Faith is 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 devils are believers! (4) The possession of inward joy and assurance is made essential to believing. Yet assurance is certainly not of the essence of saving faith. There may 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 at once rejoice. (5) Last, but not least, the sovereignty of God in saving sinners, and the absolute necessity of preventing [fore-ordained] 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 test as this, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy" (Rom 9:16).

The mischief done by the theological system I refer to is, I am persuaded, very great. On the one hand, many humble-minded Christians are totally urged and daunted. They fancy they have no grace because they cannot reach up to the high frames and feelings which are pressed on their attention. On the other side, many graceless people are deluded into thinking they are "converted," because under the pressure of animal 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 fresh reasons for neglecting religion altogether.

The antidotes to the state of things I deplore are plain and few. (1) Let "all the counsel of God be taught" is scriptural proportion; and let not two or three precious doctrines of the Gospel be allowed to overshadow all other truths. (2) Let repentance be taught fully as well as faith, and not thrust completely into the background. Our Lord Jesus Christ and St. Paul always taught both. (3) Let the variety of the Holy Ghost's works be honestly stated and admitted; and while instantaneous conversion is pressed on men, let it not be taught as a necessity. (4) Let those who profess to have found immediate sensible peace be plainly warned to try themselves well, and to remember that feeling is not faith, and that "patient continuance in well-doing" is the great proof that faith is true (Joh 8:31). (5) Let the great duty of "counting the cost" be constantly urged on all who are disposed to make a religious profession, and let them be honestly and fairly told that there is warfare as well as peace, a cross as well as a crown, in Christ's service.

I am sure that unhealthy excitement is above all things to be dreaded in religion, because it often ends in fatal, soul-ruining reaction and utter deadness. And when multitudes are suddenly brought under the power of religious impressions, unhealthy excitement is almost sure to follow.

I have not much faith in the soundness of conversions when they are said to take place in masses and wholesale. It does not seem to me in harmony with God's general dealings in this dispensation. To my eyes it appears that God's ordinary plan is to call in individuals one by one. Therefore, when I hear of large numbers being suddenly converted all at one time, I hear of it with less hope than some. The healthiest and most enduring success in mission fields is certainly not where natives have come over to Christianity in a mass. The most satisfactory and firmest work at home does not always appear to me to be the work done in "revivals."

There are two passages of Scripture which I should like to have frequently and fully expounded in the present day by all who preach the gospel, and specially by those who have anything to do with revivals. One passage is the parable of the sower. That parable is not recorded three times over without good reason and a deep meaning. The other passage is our Lord's teaching about "counting the cost," and the words which He spoke to the "great multitudes" whom He saw following Him. It is very noteworthy that He did not on that occasion say anything to flatter these volunteers or encourage them to follow Him. No, He saw what their case needed. He told them to stand still and "count the cost" (Luk 14:25, etc.). I am not sure that some modern preachers would have adopted this course of treatment.

These are solemn and painful truths. But they are truths. They all help to show the immense importance of the subject I am now considering. They all point out the absolute necessity of pressing this subject on all who profess a desire for holiness, and of crying aloud in all the churches, "*Count the cost!*"

I am bold to say that it would be well if the duty of "counting the cost" were more frequently taught than it is. Impatient hurry is the order of the day with many religionists. Instantaneous conversions, and immediate sensible peace, are the only results they seem to care for from the gospel. Compared with these all other things are thrown into the shade. To produce them is the grand end and object, apparently, of all their labours. I say without hesitation that such a naked, one-sided mode of teaching Christianity is mischievous in the extreme.

Let no one mistake my meaning. I thoroughly approve of offering men a full, free, present, immediate salvation in Christ Jesus. I thoroughly approve of urging on man 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 ought not to be set before men nakedly, singly, and alone. 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 ought not to be pressed into the ranks of Christ's army without being told what the warfare entails. In a word, they should be told honestly to "*count the cost.*"

### *The Practice of "Counting the Cost"*

Does any one 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, "There went great multitudes with him and he turned and said unto them, 'If any come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple'" (Luk 14:25-27). I must plainly say, that I cannot reconcile this passage with the proceedings of many modern religious teachers. And yet, to my mind, the doctrine of it is as clear as the sun at noon-day. It shows us that we ought not to hurry men into professing discipleship, without warning them plainly to "*count the cost.*"

Does any one ask what the practice of the eminent and best preachers of the gospel has been in days gone by? I am bold to say that they have all with one mouth 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—these were all keenly alive to the deceitfulness of man's heart. They knew full well that all is not gold that glitters, that conviction is not conversion, that feeling is not faith, that sentiment is not grace, that all blossoms do not come to fruit. "Be not deceived" was their constant cry (Deu 11:16; Luk 21:8). "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 have the opportunity, for the souls of others. Press them to consider their ways. Compel them with holy violence to come in, to lay down their arms, and to yield themselves to God (Mat 11:12). Offer them salvation, ready, free, full, immediate salvation. Press Christ and all His benefits on their acceptance. But in all your work tell the truth, and the whole truth. Be ashamed to use the vulgar arts of a recruiting sergeant. Do not speak only of the uniform, the pay, and the glory; speak also of the enemies, the battle, the armour, the watching, the marching, and the drill. Do not present only one side of Christianity. Do not keep back "the cross" of self-denial that must be carried, when you speak of the cross on which Christ died for our redemption. Explain fully what Christianity entails. Entreat men to repent and come to Christ; but bid them at the same time to "count the cost."

### **III. How To "Count the Cost" Rightly**

The third and last thing which I propose to do, is *to give some hints which may help men to "count the cost" rightly*. Sorry indeed should I be if I did not say something on this branch of my subject. I have no wish to discourage any one, or to keep any one back from Christ's service. It is my heart's desire to encourage every one 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 count rightly, and look on all sides, there is nothing that need make us afraid.

Let us mention some things which 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. But then set down side by side the following sums which I am going to give you. Do this fairly and correctly, and I am not afraid for the result.

(a) Count up and compare, for one thing, ***the profit and the loss***, if you are to be 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, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mar 8:36).

(b) Count up and compare, for another thing, ***the praise and the blame***, if you are to be a true-hearted and holy Christian. You may possibly be blamed by man, but you will have the praise of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. 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. It is only those whom He blesses who are really blessed. It is written, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven" (Mat 5:11-12).



(c) Count up and compare, for another thing, the ***friends and the enemies***, if you are to be a true-hearted and holy Christian. On the one side of you is the enmity of the devil and the wicked. On the other, you have the favour and friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Your enemies, at most, can only bruise your heel. They may rage loudly, and compass sea and land to work your ruin; but they cannot destroy you. Your Friend is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him. None shall ever pluck His sheep out of His hand. It is written, “Be not afraid of them 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, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him” (Luk 12:4-5).

(d) Count up and compare, for another thing, the ***life that now is and the life to come***, if you are to be a true-hearted and holy Christian. The time present, 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 time future is the season of rest and refreshing. Sin shall be cast out. Satan shall be bound. And, best of all, it shall be a rest for ever. It is written, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 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” (2Co 4:17-18).

(e) Count up and compare, for another thing, the ***pleasures of sin and the happiness of God’s service***, if you are to be 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 for ever. The happiness that Christ gives to His people is something solid, lasting, and substantial. It is not dependent on health or circumstances. It never leaves a man, even in death. It ends in a crown of glory that fadeth not away. It is written, “The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment;” “As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool” (Job 20:5; Ecc 7:6). But it is also written, “Peace I leave with you, my peace give I unto you: not as the world giveth, I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Joh 14:27).

(f) Count up and compare, for another thing, ***the trouble that true Christianity entails, and the troubles that are in store for the wicked beyond the grave***. Grant for a moment that Bible-reading, praying, repenting, believing, and holy living, require pains and self-denial. It is all nothing compared to that “wrath to come” which is stored up for the impenitent and unbelieving. A single day in hell will be worse than a whole life spent in carrying the cross. The worm that never dies, and the fire that is not quenched (Isa 66:24; Mar 9:44-48), are things which it passes man’s power to conceive fully or describe. It is written, “Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented” (Luk 16:25).

(g) Count up and compare, in the last place, 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 are every year 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. The footsteps in the downward road are often to be seen turning out of it. The footsteps in the road to heaven are all one way. It is written, “The way of the wicked is darkness...The way of transgressors is hard” (Pro 4:19; 13:15). But it is also written, “The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Pro 4:18).

Such sums as these, no doubt, are often not done correctly. Not a few, I am well aware, are always “halting between two opinions.” They cannot make up their minds that it is worth while to serve Christ. The losses and gains, the advantages and disadvantages, the sorrows and joys, the helps and hindrances appear to them so nearly balanced that they cannot decide for God. They cannot do this great sum correctly. They cannot make it so clear as it ought to be. They do not count right.

But what is the secret of their mistakes? It is want of faith. To come to a right conclusion about our souls, we must have some of that mighty principle which St. Paul describes in the 11th chapter of his *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Let me try to show how that principle operates in the great business of “counting the cost.”

#### *The Importance of Faith in “Counting the Cost”*

How was it that Noah persevered in building the ark? He stood alone amidst a world of sinners. He had to endure scorn, ridicule, and mockery. What was it that nerved 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, excepting in the ark he was preparing. Believing, he held the world’s opinion very cheap. He “counted the cost” by faith, and had no doubt that to build the ark was gain.

How was it that Moses forsook the pleasures of Pharaoh’s house, and refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter? How was it that he cast in his lot with a despised people like the Hebrews, and risked everything in this world in carrying out the great work of their deliverance from bondage? To the eye of sense 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 his undertaking. He believed that the “recompense of reward” was far better than all the honours of Egypt. He “counted the cost” by faith, as “seeing him that is invisible,” and was persuaded that to forsake Egypt and go forth into the wilderness was gain.

How was it that Saul the Pharisee could ever make up his mind to become a Christian? The cost and sacrifices of the change were fearfully great. He gave up all his brilliant prospects among his own people. He brought on himself instead of man’s favour, man’s hatred, man’s enmity, and man’s 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. By faith he “counted the cost,” and saw clearly on which side the balance lay. He believed firmly that to carry the cross of Christ was gain.

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

### Practical Applications

(1) In conclusion, let every reader think seriously, *whether his religion costs him anything at present*. Very likely it costs you nothing. Very probably it neither costs you trouble, nor time, nor thought, nor care, nor pains, nor reading, nor praying, nor self-denial, nor conflict, nor working, nor labour of any kind. Now mark what I say. Such a religion as this will never save your soul. It will never 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. A religion which costs nothing is worth nothing. Awake before it is too late. Awake and repent. Awake and be converted. Awake and believe. Awake and pray. Rest not till you can give a satisfactory answer to my question, "What does it cost?"

(2) Think, if you want stirring motives for serving God, *what it cost to provide a salvation for your soul*. Think how the Son of God left heaven and became 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 of all this and learn that it is no light matter to possess an immortal soul. It is worth while to take some trouble about one's soul.

Ah, lazy man or woman, is it really come to this, that you will miss heaven for lack of trouble? Are you really determined to make shipwreck for ever, from mere dislike to exertion? Away with the cowardly, unworthy thought. Arise and play the man. Say to yourself, "Whatever it may cost, I will, at any rate, strive to enter in at the strait gate." Look at the cross of Christ, and take fresh courage. Look forward to death, judgment, and eternity, and be in earnest. It may cost much to be a Christian, but you may be sure it pays.

(3) If any reader really feels that he has counted the cost, and taken up the cross, I bid him *persevere and press on*. I dare say you often feel your heart faint, and are sorely tempted to give up in despair. Your enemies seem so many, your besetting sins so strong, your friends so few, the way so steep and narrow, you hardly know what to do. But 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 shall have fought our last battle, and shall need to fight no more.

The presence and company of Christ will make amends for all we suffer here below. When we see as we have been seen, and look back on the journey of life, we shall wonder at our own faintness of heart. We shall marvel that we made so much of our cross, and thought so little of our crown. We shall marvel that in "counting the cost" we could ever doubt on which side the balance of profit lay. Let us take courage. We are not far from home. *It may cost much* to be a true Christian and a consistent believer; *but it pays*.

## 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 which heads this page is one which I dare not omit in this volume about Holiness. It is one that ought to be deeply interesting to every true Christian. It naturally raises the questions, Do we grow in grace? Do we get on in our religion? Do we make progress?

To a mere formal Christian I cannot expect the inquiry to seem worth attention. The man who has nothing more than a kind of Sunday religion—whose Christianity is like his Sunday clothes; put on once a week, and then laid aside—such a man cannot, of course, be expected to care about "growth in grace." He knows nothing about such matters. "They are foolishness to him" (1Co 2:14). But to every one who is in downright earnest about his soul, and hungers and thirsts after spiritual life, the question ought to come home with searching power. Do we make progress in our religion? Do we grow?

The question is one that is always useful, but especially so at certain seasons. A Saturday night, a Communion Sunday, the return of a birthday, the end of a year—all these are seasons that ought to set us thinking, and make us look within. Time is fast flying. Life is fast ebbing 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." Surely it becomes us from time to time to examine ourselves, and take account of our souls. Do we get on in spiritual things? Do we grow?

The question is one that is of special importance in the present day. Crude and strange opinions are floating in men's minds on some points of doctrine, and among others on the point of "growth in grace," as an essential part of true holiness. By some it is totally denied. By others it is explained away, and pared down to nothing. By thousands it is misunderstood, and consequently neglected. In a day like this it is useful to look fairly in the face the whole subject of Christian growth.

In considering this subject there are three things which I wish to bring forward and establish:

- I. *The reality of religious growth.* There is such a thing as “growth in grace.”
- II. *The marks of religious growth.* There are marks by which “growth in grace” may be known.
- III. *The means of religious growth.* There are means that must be used by those who desire “growth in grace.”

I know not who you are, into whose hands this paper may have fallen. But I am not ashamed to ask your best attention to its contents. Believe me, the subject is no mere matter of speculation and controversy. It is an eminently practical subject, if any is in religion. It is intimately and inseparably connected with the whole question of “sanctification.” It is a leading mark of true saints that they grow. The spiritual health and prosperity, the spiritual happiness and comfort of every true-hearted and holy Christian, are intimately connected with the subject of spiritual growth.

## I. The Reality of Growth in Grace

The first point I propose to establish is this: *There is such a thing as growth in grace.*

That any Christian should deny this proposition is at first sight a strange and melancholy thing. But it is fair to remember that man’s understanding is fallen no less than his will. Disagreements about *doctrines* are often nothing more than disagreements about the meaning of words. I try to hope that it is so in the present case. I try to believe that when I speak of “growth in grace” and maintain it, I mean one thing, while my brethren who deny it mean quite another. Let me therefore clear the way by explaining what I mean.

### *The Definition of “Growing in Grace”*

(a) When I speak of “growth in grace,” ***I do not for a moment mean that a believer’s interest 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, more at peace with God, than he is the first moment that he believes. I hold firmly 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 hold firmly that our election, calling, and standing in Christ admit of no degrees, increase, or diminution. If any one dreams that by “growth in grace” I mean growth in *justification* he is utterly wide of the mark, and 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” (Col 2:10). Nothing can be added to his justification from the moment he believes, and nothing taken away.

(b) When I speak of “growth in grace” ***I only mean increase in the degree, size, strength, vigour, and power of the graces which the Holy Spirit plants in a believer’s heart.*** I hold that every one of those graces admits of growth, progress, and increase. I hold that repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage, and the like, may be little or great, strong or weak, vigorous or feeble, and may vary greatly in the same man at different periods of his life. When I speak of a man “growing in grace,” I mean simply this, that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, his love more extensive, his spiritual-mindedness more marked. 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 man’s condition by any words they please. For myself I think the truest and best account of him is this, he is “growing in grace.”

### *Ground to Build On*

(1) One principal ground 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 says Paul? “Your faith groweth exceedingly” (2Th 1:3). “We beseech you that ye increase more and more” (1Th 4:10). “Increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). “Having hope, when your faith is increased” (2Co 10:15). “The Lord make you to increase in love” (1Th 3:12). “That ye may grow up into him in all things” (Eph 4:15). “I pray that your love may abound more and more (Phi 1:9). “We beseech you, as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” (1Th 4:1). What says Peter? “Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Pe 2:2). “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 3:18). I know not what others think of such texts. To me they seem to establish the doctrine for which I contend, and to be incapable of any other explanation. Growth in grace is taught in the Bible. I might stop here and say no more.

(2) The other ground, however, on which I build the doctrine of “growth in grace,” is the ground of ***fact and experience.*** I ask any honest reader of the New Testament whether he cannot see degrees of grace in the New Testament saints whose histories are recorded, as plainly as the sun at noon-day? I ask him whether he cannot see in the very same persons as great a difference between their faith and knowledge at one time and at another, as between the same man’s strength when he is an infant and when he is a grownup man? I ask him whether the Scripture does not distinctly recognise this in the language it uses, when it speaks of “weak” faith and “strong” faith, and of Christians as “newborn babes,” “little children,” “young men,” and “fathers”? (1Pe 2:2; 1Jo 2:12-14.) I ask him, above all, whether his own observation of believers, now-a-days, 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 full-grown tree? His graces are the same in principle; but they have grown. I know not how these facts strike others: to my eyes they seem to prove, most unanswerably, that “growth in grace” is a real thing.

I feel almost ashamed to dwell so long upon this part of my subject. In fact, if any man means to say that the faith, and hope, and 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. No doubt they are as real, but not so strong—as true, but not so vigorous—as much seeds of the Spirit’s planting, but not yet so fruitful. And if any one asks how they are to become stronger, I say it must be by the same process by which all things having life increase. They must grow. And this is what I mean by “growth in grace.”<sup>19</sup>

*“Growing in Grace” gives evidence of...*

Let us turn away from the things I have been discussing to a more practical view of the great subject before us. I want men to look at “growth in grace” as a thing of infinite importance to the soul. I believe, whatever others may think, that our best interests are concerned in a right view of the question—Do we grow?

(a) Let us know then that “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 vegetable will always show itself by progress and increase. It is just the same with our souls. If they are progressing and doing well they will grow.<sup>20</sup>

(b) Let us know, furthermore, that “growth in grace” is one way to be **happy in our religion**. God has wisely linked together our comfort and our increase in holiness. He has graciously made it our interest to press on and aim high in our Christianity. There is a vast difference between the amount of sensible enjoyment which one believer has in his religion compared to another. But you may be sure that ordinarily the man who feels the most “joy and peace in believing” (Rom 15:13), and has the clearest witness of the Spirit in his heart, is the man who grows.

(c) Let us know, furthermore, that “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, to all appearances the same man, with the same little faults, and weaknesses, and besetting sins, and petty infirmities, is seldom the Christian who does much good. The man who shakes and stirs minds, and sets the world thinking, is the believer who is continually improving and going forward. Men think there is life and reality when they see growth.<sup>21</sup>

(d) Let us know, furthermore, that “growth in grace” **pleases God**. It may seem a wonderful thing, no doubt, that anything done by such creatures as we are can give pleasure to the Most High God. But so it is. The Scripture speaks of walking so as to “please God.” The Scripture says there are sacrifices with which “God is well-pleased.” (1Th 4:1; Heb 13:16.) The husbandman loves to see the plants on which he has bestowed labour flourishing and bearing fruit. It cannot but disappoint and grieve him to see them stunted and standing still. Now what does our Lord Himself say? “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman;” “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (Joh 15:1, 8). The Lord takes pleasure in all His people, but specially in those that grow.

(e) Let us know, above all, that “growth in grace” is not only a thing **possible**, but a thing for which believers **are accountable**. To tell an unconverted man, dead in sins, to “grow in grace” would doubtless be absurd. To tell a believer, who is quickened and alive to God, to grow, is only summoning him to a plain scriptural duty. He has a new principle 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 should 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;” He “hath pleasure in the prosperity of His servants” (Jam 4:6; Psa 35:27). The fault, no doubt, is our own. We ourselves are to blame, and none else, if we do not grow.

## II. Marks of “Growth in Grace”

The second point I propose to establish is this: *There are marks by which growth in grace may 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 you now want to know how any one may find out whether he is growing in grace or not? I answer that question, in the first place, by observing that we are very poor judges of our own condition, and that bystanders often know us better than we know ourselves. But I answer further, that there are undoubtedly certain great marks and signs of growth in grace, and that wherever you see these marks you see a “growing” soul. I will now proceed to place some of these marks before you in order.

(a) One mark of “growth in grace” is increased **humility**. The man whose soul is “growing,” feels his own sinfulness and unworthiness more every year. He is ready to say with Job, “I am vile;” with Abraham, I am “dust and ashes;” with Jacob, “I am not

<sup>19</sup> “True grace is progressive, of a spreading, growing nature. It is with grace as it is with light: first, there is the day-break; then it shines brighter to the full noon-day. The saints are not only compared to stars for their light, but to trees for their growth (Isa 61:3; Hos 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.” – *Thomas Watson, Minister of St. Stephen’s Walbrook, Body of Divinity*, 1660.

<sup>20</sup> “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*, 1660.

<sup>21</sup> “Christian, as ever you would stir up others to exalt the God of grace, look to the exercise and improvement of your own graces. When poor servants live in a family, and see the faith, and love, and wisdom, and patience, and humility of a master, shining like the stars in heaven, it draws forth their hearts to bless the Lord that ever they came into such a family. When men’s graces shine as Moses’ face did, when their life, as one speaketh of Joseph’s life, is a very heaven, sparkling with virtues as so many bright stars, how much others are stirred up to glorify God, and cry ‘These are Christians indeed! these are an honour to their God, a crown to their Christ, and a credit to their Gospel! Oh, if they were all such, we would be Christians too!’” – *T. Brooks, Unsearchable Riches*, 1661.

worthy of the least of all [thy] mercies;" with David, "I am a worm;" with Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips;" and with Peter, "I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Job 40:4; Gen 18:27; 32:10; Psa 22:6; Isa 6:5; Luk 5:8). The nearer he draws to God, and the more he sees of God's holiness and perfection, the more thoroughly is he sensible of his own countless imperfections. The further he journeys in the way to heaven, the more he understands what St. Paul means when he says, "I am not already perfect," "I am not meet to be called an Apostle," "I am less than the least of all saints," "I am chief of sinners" (Phi 3:12; 1Co 15:9; Eph 3:8; 1Ti 1:15). The riper he is for glory, the more, like the ripe corn, he hangs down his head. The brighter and clearer is his light, the more he sees of the shortcomings and infirmities of his own heart. When first converted, he would tell you he saw but little of them compared to what he sees now. Would anyone know whether he is growing in grace? Be sure that you look within for increased humility.<sup>22</sup>

(b) Another mark of "growth in grace" is increased ***faith and love towards our Lord Jesus Christ***. The man whose soul is "growing," finds more in Christ to rest upon every year, and rejoices more that he has such a Saviour. No doubt he saw much in Him when first he 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 of which at first he never dreamed. His love and power, His heart and His intentions, His offices as Substitute, Intercessor, Priest, Advocate, Physician, Shepherd, and Friend, unfold themselves to a growing soul in an unspeakable manner. In short, he discovers a suitableness in Christ to the wants of his soul, of which the half was once not known to him. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increased knowledge of Christ.

(c) Another mark of "growth in grace" is increased ***holiness of life and conversation***. The man whose soul is "growing" gets more dominion over sin, the world, and the devil every year. He becomes more careful about his temper, his words, and his actions. He is more watchful over his conduct in every relation of life. He strives more to be conformed to the image of Christ in all things, and to follow Him as his example, as well as to trust in Him as his Saviour. He is not content with old attainments and former grace. He forgets the things that are behind and reaches forth unto those things which are before, making "Higher!" "Upward!" "Forward!" "Onward!" his continual motto (Phi 3:13). On earth he thirsts and longs to have a will more entirely in unison with God's will. In heaven the chief thing that he looks for, next to the presence of Christ, is complete separation from all sin. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increased holiness.<sup>23</sup>

(d) Another mark of "growth in grace" is increased ***spirituality of taste and mind***. The man whose soul is "growing" takes more interest in spiritual things every year. He does not neglect his duty in the world. He discharges faithfully, diligently, and conscientiously every relation of life, whether at home or abroad. But the things he loves best are spiritual things. The ways, and fashions, and amusements, and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in his heart. He does not condemn them as downright sinful, nor say that those who have anything to do with them are going to hell. He only feels that they have a constantly diminishing hold on his own affections, and gradually seem smaller and more trifling in his eyes. Spiritual companions, spiritual occupations, spiritual conversation, appear of ever-increasing value to him. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increasing spirituality of taste.<sup>24</sup>

(e) Another mark of "growth in grace" is increase of ***charity***. The man whose soul is "growing" is more full of love every year, of love to all men, but especially of love towards the brethren. His love will show itself actively in a growing disposition to do kindnesses, to take trouble for others, to be good-natured to everybody, to be generous, sympathizing, thoughtful, tender-hearted, and considerate. It will show itself passively in a growing disposition to be meek and patient toward all men, to put up with provocation and not stand upon rights, to bear and forbear much rather than quarrel. A growing soul 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 surer mark of backsliding and falling off in grace than an increasing disposition to find fault, pick holes, and see weak points in others. Would any one know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increasing charity.

(f) One more mark of "growth in grace" is increased ***zeal and diligence in trying to do good to souls***. The man who is really "growing" will take greater interest in the salvation of sinners every year. Missions at home and abroad, efforts to increase religious light and diminish religious darkness—all these things will every year have a greater place in his attention. He will not become "weary in well-doing" 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, whatever the result may be—giving, praying, preach-

<sup>22</sup> "The right manner of growth is to grow less in one's own eyes. 'I am a worm and no man.' (Psa 22:6.) The sight of corruption and ignorance makes a Christian grow into a dislike of himself. He doth vanish in his own eyes. Job abhorred himself in the dust. (Job 42:6.) This is good, to grow out of conceit with oneself." – *T. Watson*, 1660.

<sup>23</sup> "It is a sign of not growing in grace, when we are less troubled about sin. Time was when the least sin did grieve us (as the least hair makes the eye weep), but now we can digest sin without remorse. Time was when a Christian was troubled if he neglected closet prayer; now he can omit family prayer. Time was when vain thoughts did not trouble him; now he is not troubled for loose practices. There is a sad declension in religion; and grace is so far from growing that we can hardly perceive its pulse to beat." – *T. Watson*, 1660.

<sup>24</sup> "If now you would be rich in graces, look to your walking. It is not the knowing soul, nor the talking soul but the close-walking soul, the obedient soul, that is rich. Others may be rich in notions, but none so rich in spiritual experience, and in all holy and heavenly graces, as close-walking Christians." – *T. Brooks*, 1661.

"It is a sign of not growing in grace, when we grow more worldly. Perhaps once we were mounted into higher orbits, we did set our hearts on things above, and speak the language of Canaan. But now our minds are taken off heaven, we dig our comforts out of these lower mines, and with Satan compass the earth. It is a sign we are going down hill apace, and our grace is in a consumption. It is observable when nature decays, and people are near dying, they grow more stooping. And truly when men's hearts grow more stooping to the earth, and they can hardly lift up themselves to an heavenly thought, if grace be not dead, yet it is ready to die." – *T. Watson*, 1660.

ing, speaking, visiting, according to his position—and count his work its own reward. One of the surest marks of spiritual decline is a decreased interest about the souls of others and the growth of Christ's kingdom. Would any one know whether he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increased concern about the salvation of souls.

Such are the most trustworthy marks of growth in grace. Let us examine them carefully, and consider what we know about them. I can well believe that they will not please some professing Christians in the present day.

Those high-flying religionists, whose only notion of Christianity is that of a state of perpetual joy and ecstasy, who tell you that they have got far beyond the region of conflict and soul-humiliation, such persons no doubt will regard the marks I have laid down as “legal,” “carnal,” and “gendering to bondage.” I cannot help that. I call no man master in these things. I only wish my statements to be tried in the balance of Scripture. And I firmly believe that what I have said is not only scriptural, but agreeable to the experience of the most eminent saints in every age. Show me a man in whom the six marks I have mentioned can be found. He is the man who can give a satisfactory answer to the question, DO WE GROW?

### III. The Means of Growth in Grace

The third and last thing I propose to consider is this: *The means 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 cometh down from the Father of lights” (Jam 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 that would grow in grace must use the means of growth.<sup>25</sup>

This is a point, I fear, which is too much 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 are what they are by some special gift or grant from God, and that as this gift is not bestowed on themselves they must be content to sit still. This is a grievous delusion, and one against which I desire to testify with all my might. I wish 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.

Let me ask the special attention of my readers while I try to set forth in order the means of growth. Cast away for ever the vain thought that if a believer does not grow in grace it is not his fault. Settle it in your mind that a believer, a man quickened by the Spirit, is not a mere dead creature, but 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” (Pro 13:4).

(a) One thing essential to growth in grace is *diligence in the use of private means of grace.* By these I understand such means as a man must use by himself alone, and no one can use for him. I include under this head private prayer, private reading of the Scriptures, and private meditation and self-examination. The man who does not take pains about these three things must never expect to grow. Here are the roots of true Christianity. Wrong *here*, a man is wrong all the way through! Here is the whole reason why many professing Christians never seem to get on. They are careless and slovenly about their private prayers. They read their Bibles but little, and with very little heartiness of spirit. They give themselves no time for self-inquiry and quiet thought about the state of their souls.

It is useless to conceal from ourselves that the age we live in is full of peculiar dangers. It is an age of great activity, and of much hurry, bustle, and excitement in religion. Many are “running to and fro,” no doubt, and “knowledge is increased” (Dan 12:4). Thousands are ready enough for public meetings, sermon-hearing, or anything else in which there is “sensation.” Few appear to remember the absolute necessity of making time to “commune with our hearts, and be still” (Psa 4:4). But without this there is seldom any deep spiritual prosperity. I suspect that English Christians two 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 religion must receive our first attention, if we wish our souls to grow.

(b) Another thing which is essential to growth in grace is *carefulness in the use of public means of grace.* By these I understand such means as a man has within his reach as a member of Christ's visible Church. Under this head I include the ordinances of regular Sunday worship, the 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. The regular return of the same voice, and the same kind of words, and the same ceremonies, is likely to make us sleepy, and callous, and unfeeling.

Here is a snare into which too many professing Christians fall. If we would grow we must be on our guard here. Here is a matter in which the Spirit is often grieved and saints take great damage. Let us strive to use the old prayers, and sing the old hymns, and kneel at the old communion-rail, and hear the old truths preached, with as much freshness and appetite as in the year we first believed. It is a sign of bad health when a person loses relish for his food; and it is a sign of spiritual decline when we lose our appe-

<sup>25</sup> “Experience will tell every Christian that the more strictly, and closely, and constantly he walketh with God, the stronger he groweth in duty. Infused habits are advantaged by exercise. As the fire that kindled the wood for sacrifices upon the altar first came down from heaven, but then was to be kept alive by the care and labour of the priests, so the habits of spiritual grace are indeed infused from God, and must be maintained by daily influences from God, yet with a concurrence also of our own labours, in waiting upon God, and exercising ourselves with godliness; and the more a Christian doth so exercise himself, the more strong he shall grow.” – *Collingens on Providence*, 1678.

tite for means of grace. Whatever we do about public means, let us always do it “with our might.” (Ecc 9:10.) This is the way to grow!

(c) Another thing essential to growth in grace is ***watchfulness over our conduct in the little matters of everyday life***. Our tempers, our tongues, the discharge of our several relations of life, our employment of time—each and all must be vigilantly attended to if we wish our souls to prosper. Life is made up of days, and days of hours, and the little things of every hour are never so little as to be beneath the care of a Christian. When a tree begins to decay at root or heart, the mischief is first seen at the extreme end of the little branches. “He that despiseth little things,” says an uninspired writer, “shall fall by little and little.” That witness is true. Let others despise us, if they like, and call us precise and over-careful. Let us patiently hold on our way, remembering that “we serve a precise God,” that our Lord’s example is to be copied in the least things as well as the greatest, and that we must “take up our cross daily” and hourly, rather than sin. We must aim to have a Christianity which, like the sap of a tree, runs through every twig and leaf of our character, and sanctifies all. This is one way to grow!

(d) Another thing which is essential to growth in grace is ***caution about the company we keep and the friendship we form***. Nothing perhaps affects a man’s character more than the company he keeps. We catch the ways and tone of those we live and talk with, and unhappily get harm far more easily than good. Disease is infectious, but health is not. Now if a professing Christian deliberately chooses to be intimate with those who are not friends of God and who cling to the world, his soul is sure to take harm. It is hard enough to serve Christ under any circumstances in such a world as this. But it is doubly hard to do it 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 communications corrupt good manners.” “The friendship of the world is enmity with God.” (1Co 15:33; Jam 4:4.) Let us seek friends that will stir us up about our prayers, our Bible-reading, and our employment of time and 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 may stop? This is one way to grow.<sup>26</sup>

(e) There is one more thing which is absolutely essential to growth in grace—and that is ***regular and habitual communion with the Lord Jesus***. In saying this, let no one suppose for a minute that I am referring to the Lord’s Supper. I mean nothing of the kind. I mean that daily habit of conversation between the believer and his Saviour, which can only be carried on by faith, prayer, and meditation. It is a habit, I fear, of which many believers know little. A man may be a believer and have his feet on the rock, and yet live far below his privileges. It is possible to have “union” with Christ, and yet to have little if any “communion” with Him. But, for all that, there is such a thing.

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 Saviour is not a mere fancy, but 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 intercourse, of daily application 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 on Him with confidence, as a loving, personal Friend. This is what I mean by communion.

Now I believe that no man will ever grow in grace who does not know something experimentally of the habit of “communion.” We must not be content with a general orthodox knowledge that justification is by faith and not by works, and that we 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 Him about every step, to spread before Him all our sorrows, to get Him to share in all our joys, to do all as in His sight, and to go through every day leaning on 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;” “to me to live is Christ” (Gal 2:20; Phi 1:21). It is ignorance of this way of living that makes so many see no beauty in the book *Song of Solomon*. But it is the man who lives in this way who keeps up constant communion with Christ. This is the man, I say emphatically, whose soul will grow.

### Practical Application

I leave the subject of growth in grace here. Far more might be said about it, if time permitted. But I have said enough, I hope, to convince my readers that the subject is one of vast importance. Let me wind up all with some practical applications.

(1) This book may fall into the hands of some who ***know nothing whatever about growth in grace***. They have little or no concern about religion. A little proper Sunday church-going or chapel-going makes up the sum and substance of their Christianity. They are without spiritual life, and of course they cannot at present grow. Are you one of these people? If you are, you are in a pitiable condition.

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

<sup>26</sup> “Let them be thy choicest companions, that have made Christ their chiefest companion. Do not so much eye the outsides of men as their inside: look most to their internal worth. Many persons have their eyes upon the external garb of a professor. But give me a Christian that minds the internal worth of persons, that makes such as are most filled with the fulness of God his choicest and chiefest companions.” — T. Brooks, 1661.

Awake before it be too late; awake, and arise from the dead, and live to God. Turn to Him who is sitting at the right hand of God, to be your Saviour and Friend. Turn to Christ, and cry mightily to Him about your soul. There is yet hope! He that called Lazarus from the grave is not changed. He that commanded the widow's son at Nain to arise from his bier can do miracles yet for your soul. Seek Him at once: seek Christ, if you would not be lost for ever. Do not stand still talking, and meaning, and intending, and wishing, and hoping. Seek Christ that you may live—and that living, you may grow.

(2) This book may fall into the hands of some who *ought to know something of growth in grace*, but at present know nothing at all. They have made little or no progress since they were first converted. They seem to have “settled on their lees” (Zep 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, old set phrases. Like the Gibeonites, their bread is always moldy, and their shoes are patched and clouted. They never appear to get on. Are you one of these people? If you are, you are living far below your privileges and responsibilities. It is high 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, and a serious fault somewhere. It cannot be the will of God that your soul should stand still. “He giveth more grace;” He “takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants” (Jam 4:6; Psa 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 (Phi 4:4). Without growth you will never do good to others. Surely this want of growth is a serious matter! It should raise in you great searchings of heart. There must be some “secret thing” (Job 15:11). There must be some cause.

Take the advice I give you. Resolve this very day that you will find out the reason of your standstill condition. Probe with a faithful and firm hand every corner of your soul. Search from one end of the camp to the other, till you find out the Achan who is weakening your hands. Begin with an application 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 applied to Him before, and ask for grace to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye. But never, never be content, if your soul does not grow. For your peace's sake, for your usefulness' sake, for the honour of your Maker's cause, resolve to find out the reason why.

(3) This book may fall into the hands of some who *are really growing in grace*, but are not aware of it, and will not allow it. Their very growth is the reason why they do not see their growth! Their continual increase in humility prevents them feeling that they get on.<sup>27</sup> Like Moses, when he came down from the mount from communing with God, their faces shine. And yet, like Moses, they are not aware of it (Exo 34:29). Such Christians, I grant freely, are not common. But here and there such are to be found. Like angels' visits, they are few and far between. Happy is the neighbourhood 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.”

Now what shall I say to such people? What can I say? What ought I to say? Shall I bid them awake to a consciousness of their growth and be pleased with it? I will do nothing of the kind. Shall I tell them to plume themselves on their own attainments, and look at their own superiority to 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, above all, would be useless waste of time. If there is any one feature about a growing soul which specially marks 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 say, “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?” (Mat 25:37). Extremes do indeed meet strangely sometimes. The conscience-hardened sinner and the eminent saint are in one respect singularly alike. Neither of them fully realizes his own condition. The one does not see his own sin, nor the other his own grace!

But shall 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 charity, too much zeal in doing good to others. Then let us be continually forgetting the things behind, and reaching forth unto the things before. (Phi 3:13.) The best of Christians in these matters is infinitely below the perfect pattern of his Lord. Whatever the world may please to say, we may be sure there is no danger of any of us becoming “too good.”

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<sup>27</sup> “Christians may be growing when they think they do not grow. ‘There is that maketh himself poor, yet he is rich.’ (Pro 13:7.) The sight that Christians have of their defects in grace, and their thirst after greater measures of grace makes them think they do not grow. He who covets a great estate, because he hath not so much as he desires thinks himself poor.” – *T. Watson*, 1660.

“Souls may be rich in grace, and yet not know it, not perceive it. The child is heir to a crown or a great estate, but knows it not. Moses' face did shine, and others saw it, but he perceived it not. So many a precious soul is rich in grace, and others see it, and know it, and bless God for it, and yet the poor soul perceives it not. Sometimes this arises from the soul's strong desires of spiritual riches. The strength of the soul's desires after spiritual riches doth often take away the very sense of growing spiritually rich. Many covetous men's desires are so strongly carried forth after earthly riches, that though they do grow rich, yet they cannot perceive it, they cannot believe it. It is just so with many a precious Christian: his desires after spiritual riches are so strong, that they take away the very sense of his growing rich in spirituals. Many Christians have much worth within them, but they see it not. It was a good man that said, ‘The Lord was in this place and I knew it not.’ Again, this ariseth sometimes from men neglecting to cast up their accounts. Many men thrive and grow rich, and yet, by neglecting to cast up their accounts, they cannot tell whether they go forward or backward. It is so with many precious souls. Again, this ariseth sometimes from the soul's too frequent casting up of its accounts. If a man should cast up his accounts once a week, or once a month, he may not be able to discern that he doth grow rich, and yet he may grow rich. But let him compare one year with another, and he shall clearly see that he doth grow rich. Again, this sometimes ariseth from the soul's mistakes in casting up its accounts. The soul many times mistakes: it is in a hurry, and then it puts down ten for a hundred, and a hundred for a thousand. Look, as hypocrites put down their counters for gold, their pence for pounds and always prize themselves above the market, so sincere do often put down their pounds for pence, their thousands for hundreds and still prize themselves below the market.” – *Thomas Brooks*, *Unsearchable Riches*, 1661.



### *Closing Considerations*

Let us *cast to the winds as idle talk the common notion that it is possible to be “extreme” and go “too far” in religion*. This is a favourite lie of the devil, and one which he circulates with vast industry. No doubt there are enthusiasts and fanatics to be found who bring evil report upon Christianity by their extravagances and follies. But if any one means to say that a mortal man can be too humble, too charitable, too holy, or too diligent in doing good, he must either be an infidel or a fool. In serving pleasure and money it is easy to go too far. But in following the things which make up true religion, and in serving Christ there can be no extreme.

Let us *never measure our religion by that of others*, and think we are doing enough if we have gone beyond our neighbours. 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” (Joh 22:22). Let us follow on, aiming at nothing short of perfection. Let us follow on, making Christ’s life and character our only pattern and example. Let us follow on, remembering daily that at our best we are miserable sinners. Let us follow on, and never forget 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 shall be debtors to Christ’s mercy and grace to the very last. Then let us leave off looking at others and comparing ourselves with others. We shall find enough to do if we look at our own hearts.

Last, but not least, if we know anything of 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, acquainted with grief,” and “perfected through sufferings” (Isa 53:3; Heb 2:10). It is a striking saying of our Lord, “Every branch that beareth fruit, he [my Father] purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (Joh 15:2). It is a melancholy fact, that constant temporal prosperity, as a general rule, is injurious to a believer’s soul. We cannot stand it. Sickness, and losses, and crosses, and anxieties, and disappointments seem absolutely needful 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 often do not see their meaning. “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, *afterward*, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11). We shall find that all worked for our good when we reach heaven.

Let these thoughts abide in our minds, if we love growth in grace. When days of darkness come upon us, let us not count it a strange thing. Rather let us remember that lessons are learned on such days which 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 leave the subject of growth in grace here. I trust I have said enough to set some readers thinking about it. All things are growing older: the world is growing old; 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? Why, the grass will be growing over our graves!

Now would it not be well to look within, and put to our souls a simple question? In religion, in the things that concern our peace, in the great matter of personal holiness, are we getting on? *Do we grow?*

## 7. Assurance

*“I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth 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 them also that love his appearing.”—2 Timothy 4:6-8*

### **The Three Views of the Apostle Paul**

In the words of Scripture which head this page, we see the Apostle Paul looking three ways: downward, backward, forward—downward to the grave; backward to his own ministry; forward to that great day, the *day of judgment!*

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

(a) He looks **downward** to the grave, and he does it without fear. Hear what he says...

“I am 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 oblation, is already being poured out. The last ceremonies have been gone through. Every preparation has been made. It only remains to receive the death-blow, and then all is over.

“The time of my departure is at hand.” I am like a *ship* about to unmoor and put to sea. All on board is ready. I only wait to have the moorings cast off that fasten me to the shore, and I shall 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, heartsickening 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," and say, while he stands upon the brink, "I see it all, and am not afraid."

(b) Let us listen to him again. He looks *backward* to his ministerial life, and he does it without shame. Hear what he says...

"I have fought a good fight." There he speaks as a *soldier*. I have fought that good fight with the world, the flesh, and the devil, from which so many shrink and draw back.

"I have finished my course." There 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 been discouraged by the length of the way. I am at last in sight of the goal.

"I have kept the faith." There he speaks as a *steward*. I have held fast that glorious gospel which 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 withstanding them to the face. "As a soldier, a runner, and a steward," he seems to say, "I am not ashamed."

That Christian is happy who, as he quits the world, can leave such testimony behind him. A good conscience will save no man, wash away no sin, nor lift us one hair's breadth toward heaven. Yet a good conscience will be found a pleasant visitor at our bedside in a dying hour. There is a fine passage in *Pilgrim's Progress* which describes Old Honest's passage across the river of death. "The river," says Bunyan, "at that time overflowed its banks in some places; but Mr. Honest in his lifetime had spoken to one Good Conscience to meet him there; the which he also did, and lent him his hand, and so helped him over." We may be sure there is a mine of truth in that passage.

(c) Let us hear the apostle once more. He looks *forward* to the great day of reckoning, and he does it without doubt. Mark his words...

"Henceforth 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 them also that love his appearing."

"A glorious reward," he seems to say, "is ready and laid up in store for me, even that crown which is only given to the righteous. In the great day of judgment the Lord shall give this crown, to me and to all beside me who have loved Him as an unseen Saviour, and 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 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 awful sentence, the eternal separation of the lost and saved—all these were things with which he was well acquainted. But none of these things moved him. His strong faith overleaped them all, and he only saw Jesus, his all-prevailing Advocate, and the blood of sprinkling, and sin washed away. "A crown," he says, "is laid up for me." "The Lord Himself *shall* give it to me." He speaks as if he saw it all with his own eyes.

Such are the main things which these verses contain. Of most of them I shall not speak, because I want to confine myself to the special subject of this paper. I shall only try to consider one point in the passage. That point is the strong "assurance of hope," with which the apostle looks forward to his own prospects in the day of judgment.

I shall do this the more readily, because of the great importance which attaches to the subject of assurance, and the great neglect with which, I humbly conceive, it is often treated in this day.

But I shall 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 is here especially a narrow pass; and if I shall be enabled to do good to some without doing harm to others, I shall be very thankful.

There are four things I wish to bring forward in speaking of the subject of assurance, and it may clear our way if I name them at once.

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

II. Secondly, I will make this broad concession that *a man may never arrive at this assured hope, and yet be saved*.

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

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

I ask special attention of all who take an interest in the great subject of this volume. If I am not greatly mistaken, there is a very close connection between true holiness and assurance. Before I close this paper I hope to show my readers 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.

## **I. An Assured Hope Is a True and Scriptural Thing**

First, then, I will try to show that *an assured hope is a true and scriptural thing*. Assurance, such as Paul expresses in the verses which head this paper, is not a mere fancy or feeling. It is not the result of high animal spirits, or a sanguine temperament of body. It is a positive gift of the Holy Ghost, bestowed without reference to men's bodily frames or constitutions, and a gift which *every believer* in Christ ought to aim at and seek after.

In matters like these, the first question is this,

(A) *What saith the Scripture?* I answer that question without the least hesitation. The Word of God appears to me to teach distinctly that *a believer may arrive at an assured confidence* with regard to his own salvation.

I lay it down fully and broadly, as God's truth, that a true Christian, a converted man, may reach such a comfortable degree of faith in Christ, that in general he shall feel entirely confident as to the pardon and safety of his soul; shall seldom be troubled with doubts, seldom be distracted with fears, seldom be distressed by anxious questionings, and in short, though vexed by many an inward conflict with sin, shall look forward to death without trembling, and to judgment without dismay.<sup>28</sup> This, I say, is the doctrine of the Bible.

Such is my account of assurance. I will ask my readers to mark it well. I say neither less nor more than I have here laid down.

Now such a statement as this is often disputed and denied. Many cannot see the truth of it at all.

The Roman Catholic Church denounces assurance in the most unmeasured terms. The Council of Trent declares roundly 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 Romanism, calls assurance "a prime error of heretics."

(B) The *vast majority of the worldly and thoughtless Christians among ourselves 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 so themselves. Ask them whether their sins are forgiven, and they will probably tell you they do not know! That they cannot receive the doctrine of assurance is certainly no marvel.

(C) But there are also *some true believers who reject* assurance, or shrink from it as a doctrine fraught with danger. They consider it borders on presumption. They seem to think it a proper humility 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 does much harm.

(D) I frankly allow there are *some presumptuous persons* who profess to feel a confidence for which they have no scriptural warrant: There are always some people who think well of themselves when God thinks ill, just as there are some who think ill of themselves when God thinks well. There always will be such. There never yet was a scriptural truth without abuses and counterfeits. God's election, man's impotence, salvation by grace—all are alike abused.

There will be fanatics and enthusiasts as long as the world stands. But, for 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, merely because it is abused.<sup>29</sup>

My answer to all who deny the existence of real, well-grounded assurance, is simply this—*What saith the Scripture?* If assurance be not there, I have not another word to say.

But does not Job say, "I *know* that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I 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 they comfort me" (Psa 23:4)?

Does not Isaiah say, "Thou wilt keep him in *perfect peace* whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee" (Isa 26:3)? And again, "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness, and *assurance* for ever" (Isa 32:17).

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

Does he not say to the Corinthians, "We *know* that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2Co 5:1)? And again, "We are always *confident*, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord" (2Co 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 to him" (2Ti 1:12)?

And does he not speak to the Colossians of "the full assurance of understanding" (Col 2:2), and to the Hebrews of the "full assurance of faith," and the "full assurance of hope" (Heb 6:11; 10:22)?

Does not Peter say expressly, "Give diligence to make your calling and election *sure*" (2Pe 1:10)?

Does not John say, "We *know* that we have passed from death unto life" (1Jo 3:14)?

And again, "These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life" (1Jo 5:13).

And again, "We *know* that we are of God" (1Jo 5:19).

<sup>28</sup> "Full assurance that Christ hath delivered Paul from condemnation, yea, so full and real as produceth thanksgiving and triumphing in Christ, may and doth consist with complaints and outcries of a wretched condition for the indwelling of the body of sin." — *Rutherford's Triumph of Faith*, 1645.

<sup>29</sup> We do not vindicate every vain pretender to 'the witness of the spirit'; we are aware that there are those in whose professions of religion we can see nothing but their forwardness and confidence to recommend them. But let us not reject any doctrine of revelation through an over-anxious fear of consequences." — *Robinson's Christian System*.

"True assurance is built upon a scriptural basis: presumption hath no Scripture to show for its warrant; it is like a will without seal and witnesses, which is null and void in law. Presumption wants both the witness of the Word and the seal of the Spirit. Assurance always keeps the heart in a lowly posture; but presumption is bred of pride. Feathers fly up, but gold descends; he who hath this golden assurance, his heart descends in humility."

— *Watson's Body of Divinity*, 1650.

"Presumption is joined with looseness of life; persuasion with a tender conscience; that dares sin because it is sure, this dares not for fear of losing assurance. Persuasion will not sin, because it cost her Saviour so dear; presumption will sin, because grace doth abound. Humility is the way to heaven. They that are proudly secure of their going to heaven do not so often come thither as they that are afraid of going to hell."

— *Adams on Second Epistle of Peter*, 1633.

What shall we say to these things? I desire to speak with all humility on any controverted point. I feel that 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 appear content in this day. I see the language of persuasion, confidence, knowledge—nay, I may almost say, of certainty. And I feel, for my own part, if I may take these Scriptures in their plain obvious meaning, *the doctrine of assurance is true.*

### *Response to the Scriptures*

(a) But 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, and Paul, of Job, and of John. They were all eminently humble and lowly-minded men, if ever any were; and yet they all speak of their own state with an assured hope. Surely 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.<sup>30</sup>

(b) My answer, furthermore, is that ***many have attained*** to such an assured hope as our text expresses, even in modern times. I will not concede for a moment that it was a peculiar 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 have left their experience on record. I could mention well-known names, if space permitted. The thing has been, and is—and that is enough.

(c) My answer, lastly, is: it cannot be wrong to feel confidently 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 that 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 the Lord Jesus means what He says, and ***takes Him at His Word***. Assurance after all is no more than a ***full-grown faith***; a masculine faith that grasps Christ’s promise with both hands and a faith that argues like the good centurion, “If the Lord speak the word only, I am healed.” Wherefore then should I doubt (Mat 8:8)?<sup>31</sup>

### *Paul’s Assurance of Hope Built upon Christ*

We may 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 “chief of sinners” (1Ti 1:15), had a deep sense of his guilt and corruption. But then 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” (Rom 7:24), had a clear view of the fountain of evil within his heart. But then he had a still clearer view of that other Fountain which can remove “all sin and uncleanness.” He who thought himself “less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8), had a lively and abiding feeling of his own weakness. But he had a still livelier feeling that Christ’s promise, “My sheep shall never perish” (Joh 10:28), could not be broken. Paul knew, if ever a man did, that he was a poor, frail bark, floating on a stormy ocean. He saw, if any did, the rolling waves and roaring tempest by which he was surrounded. But then he looked away from self to Jesus, and was not afraid. He remembered that anchor within the veil, which is both “sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19). He remembered the word, and work, and constant intercession of Him that loved him and gave Himself for him. And this it was, and nothing else, that enabled him to say so boldly, “A crown is laid up for me, and the Lord shall give it to me;” and to conclude so surely, “The Lord will preserve me; I shall never be confounded.”<sup>32</sup>

I may not dwell longer on this part of the subject. I think it will be allowed I have sown some good ground for the assertion I made, that assurance is a true thing in the Scriptures.

## **II. A Believer May Never Arrive at This Assured Hope**

I pass on to the second thing I spoke of. I said, *a believer may never arrive at this assured hope, which Paul expresses, and yet be saved.*

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<sup>30</sup> “They are quite mistaken that think faith and humility are inconsistent; they not only agree well together, but they cannot be parted.” – *Traill*.

<sup>31</sup> “To be assured of our salvation,” Augustine saith, “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.” – *Hildersam on 1 John 4*, 1632.

“Our hope is not hung upon such an untwisted thread as, ‘I imagine so,’ or ‘It is likely’; but the cable, the strong rope of our fastened anchor, is the oath and promise of Him who is eternal verity. 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.

<sup>32</sup> “Never did a believer in Jesus Christ die or drown in his voyage to heaven. They will all be found safe and sound with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Christ loseth none of them; yea, nothing of them (Joh 6:39). Not a bone of a believer is to be seen in the field of battle. They are all more than conquerors through Him that loved them” (Rom 8:37). – *Traill*.

I grant 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, or to discourage one fainting child of God, or to leave the impression that men have no part or lot in Christ, except they feel assurance.

A person may have saving faith in Christ, and yet never enjoy an assured hope, such as the Apostle Paul enjoyed. To believe and have a glimmering hope of acceptance is one thing; to have “joy and peace” in our believing, and abound in hope, is quite another. All God’s children have faith; not all have assurance. I think this ought never to be forgotten.

I know some great and good men have held a different opinion. I believe that many excellent ministers of the gospel, at whose feet I would gladly sit, do not allow the distinction I have stated. But I desire to call no man master. I dread as much as anyone the idea of healing the wounds of conscience slightly; but I should think any other view than that I have given, a most uncomfortable gospel to preach, and one very likely to keep souls back a long time from the gate of life.<sup>33</sup>

I do not shrink from saying that by grace a man may 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, really to be saved; and yet to his last day be never free from much anxiety, doubt, and fear. “A letter,” says an old writer, “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; may live childish, die childish, and never know the greatness of his possessions. And so also a man may be a babe in Christ’s family, think as a babe, speak as a babe, and, though saved, never enjoy a lively hope, or know the real privileges of his inheritance.

### *The Distinction between Faith and Assurance*

Let no man mistake my meaning when I dwell strongly on the reality, privilege, and importance of assurance. Do not do me the injustice to say, I teach that none are saved except such as can say with Paul, “I know and am persuaded...there is a crown laid up for me.” I do not say so. I teach nothing of the kind.

(A) ***Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ a man must have***, beyond all question, if he is to be saved. I know no other way of access to the Father. I see no intimation of mercy, excepting through Christ. A man *must* feel his sins and lost estate, *must* come to Jesus for pardon and salvation, *must* rest his hope on Him, and on Him alone. But if he only has faith to do this, however weak and feeble that faith may be, I will engage, from Scripture warrants, he shall not miss heaven.

Never, never let us curtail the freeness of the glorious gospel, or clip its fair proportions. Never let us make the gate more strait and the way more narrow than pride and the love of sin have made it already. The Lord Jesus is very pitiful, 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. He will never let it be said that any perished at the foot of the cross. “Him that cometh unto me,” He says, “I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37).<sup>34</sup>

Yes! Though a man’s faith be no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, if it only brings him to Christ, and enables him to touch the hem of His garment, he shall be saved, saved as surely as the oldest saint in paradise, saved as completely and eternally as Peter, or John, or Paul. There are degrees in our sanctification. In our justification there are none. What is written, is written, and shall never fail: “Whosoever believeth on him,”—not whosoever has a strong and mighty faith—“Whosoever *believeth* on him shall not be ashamed” (Rom 10:11).

(B) But all this time, be it remembered, ***the poor believing soul may have no full assurance*** of his pardon and acceptance with God. He may be troubled with fear upon fear, and doubt upon doubt. He may have many an inward question, many an anxiety, many a struggle, and many a misgiving—clouds and darkness, storm and tempest—to the very end.

I will engage, I repeat, that bare simple faith in Christ shall save a man, though he may never attain to assurance; but I will not engage it shall bring him to heaven with strong and abounding consolations. I will engage it shall land him safe in harbour; but I will not engage he shall enter that harbour in full sail, confident and rejoicing. I shall not be surprised if he reaches his desired haven weather-beaten and tempest-tossed, scarcely realizing his own safety, till he opens his eyes in glory.

I believe it is of great importance to keep in view this distinction between faith and assurance. It explains things which an inquirer in religion sometimes finds it hard to understand.

Faith, let us remember, is the root, and assurance is the flower. Doubtless you can never have the flower without the root; but it is no less certain you may have the root and not the flower.

Faith is that poor trembling woman who came behind Jesus in the press, and touched the hem of His garment (Mar 5:25ff). Assurance is Stephen standing calmly in the midst of his murderers and saying, “I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Act 7:56).

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

<sup>33</sup> The reader who would like to hear more about this point is referred to the Note at the end of this chapter, in which he will find extracts from several well-known English Divines, supporting the view here maintained. The extracts are too long for insertion in this page.

<sup>34</sup> “He that believeth on Jesus shall never be confounded. Never was any; neither shall you, if you believe. It was a great word of faith spoken by a dying man, who had been converted in a singular way, betwixt his condemnation and execution: his last words were these, spoken with a mighty shout: ‘Never man perished with his face towards Christ Jesus.’”

— Robert Traill (1642-1716).

Faith is Peter's drowning cry, as he began to sink: "Lord save me!" (Mat 14:30). Assurance is that same Peter declaring before the Council in after times, "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 none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Act 4:11-12).

Faith is the anxious, trembling voice, "Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief" (Mar 9:24). Assurance is the confident challenge, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? Who is he that condemneth?" (Rom 8:33-34). Faith is Saul praying in the house of Judas at Damascus, sorrowful, blind, and alone (Act 9:11). Assurance is Paul, the aged prisoner, looking calmly into the grave, and saying, "I know whom I have believed. There is a crown laid up for me" (2Ti 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" (Ecc 9:4). And yet life may be weak, sickly, unhealthy, painful, trying, anxious, weary, burdensome, joyless, smileless to the very end. Assurance is *more than life*. It is health, strength, power, vigour, activity, energy, manliness, 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: it is one that belongs only to the school: it is between the first form and the last.

He that has faith does *well*. Happy should I be, if I thought all readers of this paper had it. Blessed, thrice blessed are they that believe! They are safe. They are washed. They are justified. They are beyond the power of hell. Satan, with all his malice, shall never pluck them out of Christ's hand. But he that has assurance does *far better*—sees more, feels more, knows more, enjoys more, has more days like those spoken of in Deuteronomy, even "the days of heaven upon the earth" (Deu 11:21).<sup>35</sup>

### III. Why an Assured Hope Is Exceedingly to Be Desired

I pass on to the third thing of which I spoke. I will give *some reasons why an assured hope is exceedingly to be desired*.

I ask special attention to this point. I heartily wish that assurance was more sought after than it is. Too many among those who believe begin doubting and go on doubting, live doubting and die doubting, and go to heaven in a kind of mist.

It would ill become me to speak in a slighting way of "hopes" and "trusts." But I fear many of us sit down content with them, and go no further. I should like to see fewer "peradventurers" in the Lord's family, and more who could say, "I know and am persuaded." Oh, that all believers would covet the best gifts, and not be content with less! Many miss the full tide of blessedness the Gospel was meant to convey. Many keep themselves in a low and starved condition of soul, while their Lord is saying, "Eat and drink abundantly, O beloved;" "Ask and...receive, that your joy may be full" (Song 5:1; Joh 16:24).

(1) Let us remember then, for one thing, that assurance is to be desired, because of the *present comfort and peace it affords*.

Doubts and fears have power to spoil 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, our earthly callings, but never so bad as in the affairs of our souls. And so long as a believer cannot get beyond "I hope," and "I trust," he manifestly 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."

Now assurance goes far to set a child of God free from this painful kind of bondage, and thus ministers mightily to his comfort. It enables him to feel that the great business of life is a settled business, the great debt a paid debt, the great disease a healed disease, and the great work a finished work; and all other business, diseases, debts, and works, are then by comparison small. In this way assurance makes him patient in tribulation, calm under bereavements, unmoved in sorrow, not afraid of evil tidings, in every condition content, for it gives him a *fixedness* 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, a sure friend by the way and a sure home at the end.<sup>36</sup>

Assurance will help a man to bear poverty and loss. It will teach him to say, "I know that I have in heaven a better and more enduring substance. Silver and gold have I none, but grace and glory are mine, and these can never make themselves wings and fly away. Though the fig tree shall not blossom, yet I will rejoice in the Lord" (Pro 23:5; Hab 3:17-18).

Assurance will support a child of God under the heaviest bereavements, and assist him to feel, "It is well." An assured soul will say, "Though beloved ones are taken from me, yet Jesus is the same, and is alive for evermore. Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more. Though my house be not as flesh and blood could wish, yet I have an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure." (2Ki 4:26; Heb 13:8; Rom 6:9; 2Sa 23:5.)

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<sup>35</sup> "The greatest thing that we can desire, next to the glory of God, is our own salvation; and the sweetest thing we can desire is the assurance of our salvation. In this life we cannot get higher than to be assured of that which in the next life is to be enjoyed. All saints shall enjoy a heaven when they leave this earth; some saints enjoy a heaven while they are here on earth." — *Joseph Caryl*, 1653.

<sup>36</sup> "It was a saying of Bishop Latimer to Ridley, 'When I live in a settled and stead-fast assurance about the state of soul, methinks then I am as bold as a lion. I can laugh at all trouble: no affliction daunts me. But when I am eclipsed in my comforts, I am of so fearful a spirit that I could run into a very mouse-hole.'" — *Quoted by Christopher Love*, 1653.

"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 that hath assurance. God is his. Hath he lost a friend? His father lives. Hath he lost an only child? God hath given him His only Son. Hath he scarcity of bread? God hath given him the finest of the wheat, the bread of life. Are his comforts gone? He hath a Comforter. Doth he meet with storms? He knows where to put in for harbour. God is his Portion, and heaven is his haven." — *Thomas Watson*, 1662.

Assurance will enable a man 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, and joy when all things seem going against him.<sup>37</sup> (Job 35:10; Psa 42:8.)

Assurance will enable a man to sleep with the full prospect of death on the morrow, like Peter in Herod's dungeon. It will teach him to say, "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety" (Psa 4:8).

Assurance can make a man rejoice to suffer shame for Christ's sake, as the apostles did when put in prison at Jerusalem (Act 5:41). It will remind him that he may "rejoice and be exceeding glad" (Mat 5:12), and that there is in heaven an exceeding weight of glory that shall make amends for all (2Co 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, and as Cranmer, Ridley, Hooper, Latimer, Rogers, and Taylor did in our own land. It will bring to his heart the texts, "Be not afraid of them which kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do" (Luk 12:4). "Lord Jesus receive my spirit" (Act 7:59).<sup>38</sup>

Assurance will support a man in pain and sickness, make all his bed, and smooth down his dying pillow. It will enable him to say, "If my earthly house fail, I have a building of God" (2Co 5:1). "I desire to depart and be with Christ" (Phi 1:23). "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psa 73:26).<sup>39</sup>

The strong consolation which assurance can give in the hour of death is a point of great importance. We may depend on it, we shall never think assurance so 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 shall 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 cordial 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 none other name under heaven, through whom thou mayest 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 the eyes grow dim, and the heart grows faint, and the spirit is on the eve of departing, there must then be *knowing* and *feeling* what Christ has done for us, or else there cannot be perfect peace.<sup>40</sup>

(2) Let us remember, for another thing, that assurance is to be desired, because ***it tends to make a Christian an active working Christian.***

None, generally speaking, do so much for Christ on earth as those who enjoy the fullest confidence of a free entrance into heaven, and trust 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 state. Like a nervous, hypochondriacal person, he will be full of his own ailments, his own doubtings and questionings, his own conflicts and corruptions. In short, 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.

But a believer, who has, like Paul, an assured hope, is free from these harassing distractions. He does not vex his soul with doubts about his own pardon and acceptance. He looks at the everlasting covenant sealed with blood, at the finished work, and never-broken word of his Lord and Saviour, and therefore counts his salvation a *settled thing*. And thus he is able to give an undivided attention to the work of the Lord, and so in the long run to do more.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> 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*. (Extracts available from Chapel Library in booklet form.)

<sup>38</sup> These were the last words of Hugh Mackail on the scaffold, at Edinburgh, 1666: "Now I begin my intercourse with God, which 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!"

<sup>39</sup> These were Rutherford's words on his death-bed: "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 Baxter's words on his death-bed: "I bless God I have a well-grounded assurance of my eternal happiness, and great peace and comfort within." Towards the close he was asked how he did. The answer was, "Almost well." 1691.

<sup>40</sup> "The least degree of faith takes away the sting of death, because it takes away guilt; but the full assurance of faith breaks the very teeth and jaws of death, by taking away the fear and dread of it" – *Fairclough's "Sermon in the Morning Exercises."*

<sup>41</sup> "Assurance would make us active and lively in God's service: it would excite prayer, quicken obedience. Faith would make us walk, but assurance would make us run. We should think we could never do enough for God. Assurance would be as wings to the bird, as weights to the clock, to set all the wheels of obedience a-running."

– Thomas Watson.

"Assurance will make a man fervent, constant, and abundant in the work of the Lord. When the assured Christian hath done one work, he is calling out for another. What is next, Lord, says the assured soul, what is next? An assured Christian will put his hand to any work, he will put his neck in any yoke for Christ, he never thinks he hath done enough, he always thinks he had done too little; and when he hath done all he can, he sits down, saying, I am an unprofitable servant." – *Thomas Brooks*.

Take, for an illustration of this, two English emigrants, and suppose them set 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 as freehold to them and theirs for ever; let the conveyance be publicly registered, and the property made sure to them by every deed and security that man's ingenuity can devise.

Suppose then that one of them shall set to work to clear his land and bring it into cultivation, and labour at it day after day without intermission or cessation. Suppose in the meanwhile that the other shall be 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, whether after all there is not some flaw in the legal instruments which conveyed it to him.

The one shall never doubt his title, but just work diligently on. The other shall hardly ever feel sure of his title, and spend half his time in going to Sydney or Melbourne or Auckland, with needless inquiries about it.

Which now of these two men will have made 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, be altogether the most prosperous?

Any one of common sense can answer that question. I need not 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." None will do so 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 thy salvation; *then* will I teach transgressors thy ways" (Psa 51:12).

Never were there such working Christians as the apostles. They seemed to live to labour. Christ's work was truly their meat and drink. They counted not their lives dear to themselves. They spent and were spent. They laid down ease, health, worldly comfort, at the foot of the cross. And one grand 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 lieth in wickedness" (1Jo 5:19).

(3) Let us remember, for another thing, 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 grievous evil, and the mother of many evils. It often produces a wavering and unstable walk in following the Lord. Assurance helps to cut many a knot, and to make the path of Christian duty clear and plain.

Many of whom we feel hopes 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; shall we give up this family custom? Ought we to go into that company? How shall we draw the line about visiting? What is to be the measure of our dressing and our entertainments? Are we never, under any circumstances, to dance, never to touch a card, never to attend parties of pleasure?" These are a kind of question which seem to give them constant trouble. And often, very often, the simple root of their perplexity is, that they do not feel assured they are themselves children of God. They have not yet settled the point, which side of the gate they are on. They do not know whether they are inside the ark or not.

That a child of God ought to act in a certain decided way, they quite feel; but the grand question is, "Are they children of God themselves?" If they only felt they were so, they would go straightforward, and take a decided line. But not feeling sure about it, their conscience is for ever hesitating and coming to a deadlock. The devil whispers, "Perhaps after all you are only a hypocrite: what right have you to take a decided course? Wait till you are really a Christian." And this whisper too often turns the scale, and leads on to some miserable compromise or wretched conformity to the world!

I believe we have here one chief reason why so many in this day are inconsistent, trimming, unsatisfactory, and half-hearted in their conduct about the world. Their faith fails. They feel no assurance that they are Christ's, and so feel a hesitancy about breaking with the world. They shrink from laying aside all the ways of the old man, because they are not quite confident they have put on the new. In short, I have little doubt that one secret cause of "halting between two opinions" is want of assurance. When people can say decidedly, "The Lord, he is the God," their course becomes very clear (1Ki 18:39).

(4) Let us remember, finally, that assurance is to be desired, because ***it tends to make the holiest Christians.***

This, too, sounds incredible and strange, and yet it is true. It is one of the paradoxes of the gospel, contrary at first sight to reason and common sense, and yet it is a fact. Cardinal Bellarmine was seldom more wide of the truth than when he said, "Assurance tends to carelessness and sloth." He that is freely forgiven by Christ will always do much for Christ's glory, and he that 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, "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1Jo 3:3). A hope that does not purify is a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> "The true assurance of salvation which the Spirit of God hath wrought in any heart hath that force to restrain a man from looseness of life, and to knit his heart in love and obedience to God, as nothing else hath in all the world. It is certainly either the want of faith and assurance of God's love, or a false and carnal assurance of it, that is the true cause of all the licentiousness that reigns in the world." — *Hildersam, 51st Psalm.*

"None walk so evenly with God, as they who are assured of the love of God. Faith is the mother of obedience, and sureness of trust makes way for strictness of life. When men are loose from Christ, they are loose in point of duty, and their floating belief is soon discovered in their inconstancy and unevenness of walking. We do not, with alacrity, engage in that of the success of which we are doubtful; and, therefore, when we know not whether God will accept us or not, when we are off and



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 feel their privilege, and will fear losing it. They will dread falling from the high estate; and marring their own comforts, by bringing clouds between themselves and Christ. He that goes on a journey with little money about him takes little thought of danger, and cares little how late he travels. He, on the contrary, that carries gold and jewels will be a cautious traveller. He will look well to his roads, his lodgings, and his company, and run no risks. It is an old saying, however unscientific it may be, that the fixed stars are those which tremble most. The man that 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 Ghost.

I commend these four points to the serious consideration of all professing Christians. Would you like to feel the Everlasting Arms around you, and to hear the voice of Jesus daily drawing nigh to your soul, and saying, "I am thy salvation"? Would you like to be a useful labourer in the vineyard in your day and generation? Would you be known of all men as a bold, firm, decided, single-eyed, uncompromising follower of Christ? Would you be eminently spiritually-minded and holy? I doubt not some readers will say, "These are the very things our hearts desire. We long for them. We pant after them: but they seem far from us."

#### *A Low Measure of Faith May Be the Cause of Failures*

Now, has it never struck you that your neglect of *assurance* may possibly be the main secret of all your failures—that the low measure of faith which satisfies you may be the cause of your low degree of peace? Can you think it a strange thing that your graces are faint and languishing, when faith, the root and mother of them all, is allowed to remain feeble and weak?

Take my advice this day. Seek an increase of faith. Seek an assured hope of salvation like the apostle Paul's. Seek to obtain a simple, childlike 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" (2Ti 1:12).

You have very likely tried other ways and methods and completely failed. Change your plan. Go upon another tack. Lay aside your doubts. Lean more entirely on the Lord's arm. Begin with implicit trusting. Cast aside your faithless backwardness to take the Lord at His word. Come and roll yourself, your soul, and your sins, upon your gracious Saviour. Begin with simple believing, and all other things shall soon be added to you.<sup>43</sup>

#### **IV. Why an Assured Hope Is So Seldom Attained**

I come now to the last thing of which I spoke. I promised to point out *some probable causes why an assured hope is so seldom attained*. I will do it very shortly.

This is a very serious question, and ought to raise in all of us great searchings of heart. Few, certainly, of Christ's people seem to reach up to this blessed spirit of assurance. Many comparatively believe, but few are persuaded; Many comparatively have saving faith, but few that glorious confidence which shines forth in the language of St. Paul. That such is the case, I think we must all allow.

Now, why is this so? Why is a thing which two apostles have strongly enjoined us to seek after, a thing of which few believers have any experimental knowledge in these latter days? Why is an assured hope so rare?

I desire to offer a few suggestions on this point, with all humility. I know that many have never attained assurance, at whose feet I would gladly sit both in earth and heaven. *Perhaps* the Lord sees something in the natural temperament of some of His children, which makes assurance not good for them. *Perhaps*, in order to be kept in spiritual health, they need to be kept very low. God only knows. Still, after every allowance, I fear there are many believers without an assured hope, whose case may too often be explained by causes such as these.

(1) One most common cause, I suspect, is a ***defective view of the doctrine of justification***.

I am inclined to think that justification and sanctification are insensibly confused 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

on in point of trust, we are just so in the course of our lives, and serve God by fits and starts. It is the slander of the world to think assurance an idle doctrine." — *Manton's Exposition of James*, 1660.

"Who is more obliged, or who feels the obligation to observance more cogently—the son who knows his near relation, and knows his father loves him, or the servant that hath great reason to doubt it? Fear is a weak and impotent principle, in comparison of love. Terrors may awaken: love enlivens. Terrors may 'almost persuade': love over-persuades. Sure am I that a believer's knowledge that his Beloved is his, and he is his Beloved's (Song 4:3), is found by experience to lay the most strong and cogent obligations upon him to loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. For as to him that believes Christ is precious (1 Peter 2:7), so to him that knows he believes Christ is so much the more precious, even the 'chiefest of ten thousand.'" (Song 5:10.)

— *Fairclough's "Sermon in Morning Exercises,"* 1660.

"Is it necessary that men should be kept in continual dread of damnation, in order to render them circumspect and ensure their attention to duty? Will not the well-grounded expectation of heaven prove far more efficacious? Love is the noblest and strongest principle of obedience; nor can it be but that a sense of God's love to us will increase our desire to please Him."

— *Robinson's Christian System*.

<sup>43</sup>"That which breeds so much perplexity is, that we would invert God's order. 'If I knew,' say some, 'that the promise belonged to me, and Christ was a Saviour to me, I could believe': that is to say, I would first see and then believe. But the true method is just the contrary: 'I had fainted,' says David, 'unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord.' He believed it first, and saw it afterwards." — *Archbishop Leighton*.

"It is a weak and ignorant, but common thought of Christians, that they ought not to look for heaven, nor trust Christ for eternal glory till they be well advanced in holiness and meetness for it. But as the first sanctification of our natures flows from our ***faith and trust*** in Christ for acceptance, so our further sanctification and meetness for glory flows from the renewed and repeated exercise of ***faith in Him***." — *Traill*.

of Christ: and so far they are right. But then, without being aware of it, perhaps, they seem to imbibe the idea that their justification is, in some degree, affected by something within themselves. They do not clearly see that Christ's work, not their own work—either in whole or in part, either directly or indirectly—is alone the ground of our acceptance with God; that justification is a thing entirely without us, for which nothing whatever is needful on our part but simple faith; and that the weakest believer is as fully and completely justified as the strongest.<sup>44</sup>

Many appear to forget that we are saved and justified as sinners, and only sinners; and that we never can attain to anything higher, if we live to the age of Methuselah. *Redeemed* sinners, *justified* sinners, and *renewed* sinners doubtless we must be, but sinners, sinners, sinners, we shall be always to the very last. They do not seem to comprehend that there is a wide difference between our justification and our sanctification. Our justification is a perfect finished work, and admits of no degrees. Our sanctification is imperfect and incomplete, and will be so to the last hour of our life. They appear to expect that a believer may at some period of his life be in a measure free from corruption, and attain to a kind of inward perfection. And not finding this angelic state of things in their own hearts, they at once conclude there must be something very wrong in their state. And so they go mourning all their days, oppressed with fears that they have no part or lot in Christ, and refusing to be comforted.

Let us weigh this point well. If any believing soul desires assurance, and has not got it, let him ask himself, first of all, if he is quite sure 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. People ought to seek clearer views of Christ, and what Christ has done for them. Happy is the man who really understands “justification by faith without the deeds of the law.”

(2) Another common cause of the absence of assurance is, *slothfulness about growth in grace*.

I suspect many true believers hold dangerous and unscriptural views on this point; I do not of course mean intentionally, but they do hold them. Many appear to think that, once converted, they have little more to attend to, and that a state of salvation is a kind of easy chair, in which they may just sit still, lie back, and be happy. They seem to fancy that grace is given them that they may enjoy it, and they forget that it is given, like a talent, to be used, employed, and improved. Such persons lose sight of the many direct injunctions “to increase, to grow, to abound more and more and to add to our faith,” and the like; and in this little-doing condition, this sitting-still state of mind, I never marvel that they miss assurance.

I believe it ought to 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, “More and more” (1Th 4:1): more knowledge, more faith, more obedience, more love. If we have brought forth thirtyfold, we should seek to bring forth sixty; and if we have brought forth sixty, we should strive to bring forth a hundred. The will of the Lord is our sanctification, and it ought to be our will too (Mat 13:23; 1Th 4:3).

One thing, at all events, we may depend upon, there is an inseparable connection between diligence and assurance. “Give diligence,” says Peter, “to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10). “We desire,” says Paul, “that every one of you do show the same *diligence* to the full assurance of hope unto the end” (Heb 6:11). “The soul of the *diligent*,” says Solomon, “shall be made fat” (Pro 13:4). There is much truth in the old maxim of the Puritans: “Faith of adherence comes by *hearing*, but faith of assurance comes not without *doing*.”

Is any reader of this paper one of those who desires assurance, but has not got 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 temporal. “The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing” (Pro 13:4).<sup>45</sup>

(3) 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 fear nothing more frequently prevents men attaining an assured hope than this. The stream of professing Christianity in this day is far wider than it formerly was, and I am afraid we must admit at the same time it is much less deep.

Inconsistency of life is utterly destructive of peace of conscience. The two things are incompatible. They cannot and they will not go together. If you will have your besetting sins, and cannot make up your minds to give them up—if you will shrink from cutting off the right hand and plucking out the right eye when occasion requires it—I will engage you will have no assurance.

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<sup>44</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith gives an admirable account of justification: “Those whom God effectually calleth, He also freely justifieth—not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and righteousness of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith.”

<sup>45</sup> “Whose fault is it that thy interest in Christ is not put out of question? Were Christians more in self-examination, more close in walking with God, and if they had more near communion with God and were more in acting of faith, this shameful darkness and doubting would quickly vanish.” – *Robert Traill*.

“A lazy Christian shall always want four things: viz., comfort, content, confidence, and assurance. God hath made a separation between joy and idleness between assurance and laziness; and, therefore, it is impossible for thee to bring these together that God hath put so far asunder.” – *Thomas Brooks*.

“Are you in depths and doubts, staggering and uncertain, not knowing what is your condition nor whether you have any interest in the forgiveness that is of God? Are you tossed up and down between hopes and fears, and want peace, consolation, and establishment? Why lie you upon your faces? Get up: watch, pray, fast, meditate, offer violence to your lusts and corruptions; fear not, startle not at their crying to be spared; press unto the throne of grace by prayer, supplications importunities, restless requests—this is the way to take the kingdom of God. These things are not peace, are not assurance; but they are part of the means God hath appointed for attainment of them.” – *Owen on the 13th Psalm*.

A vacillating walk, a backwardness to take a bold and decided line, a readiness to conform to the world, a hesitating witness for Christ, a lingering tone of religion, a flinching from a high standard of holiness and spiritual life—all these make up a sure receipt for bringing a blight upon the garden of your soul.

It is vain to suppose you will feel assured and persuaded of your own pardon and acceptance with God, unless you count *all* God's commandments concerning *all* things to be right, and hate every sin, whether great or small (Psa 119:128). One Achan allowed in the camp of your heart will weaken your hands and lay your consolations low in the dust. 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, unless you labour in all your ways to please the Lord.<sup>46</sup>

I bless God that our salvation in no wise depends on our own works. By grace we are saved, not by works of righteousness, through faith—without the deeds of the law. But I never would have any believer for a moment forget 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 well doing that the day-spring of assurance will visit you, and shine down upon your heart.

“The secret of the Lord,” says David, “is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant” (Psa 25:14).

“To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God” (Psa 50:23).

“Great peace have they which love thy law, and nothing shall offend them” (Psa 119:165).

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1Jo 1:7).

“Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth; and hereby we *know* that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (1Jo 3:18-19).

“Hereby we do *know* that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1Jo 2:3).

Paul was a man who exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man (Act 24:16). He could say with boldness, “I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith.” I do not therefore wonder that the Lord enabled him to add with confidence, “Henceforth there is a crown laid up for me, and the Lord shall give it me at that day.”

If any believer in the Lord Jesus desires assurance, and has not got it, let him think over this point also. Let him look at his own heart, look at his own conscience, look at his own life, look at his own ways, look at his own home. And perhaps when he has done that, he will be able to say, “There is a *cause* why I have no assured hope.”

I leave the three matters I have just mentioned to the private consideration of every reader of this paper. I am sure they are worth examining. May we examine them honestly. And may the Lord give us understanding in all things.

## Practical Applications

### (1) For Non-Believers

And now in closing this important inquiry, let me speak first to those readers who have not yet given themselves to the Lord, who have not yet come out from the world, chosen the good part, and followed Christ.

I ask you then to learn from this subject the *privileges and comforts of a true Christian*.

I would not have you judge of the Lord Jesus Christ by His people. The best of servants can give you but a faint idea of that glorious Master. Neither would I have you judge of the privileges of His kingdom, by the measure of comfort to which many of His people attain. Alas, we are most of us poor creatures! We come short, very short, of the blessedness we might enjoy. But, depend upon it, there are glorious things in the city of our God, which they who have an assured hope taste, even in their lifetime. There are lengths and breadths of peace and consolation there, which it has not entered into your heart to conceive. There is bread enough and to spare in our Father's house, though many of us certainly eat but little of it, and continue weak. But the fault must not be laid to our Master's charge: it is all our own.

And, after all, the weakest child of God has a mine of comforts within him, of which you know nothing. You see the conflicts and tossings of the surface of his heart, but you see not the pearls of great price which are hidden in the depths below. The feeblest member of Christ would not change conditions 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 Saviour that will never be taken from him, a Saviour that will never forsake him, a treasure that fadeth not 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, if I ever did. I feel deeply for those whose treasure is all on earth, and whose hopes are all on this side of the grave. Yes!...

- when I see old kingdoms and dynasties shaking to the very foundation,

<sup>46</sup> “Would'st thou have thy hope strong? Then keep thy conscience pure: thou canst not defile one without weakening the other. The godly person that is loose and careless in his holy walking will soon find his hope languishing. All sin disposeth the soul that tampers with it to trembling fears and shakings of heart.” – *Gurnall*.

“One great and too common cause of distress is the secret maintaining some known sin: it puts out the eye of the soul, or dimmeth it and stupefies it, that it can neither see nor feel its own condition; but especially it provoketh God to withdraw Himself, His comforts, and the assistance of His Spirit.” – *Baxter's Saints' Rest*.

“The stars which have least circuit are nearest the pole; and men whose earths are least entangled with the world are always nearest to God and to the assurance of His favour. Worldly Christians, remember this. You and the world must part, or else assurance and your souls will never meet.” – *Thomas Brooks*.

- 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 scarce knowing where to hide their heads,
- when I see property dependent on public confidence melting like snow in the spring, and public stocks and funds losing their value—

when I see these things, I feel deeply for those who have no better portion than this world can give them, and no place in that kingdom which cannot be removed.<sup>47</sup>

Take of a minister of Christ this very day. Seek durable riches, a treasure that cannot be taken from you, a city which hath lasting foundations. 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. Come away from a world which will never really satisfy you, and from sin which will bite like a serpent, if you cleave to it, at last. Come to the Lord Jesus as lowly sinners, and He will receive you, pardon you, give you His renewing Spirit, fill you with peace. This shall give you more real comfort than the world has ever done. There is a gulf in your heart which nothing but the peace of Christ can fill. Enter in and share our privileges. Come with us, and sit down by our side.

## (2) For Believers

Lastly, let me turn to all believers who read these pages, and speak to them a few words of brotherly counsel.

(A) The main thing that I urge upon you is this: **if you have not got an assured hope of your own acceptance in Christ, resolve this day to seek it.** Labour for it. Strive after it. Pray for it. Give the Lord no rest till you “know whom you have believed.”

I feel, indeed, that the small amount of assurance in this day, among those who are reckoned God’s children, is a shame and a reproach. “It is a thing to be heavily bewailed,” says old Traill, “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” Paul expresses, that “every one” of the Hebrews should seek after full assurance; and let us endeavour, by God’s blessing, to roll this reproach away (Heb 6:11).

Believing reader, do you really mean to say that you have no desire to exchange hope for confidence, trust for persuasion, 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? Alas, this is not a healthy state of soul to be in; this is not the mind of the Apostolic day! Arise at once and go forward. Stick not at the foundations of religion: go on to perfection. Be not content with a day of small things. Never despise it in others, but never be content with it yourself.

Believe me, assurance is worth the 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 sure 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 should not you 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.”

Make it then your daily prayer that you may 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 may not, perhaps attain to full assurance all at once. It is good sometimes to be kept waiting; we do not value things which we get without trouble. But though it tarry, wait for it. Seek on, and expect to find.

(B) There is one thing, however, of which I would not have you ignorant: **you must not be surprised if you have occasional doubts**, after you have got assurance. You must not forget 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 till death takes it down. And there is a devil, too, and a strong devil: a devil who tempted the Lord Jesus, and gave Peter a fall; and he will take care you know it. Some doubts there always will be. He that never doubts has nothing to lose. He that never fears possesses nothing truly valuable. He that is never jealous knows little of deep love. Be not discouraged: you shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved you.<sup>48</sup>

(C) Finally, do not forget that assurance is a thing which **may be lost for a season**, even by the brightest Christians, unless they take care.

Assurance is a most delicate plant. It needs daily, hourly watching, watering, tending, cherishing. So watch and pray the more when you have got it. As Rutherford says, “Make much of assurance.” Be always upon your guard. When Christian slept in the bour, 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. Each found it again undoubtedly, but not till 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 till after many days. It is easy to run down hill. It is hard work to climb up. So remember my caution: when you have the joy of the Lord, watch and pray.

<sup>47</sup> “They are doubly miserable that have neither heaven nor earth, temporals nor eternal, made sure to them in changing times.” – *Thomas Brooks*.

<sup>48</sup> “None have assurance at all times. As in a walk that is shaded with trees and chequered with light and shadow, some tracks and paths in it are dark and others are sunshine. Such is usually the life of the most assured Christian.” – *Bishop Hopkins*.

“It is very suspicious, that that person is a hypocrite that is always in the same frame, let him pretend it to be never so good.” – *Traill*.

(D) Above all, ***grieve not the Spirit***. Quench not the Spirit. Vex not the Spirit. Drive Him not to a distance, by tampering with small bad habits and little sins. Little jarrings between husbands and wives make unhappy homes, and petty inconsistencies, known and allowed, will bring in a strangeness between you and the Spirit.

Hear the conclusion of the whole matter: the man who walks with God in Christ most closely will generally be kept in the greatest peace. The believer who follows the Lord most fully and aims at the highest degree of holiness will ordinarily enjoy the most assured hope, and have the clearest persuasion of his own salvation.

## Addendum

### The Difference between Faith and Assurance

The following are extracts from English divines, showing...

- that there is a difference between faith and assurance,
- that a believer may be justified and accepted with God, and yet not enjoy a comfortable knowledge and persuasion of his own safety, and
- that the weakest faith in Christ, if it be true, will save a man as surely as the strongest.

(1) “The mercy of God is greater than all the sins in the world. But we sometimes are in such a case, that we think we have no faith at all or if we have any, it is very feeble and weak. And therefore these are two things: to have faith, and to have the feeling of faith. For some men would fain have the feeling of faith, but they cannot attain unto it; and yet they must not despair, but go forward in calling upon God and it will come at the length: God will open their hearts, and let them feel His goodness.”—*Bishop Latimer’s Sermons*, 1552.

(2) “Weak faith may fail in the applying, or in the apprehension and appropriating of Christ’s benefits to a man’s own self. This is to be seen in ordinary experience. For many a man there is of humble and contrite heart, that serveth God in spirit and truth, yet is not able to say, without great doubtings and waverings, I know and am fully assured that my sins are pardoned. Now shall we say that all such are without faith? God forbid. This weak faith will as truly apprehend God’s merciful promises for the pardon of sin as strong faith, though not so soundly. Even as man with a palsied hand can stretch it out as well to receive a gift at the hand of a king as he that is more sound, though it may be not so firmly and steadfastly.”—*Exposition of the Creed*, by William Perkins; Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, 1612.

(3) “This certainty of our salvation, spoken of by Paul, rehearsed by Peter, and mentioned by David (Psa 4:7), is that special fruit of faith, which breedeth spiritual joy and inward peace, which passeth all understanding. True it is, all God’s children have it not. One thing is the tree, and another thing is the fruit of the tree: one thing is faith; and another thing is the fruit of faith. And that remnant of God’s elect which feel the want of this faith, have notwithstanding faith.”—*Sermons by Richard Greenham, Minister and Preacher of the Word of God*, 1612.

(4) “Some think they have no faith at all, because they have no full assurance. Yet the fairest fire that can be will have some smoke.”—*The Bruised Reed*, by Richard Sibbes, Master of Catherine Hall, Cambridge, and Preacher of Gray’s Inn, London, 1630.

(5) “The act of faith is to apply Christ to the soul; and this the weakest faith can do as well as the strongest, if it be true. A child can hold a staff as well, though not so strongly, as a man. The prisoner through a hole sees the sun, though not so perfectly as they in the open air. They that saw the brazen serpent, though a great way off, yet were healed. The least faith is as precious to the believer’s soul as Peter’s or Paul’s faith was to themselves; for it lays hold upon Christ and brings eternal salvation.”—*An Exposition of the Second Epistle General of Peter*, by the Rev. Thomas Adams, Rector of St. Gregory’s, London, 1633.

(6) “Weak faith is true faith—as precious, though not so great, as strong faith: the same Holy Ghost (the author), the same gospel (the instrument). If it never proves great, yet weak faith shall save; for it interests us in Christ, and makes Him and all His benefits ours. For it is not the strength of our faith that saves, but the truth of our faith—not the weakness of our faith that condemns, but the want of faith; for the least faith layeth hold on Christ, and so will save us. Neither are we saved by the worth or quantity of our faith, but by Christ, who is laid hold on by a weak faith as well as a strong. Just as a weak hand that can put meat into the mouth shall feed and nourish the body as well as if it were a strong hand; seeing the body is not nourished by the strength of the hand, but by the goodness of the meat.”—*The Doctrine of Faith*, by John Rogers, Preacher of God’s Word, at Dedham, in Essex, 1634.

(7) “It is one thing to have a thing surely, another thing to know I have it surely. We seek many things that we have in our hands, and we have many things that we think we have lost. So a believer, who hath a sure belief, yet doth not always know that he so believeth. Faith is necessary to salvation: but full assurance that I do believe is not of like necessity.”—*Ball on Faith*, 1637.

(8) “There is a weak faith, which yet is true; and although it be weak, yet, because it is true, it shall not be rejected of Christ. Faith is not created perfect at the first, as Adam was; but is like a man in the ordinary course of nature, who is first an instrument, then a child, then a youth, then a man. Some utterly reject all weak ones, and tax all weakness in faith with hypocrisy. Certainly these are either proud or cruel men. Some comfort and establish those who are weak, saying, ‘Be quiet. Thou hast faith and grace enough, and art good enough: thou needest no more, neither must thou be too righteous’ (Ecc 7:16). These are soft, but not safe, cushions: these are fawning flatterers, and not faithful friends. Some comfort and exhort, saying, ‘Be of good cheer: He who hath begun a good work will also finish it in you; therefore pray that His grace may abound in you; yea, do not sit still, but go forward and march on in the way of the Lord.’ (Heb 6:1.) Now this is the safest and best course.”—*Questions, Observations, etc., upon the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, by Richard Ward, sometime student at Cambridge, and preacher of the gospel in London, 1640.

(9) “A man may be in the favour of God, in the state of grace, a justified man before God, and yet want the sensible assurance of His salvation, and of the favour of God in Christ. A man may have saving grace in him, and not perceive it himself; a man may have true justifying faith in him,

and not have the use and operation of it, so far as to work in him a comfortable assurance of his reconciliation with God. Nay, I will say more: a man may be in the state of grace, and have true justifying faith in him, and yet be so far from sensible assurance of it in himself, as in his own sense and feeling he may seem to be assured of the contrary. Job was certainly in this case when he cried unto God, 'Wherefore hidest thou thy face and holdest me for thine enemy?' (Job 13:24). The weakest faith will justify. If thou canst receive Christ and rest upon Him, even with the weakest faith, it will serve thy turn. Take heed thou think not it is the strength of thy faith that justifieth thee. No, no: it is Christ and His perfect righteousness which thy faith receiveth and resteth upon, that doth it. He that hath the feeblest and weakest hand may receive an alms and apply a sovereign plaster to his wound, as well as he that hath the strongest; and receive as much good by it too."—*Lectures upon the 51st Psalm, preached at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, by Arthur Hildersam, Minister of Jesus Christ, 1642.*

(10) "Though your grace be never so weak, if ye have truth of grace, you have as great a share in the righteousness of Christ for your justification as the strong Christian hath. You have as much of Christ imputed to you as any other."—*Sermons by William Bridge, formerly Fellow of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and Pastor of the Church of Christ, in Great Yarmouth, 1648.*

(11) "There are some who are true believers, and yet weak in faith. They do indeed receive Christ and free grace, but it is with a shaking hand; they have, as divines say, the faith of adherence; they will stick to Christ, as theirs. But they want the faith of evidence; they cannot see themselves as His. They are believers, but of little faith; they hope that Christ will not cast them off, but are not sure that He will take them up."—*Sips of Sweetness, or Consolation for Weak Believers, by John Durant, Preacher in Canterbury Cathedral, 1649.*

(12) "I know, thou sayest, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners: and that 'Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have eternal life' (Joh 3:15). Neither can I know but that, in a sense of my own sinful condition, I do cast myself in some measure upon my Saviour, and lay some hold upon His all-sufficient redemption: but, alas, my apprehensions of Him are so feeble, as that they can afford no sound comfort to my soul! Courage, my son. Were it that thou lookedst to be justified, and saved by the power of the very act of thy faith, thou hadst reason to be disheartened with the conscience of the weakness thereof; but now that the virtue and efficacy of this happy work is in the object apprehended by thee, which is the infinite merits and mercy of thy God and Saviour, which cannot be abated by thine infirmities, thou hast cause to take heart to thyself, and cheerfully to expect His salvation. Understand thy case aright. Here is a double hand, that helps us up toward Heaven. Our hand of faith lays hold upon our Saviour; our Saviour's hand of mercy and plenteous redemption lays hold on us. Our hold of Him is feeble and easily loosed; His hold of us is strong and irresistible. If work were stood upon, a strength of hand were necessary; but now that only taking and receiving of a precious gift is required, why may not a weak hand do that as well as a strong? As well, though not as forcibly."—*Bishop Hall's Balm of Gilead, 1650.*

(13) "I find not salvation put upon the strength of faith, but the truth of faith—not upon the brightest degree, but upon any degree of faith. It is not said, If you have such a degree of faith you shall be justified and saved; but simply believing is required. The lowest degree of true faith will do it; as Romans 10:9, 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.' The thief upon the cross had not attained to such high degrees of faith: he by one act, and that of a weak faith, was justified and saved (Luk 23:42)."—*Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel, by William Greenhill, Rector of Stepney, London, and Chaplain to the Dukes of York and Gloucester, 1650.*

(14) "A man may have true grace that hath not the assurance of the love and favour of God, or the remission of his sins, and salvation of his soul. A man may be God's, and yet he not know it; his estate may be good, and yet he not see it; he may be in a safe condition, when he is not in a comfortable position. All may be well with him in the court of glory, when he would give a thousand worlds that all were but well in the court of conscience. Assurance is requisite to the well-being of a Christian, but not to the being; it is requisite to the consolation of a Christian, but not to the salvation of a Christian; it is requisite to the well-being of grace, but not to the mere being of grace. Though a man cannot be saved without faith, yet he may be saved without assurance. God hath in many places of the Scripture declared that without faith there is no salvation; but God hath not in any one place of Scripture declared that without assurance there is no salvation."—*Heaven on Earth, by Thomas Brooks, Preacher of the gospel, at St. Margaret's, Fish Street Hill, London, 1654.*

(15) "You that can clear this to your own hearts that you have faith, though it be weak, be not discouraged, be not troubled. Consider that the smallest degree of faith is true, is saving faith as well as the greatest. A spark of fire is as true fire as any is in the element of fire. A drop of water is as true water as any is in the ocean. So the least grain of faith is as true faith, and as saving as the greatest faith in the world. The least bud draws sap from the root as well as the greatest bough. So the weakest measure of faith doth as truly ingraft thee into Christ, and by that draw life from Christ, as well as the strongest. The weakest faith hath communion with the merits and blood of Christ as well as the strongest. The least faith marries the soul to Christ. The weakest faith hath as equal a share in God's love as the strongest. We are beloved in Christ, and the least measure of faith makes us members of Christ. The least faith hath equal right to the promises as the strongest. And therefore let not our souls be discouraged for weakness."—*Nature and Royalties of Faith, by Samuel Bolton, D.D., of Christ's College, Cambridge, 1657.*

(16) "Some are afraid they have no faith at all, because they have not the highest degree of faith, which is full assurance, or because they want the comfort which others attain to, even joy unspeakable and full of glory. But for the rolling of this stone out of the way, we must remember there are several degrees of faith. It is possible thou mayest have faith, though not the highest degree of faith, and so joy in the Spirit. That is rather a point of faith than faith itself. It is indeed rather a living by sense than a living by faith, when we are cheered up with continual cordials. A stronger faith is required to live upon God without comfort, than when God shines in on our spirit with abundance of joy."—*Matthew Lawrence, Preacher at Ipswich, on Faith, 1657.*

(17) "If any person abroad have thought that a special and full persuasion of the pardon of their sin was of the essence of faith, let them answer for it. Our divines at home generally are of another judgment. Bishop Davenant and Bishop Prideaux, and others, have shown the great difference between recumbence and assurance, and they all do account and call assurance, a daughter, fruit, and consequent of faith. And the late learned Arrowsmith tells us, that God seldom bestows assurance upon believers till they are grown in grace: for, says he, there is the same difference between faith of recumbence and faith of assurance, as is between reason and learning. Reason is the foundation of learning; so, as there can be no learning if reason be wanting (as in beasts), in like manner there can be no assurance where there is no faith of adherence. Again: as reason well exercised in the study of arts and sciences arises to learning; so faith being well exercised on its proper object, and by its proper fruits, arises to assurance. Further, as by negligence, non-attendance, or some violent disease, learning may be lost, while reason doth abide; so by temptation, or by spiritual sloth, assurance may be lost, while saving faith may abide. Lastly, as all men have reason, but all men are not learned; so

all regenerate persons have faith to comply savingly with the gospel method of salvation, but all true believers have not assurance.”—*Sermon by A. Fairclough, Fellow of Immanuel College, Cambridge, in the Morning Exercises, preached at Southwark, 1660.*

(18) “We must distinguish between weakness of faith and nullity. A weak faith is true. The bruised reed is but weak, yet it is such as Christ will not break. Though thy faith be but weak, yet be not discouraged. A weak faith may receive a strong Christ; a weak hand can tie the knot in marriage as well as a strong; a weak eye might have seen the brazen serpent. The promise is not made to strong faith, but to true. The promise doth not say, Whosoever hath a giant faith that can remove mountains, that can stop the mouth of lions, shall be saved; but whosoever believes, be his faith never so small. You may have the water of the Spirit poured on you in sanctification, though not the oil of gladness in assurance: there may be faith of adherence, and not of evidence; there may be life in the root where there is no fruit in the branches, and faith in the heart where no fruit of assurance.”—*A Body of Divinity, by Thomas Watson, formerly Minister of St. Stephen’s, Walbrook, London, 1660.*

(19) “Many of God’s dear children for a long time may remain very doubtful as to their present and eternal condition, and know not what to conclude, whether they shall be damned or whether they shall be saved. There are believers of several growths in the Church of God, fathers, young men, children, and babes. And as in most families there are more babes and children than grown men, so in the Church of God there are more weak, doubting Christians than strong ones, grown up to a full assurance. A babe may be born, and yet not know it; so a man may be born again, and yet not be sure of it. We make a difference betwixt saving faith, as such, and a full persuasion of the heart. Some of those that shall be saved may not be certain that they shall be saved; for the promise is made to the grace of faith, and not to the evidence of it—to faith as true, and not to faith as strong. They may be sure of heaven, and yet in their own sense not assured of heaven.”—*Sermon by Rev. Thomas Doolittle, of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, and sometime Rector of St. Alphege, London; in the Morning Exercises, at Cripplegate, 1661.*

(20) “Is it not necessary to justification to be assured that my sins are pardoned, and that I am justified? No: that is no act of faith as it justifieth, but an effect and fruit that followeth after justification. It is one thing for a man to have his salvation certain, another thing to be certain that it is certain. Even as a man fallen into a river, and like to be drowned, as he is carried down with the flood, espies the bough of a tree hanging over the river, which he catcheth at, and clings unto with all his might to save him, and seeing no other way of succour but that, ventures his life upon it. This man, so soon as he has fastened on this bough, is in a safe condition, though all troubles, fears, and terrors are not presently out of his mind, until he comes to himself, and sees himself quite out of danger. Then he is sure he is safe; but he was safe before he was sure. Even so it is with a believer. Faith is but the espying of Christ as the only means to save, and the reaching out of the heart to lay hold upon Him. God hath spoke the word, and made the promise to His Son: I believe Him to be the only Saviour, and remit my soul to Him to be saved by His mediation. So soon as the soul can do this, God imputeth the righteousness of His Son unto it, and it is actually justified in the court of heaven, though it is not presently quieted and pacified in the court of conscience. That is done afterwards: in some sooner, in some later, by the fruits and effects of justification.”—*Archbishop Usher’s Body of Divinity, 1670.*

(21) “There are those who doubt, because they doubt, and multiply distrust upon itself, concluding that they have no faith, because they find so much and so frequent doubting within them. But this is a great mistake. Some doubtings there may be, where there is even much faith; and a little faith there may be, where there is much doubting. Our Saviour requires, and delights in a strong, firm believing on Him, though the least and weakest He rejects not.”—*Archbishop Leighton’s Lectures on the first nine chapters of St. Matthew’s Gospel, 1670.*

(22) “Many formerly, and those of the highest remark and eminency, have placed true faith in no lower degree than assurance, or the secure persuasion of the pardon of their sins, the acceptation of their persons, and their future salvation. But this, as it is very sad and uncomfortable for thousands of doubting and deserted souls, concluding all those to fall short of grace who fall short of certainty, so hath it given the papists too great advantage. Faith is not assurance. But this doth sometimes crown and reward a strong, vigorous and heroic faith; the Spirit of God breaking in upon the soul with an evidencing light, and scattering all that darkness, and those fears and doubts which before beclouded it.”—*Bishop Hopkins on the Covenants, 1680.*

(23) “A want of assurance is not unbelief. Drooping spirits may be believers. There is a manifest distinction made between faith in Christ, and the comfort of that faith—between believing to eternal life, and knowing we have eternal life. There is a difference between a child’s having a right to an estate, and his full knowledge of the title. The character of faith may be written in the heart, as letters engraven upon a seal, yet filled with so much dust as not to be distinguished. The dust hinders the reading of the letters, yet doth not raze them out.”—*Discourses, by Stephen Charnock, of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, 1680.*

(24) “Some rob themselves of their own comfort by placing saving faith in full assurance. Faith, and sense of faith, are two distinct and separable mercies; you may have truly received Christ, and not receive the knowledge or assurance of it. Some there be that say, ‘Thou art our God,’ of whom God never said, ‘You are my people,’ these have no authority to be called the sons of God: others there are, of whom God saith, ‘These are my people,’ yet they dare not call God ‘their God’; these have authority to be called the sons of God, yet know it not. They have received Christ, that is their safety; but they have not yet received the knowledge and assurance of it, that is their trouble...The father owns his child in the cradle, who yet knows him not to be his father.”—*Method of Grace, by John Flavel, Minister of the Gospel at Dartmouth, Devon, 1680.*

(25) “It is confessed weak faith hath as much peace with God, through Christ, as another hath by strong faith, but not so much bosom peace. Weak faith will as surely land the Christian in heaven as strong faith, for it is impossible the least dram of true grace should perish, being all incorruptible seed; but the weak, doubting Christian is not like to have so pleasant a voyage thither as another with strong faith. Though all in the ship come safe to shore, yet he that is all the way sea-sick hath not so comfortable a voyage as he that is strong and healthful.”—*The Christian in Complete Armour, by William Gurnall, sometime Rector of Lavenham, Suffolk, 1680.*

(26) “Be not discouraged if it doth not yet appear to you that you were given by the Father to the Son. It may be, though you do not see it. Many of the given do not for a long time know it; yea, I see no great danger in saying that not a few of the given to the Son may be in darkness, and doubts, and fears about it, till the last and brightest day declare it, and till the last sentence proclaims it. If, therefore, any of you be in the dark about your own election, be not discouraged: it may be, though you do not know it.”—*Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer, by Robert Traill, Minister of the gospel, in London, and sometime at Cranbrook, Kent, 1690.*

(27) “Assurance is not essential to the being of faith. It is a strong faith; but we read likewise of a weak faith, little faith, faith like a grain of mustard seed. True saving faith in Jesus Christ is only distinguishable by its different degrees; but in every degree and in every subject, it is universally of the same kind.”—*Sermons, by the Rev. John Newton, sometime Vicar of Olney, and Rector of St. Mary, Woolnoth, London, 1767.*

(28) “There is no reason why weak believers should conclude against themselves. Weak faith unites as really with Christ as strong faith—as the least bud in the vine is drawing sap and life from the root, no less than the strongest branch. Weak believers, therefore, have abundant cause to be thankful; and while they reach after growth in grace, ought not to overlook what they have already received.”—*Letter of Rev. Henry Venn*, 1784.

(29) “The faith necessary and sufficient for our salvation is not assurance. Its tendency doubtless is to produce that lively expectation of the Divine favour which will issue in a full confidence. But the confidence is not itself the faith of which we speak, nor is it necessarily included in it; nay, it is a totally distinct thing. Assurance will generally accompany a high degree of faith. But there are sincere persons who are endued with only small measures of grace, or in whom the exercise of that grace may be greatly obstructed. When such defects or hindrances prevail, many fears and distresses may be expected to arise.”—*The Christian System*, by the Rev. Thomas Robinson, Vicar of St. Mary’s, Leicester, 1795.

(30) “Salvation, and the joy of salvation, are not always contemporaneous; the latter does not always accompany the former in present experience. A sick man may be under a process of recovery, and yet be in doubt concerning the restoration of his health. Pain and weakness may cause him to hesitate. A child may be heir to his estate or kingdom, and yet derive no joy from the prospect of his future inheritance. He may be unable to trace his genealogy, or to read his title-deeds, and the testament of his father; or with a capacity of reading them he may be unable to understand their import, and his guardian may for a time deem it right to suffer him to remain in ignorance. But his ignorance does not affect the validity of his title. Personal assurance of salvation is not necessarily connected with faith. They are not essentially the same. Every believer might indeed infer, from the effect produced in his own heart, his own safety and privileges; but many who truly believe are unskillful in the word of righteousness, and fail of drawing the conclusion from scriptural premises which they would be justified in drawing.”—*Lectures on the 51st Psalm*, by the Rev. Thomas Biddulph, Minister of St. James’, Bristol, 1830.

## 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 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 drawn and described in the Bible, form a most useful part of Holy Scripture. Abstract doctrines, and principles, and precepts, are all most valuable in their way; but after all, 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 in this paper 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 the *Epistle to the 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 cheering and encouraging to a converted Jew. I suppose no members of the early Church found so much difficulty in a profession of Christianity as the Hebrews did. The way was narrow to all, but pre-eminently so to them. The cross was heavy to all, but surely they had to carry double weight. And this chapter would refresh them like a cordial; it would be as “wine to those that be of heavy hearts.” Its words would “be pleasant as the honey-comb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.” (Pro 31:6; 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 examples to us beyond question. But we cannot literally do what most of them did, however much we may drink into their spirit. We are not called upon to offer a literal sacrifice like Abel, or to build a literal ark like Noah, or to leave our country literally, dwell in tents, and offer up our Isaac like Abraham. But the faith of Moses comes nearer to us. It seems to operate in a way more familiar to our own experience. It made him take up a line of conduct such as we must sometimes take up ourselves in the present day, each in our own walk of life, if we would be consistent Christians. And for this reason I think these three verses deserve more than ordinary consideration.

Now I have nothing but the simplest things to say about them. I shall only try to show the greatness of the things Moses did, and the principle on which he did them. And then perhaps we shall be better prepared for the practical instruction which the verses appear to hold out to every one who will receive it.

### I. What Moses Gave Up

First, then, 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.

(1) He gave up **rank 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 gone further than that: she had adopted him and educated him as her own son.



If some writers of history may be trusted, 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!<sup>49</sup> That may be, or may not; we cannot tell. It is enough for us to know that, from his connection with Pharaoh's daughter, Moses might have been, if he had pleased, 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 first (if not the very first) in all the land of Egypt.

Let us think, for a moment, how great this temptation was.

Here was a man of like passions with ourselves. He might have had as much greatness as earth can well give. Rank, power, place, honour, titles, dignities—all were before him, and within his grasp. These are the things for which many men are continually struggling. These are the prizes 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 the scale of society, to get a handle to their names—these are the very things for which many sacrifice time, thought, health, and life itself. But Moses would not have them as a gift. He turned his back upon them. He refused them. He gave them up!

(2) And more than this, he refused *pleasure*.

Pleasure of every kind, no doubt, was at his feet, if he had liked to take it up—sensual pleasure, intellectual pleasure, social pleasure—whatever could strike his fancy. Egypt was a land of artists, a residence of learned men, a resort of everyone who had skill or science of any description. There was nothing which could feed the “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life,” which one in the place of Moses might not easily have possessed as his own (1Jo 2:16).

Let us think again, how great was this temptation also.

Pleasure, be it remembered, 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 grand object to which a schoolboy looks forward. Pleasure and satisfaction in making himself independent is the mark on which the young man in business fixes his eye. Pleasure and ease in retiring from business with a fortune is the aim which the merchant sets before him. Pleasure and bodily comfort at his own home is the sum of the poor man's wishes. Pleasure and fresh excitement in politics, in travelling, in amusements, in company, in books—this is the goal towards which the rich man is straining. Pleasure is the shadow which all alike are hunting—high and low, rich and poor, old and young, one with another—each, perhaps, pretending to despise his neighbour for seeking it—each in his own way seeking it for himself—each secretly wondering that he does not find it—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 would not have it. He turned his back upon it. He refused it. He gave it up!

(3) And more than this, he refused *riches*.

“The treasures in Egypt” is an expression that seems to tell of boundless wealth which Moses might have enjoyed, had he been content to remain with Pharaoh's daughter. We may well suppose these “treasures” would have been a mighty fortune. Enough is still remaining in Egypt to give us some faint idea of the money at its King's disposal. The pyramids, and obelisks, and temples, and statues are still standing there as witnesses. The ruins at Carnac, and Luxor, and 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 which even our modern minds would find it hard to reckon up and estimate.

Let us think once more, how great was this temptation.

Let us consider, for a moment, the power of money—the immense influence that “the love of money” obtains over men's minds. Let us look around us and observe how men covet it, and what amazing pains and trouble they will go through to obtain it.

Tell them of an island many thousand miles away, where something may be found which may be profitable, if imported, and at once a fleet of ships will be sent to get it. Show them a way to make one per cent more of their money, and they will reckon you among the wisest of men. They will almost fall down and worship you. To possess money seems to hide defects, to cover over faults and to clothe a man with virtues. People can get over much, if you are rich! But here is a man who might have been rich, and would not. He would not have Egyptian treasures. He turned his back upon them. He refused them. He gave them up!

Such were the things that Moses refused—rank, 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, “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Act 7:22). He could weigh both sides of the question.

Add to it that he did not refuse them *because he was obliged*. He was not like the dying man, who tells us “he craves nothing more in this world;” and why? Because he is leaving the world, and cannot keep it. He was not like the pauper, who makes a merit of necessity, and says “he does not want riches;” and why? Because he cannot get them. He was not like the old man who boasts that “he has laid aside worldly pleasures;” and why? Because he is worn out, and cannot enjoy them. No! Moses refused what he might have enjoyed. Rank, pleasure, and riches did not leave him, but he *left them*.

And then judge whether I am not right in saying that his was one of the greatest sacrifices mortal man ever made. Others have refused much, but none, I think, so much as Moses. Others have done well in the way of self-sacrifice and self-denial, but he excels them all.

<sup>49</sup> In Eastern countries the liberty to adopt children who are not blood-relatives, and to give them the privileges of sons, is notoriously carried out most extensively.

## II. What Moses Chose

And now let me go on to the second thing I wish to consider. I will speak of *what Moses chose*.

I think his choices as wonderful as his refusals. He chose these three things for his soul's sake. The road to salvation led through them, and he followed it; and in so doing he chose three of the last things that man is ever disposed to take up.

(1) 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 an enslaved and persecuted people—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 a thing never likely to be obtained, however much desired. In fact, if ever man seemed to be choosing pain, trials, poverty, want, distress, anxiety, perhaps even death, with his eyes open, Moses was that man.

Let us think how wonderful was this choice.

Flesh and blood naturally shrink from pain. It is in us all to do so. We draw back by a kind of instinct from suffering, and avoid it if we can. If two courses of action are set before us, which 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 use every means to escape it. And when it does come, we often fret and murmur under the burden of it; and if we can only bear it patiently, we count it a great matter.

But look here! Here is a man of like passions with ourselves, and he actually chooses affliction! Moses saw the cup of suffering that was before him if he left Pharaoh's court, and he chose it, preferred it, and took it up.

(2) But he did 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 rank, and riches, and luxury, came down from his high estate, and cast in his lot with poor men—slaves, serfs, helots,<sup>50</sup> pariahs,<sup>51</sup> bondservants, oppressed, destitute, afflicted, tormented—labourers in the brick-kiln.

How wonderful, once more, was this choice!

Generally speaking, we think it enough to carry our own troubles. We may be sorry for others whose lot is to be despised. We may even try to help them. We may give money to raise them. We may speak for them to those on whom they depend; but here we generally stop.

But here is a man who does far more. He not merely feels for despised Israel, but actually goes down to them, adds himself to their society, and lives with them altogether. You would wonder if some great man in Grosvenor or Belgrave Square were to give up house, and fortune, and position in society, and go to live on a small allowance in some narrow lane in Bethnal Green, for the sake of doing good. Yet 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.

(3) But he did even more; he chose ***reproach and scorn***.

Who can conceive the torrent of mockery and ridicule that Moses would have to stem, in turning away from Pharaoh's court to join Israel! Men would tell him he was mad, foolish, weak, silly, out of his mind. He would lose his influence; he would forfeit the favour 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!

Let us think again, what a choice this was!

There are few things more powerful than ridicule and scorn. It can do far more than open enmity and persecution. Many a man who would march up to a cannon's mouth, or lead a forlorn hope, or storm a breach, has found it impossible to face the mockery of a few companions, and has flinched from the path of duty to avoid it. To be laughed at! To be made a joke of! To be jested and sneered at! To be reckoned weak and silly! To be thought a fool! There is nothing grand in all this, and many, alas, cannot make up their minds to undergo it!

Yet here is a man who made up his mind to it, and did not shrink from the trial. Moses saw reproach and scorn before him, and he chose them, and accepted them for his portion.

Such then were the things that Moses chose: affliction, the company of a despised people, and scorn.

Set down beside all this, that Moses was no weak, ignorant person, who did not know what he was about. You are specially told he was "mighty in words and in deeds;" and yet he chose as he did (Act 7:22)!

Set down, too, the circumstances of his choice. He was not obliged to choose as he did. None compelled him to take such a course. The things he took up 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.

And then judge whether it is not true that his choices were as wonderful as his refusals. Since the world began, I suppose, none ever made such a choice as Moses did in our test.

<sup>50</sup> **helot** – a serf, a class of serfs in ancient Sparta.

<sup>51</sup> **pariah** – an outcast, a member of low-caste agricultural workers in southern India.

### III. The Principle Which Moved Moses

And now let me go on to a third thing: *let me speak of the principle which moved Moses*, and made him do as he did.

How can this conduct of his be accounted for? What possible reason can be given for it? To refuse that which is generally called good, to choose that which is commonly thought evil, this is not the way of flesh and blood. This is not the manner of man; this requires some explanation. What will that explanation be?

We have the answer in the text. I know not 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 mainspring of his incredible 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 him that a Saviour was to be born of the stock of Israel, that mighty promises were bound up in these children of Abraham, and yet to be fulfilled, that the time for fulfilling a portion of these promises was at hand; and Moses put credit in this, and believed. And every step in his wonderful career, every action in his journey through life after leaving Pharaoh's court—his choice of seeming evil, his refusal of seeming good—all must be traced up to this fountain; all will be found to rest on this foundation. God had spoken to him, and he had faith in God's word.

He believed that God would *keep His promises*—that what He had said He would surely do, and what He had covenanted He would surely perform.

He believed that with God *nothing was impossible*. Reason and sense might say that the deliverance of Israel was out of the question: the obstacles were too many, the difficulties too great. But faith told Moses that God was all-sufficient. God had undertaken the work, and it would be done:

He believed that God was *all wise*. Reason and sense might tell him that his line of action was absurd; 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.

He believed that God was *all merciful*. Reason and sense might hint that a more pleasant manner of deliverance might be found, that some compromise might be effected, and many hardships be avoided. But faith told Moses that God was love, and 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 goodly land afar off—rest, peace, and victory, when dim-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 rank and greatness was of the earth, earthy, a poor, vain, empty thing, frail, fleeting, and passing away; and that there was no true greatness like that of serving God. He was the king, he the true nobleman who belonged to the family of God. It was better to be last in heaven than first in hell.

*Faith told Moses* that worldly pleasures were "pleasures of sin." They were mingled with sin, led to sin, were ruinous to the soul, and displeasing to God. It would be small comfort to have pleasure while God was against him. Better suffer and obey God, than be at ease and sin.

*Faith told Moses* that these pleasures after all were only for a "season." They could not last; they were all short-lived; they would weary him soon; he must 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, where rust could not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. The crown there would be incorruptible; the weight of glory would be exceeding and eternal; and faith bade him look away to an unseen heaven if his eyes were dazzled with Egyptian gold.

*Faith told Moses* that affliction and suffering were not real evils. They were the school of God, in which He trains the children of grace for glory; the medicines which are needful to purify our corrupt wills, the furnace which must burn away our dross, the knife which 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, and the covenant, and the promises, and the glory; that of them the seed of the woman was one day to be born, who should 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 approach and scorn poured out on him was "the reproach of Christ;" that it was honourable to be mocked and despised for Christ's sake, that whoso 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.

All this, and much more, of which I cannot speak particularly, Moses saw by faith. These were the things he believed, and believing, did what he did. He was persuaded of them, and embraced them...

- he reckoned them as certainties,
- he regarded them as substantial verities,
- he counted them as sure as if he had seen them with his own eyes,
- he acted on them as realities—

and this made him the man that he was. He had faith. He believed.

Marvel not that he refused greatness, riches, and pleasure. He looked far forward. He saw with the eye of faith kingdoms crumbling into dust, riches taking to themselves wings and fleeing away, pleasures leading on to death, and Christ only and His little flock enduring forever.

Wonder not that he chose affliction, a despised people, and reproach. He beheld things below the surface. He saw with the eye of faith: affliction lasting but for a moment, reproach rolled away and ending in everlasting honour, and the despised people of God reigning as kings with Christ in glory.

And was he not right? Does he not speak to us, though dead, this very day? The name of Pharaoh's daughter has perished, or at any rate is extremely doubtful. 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 is still a standing witness that "whoso liveth by faith, happy is he."

#### IV. Practical Lessons from Moses

And now let me wind up all by trying to set forth in order *some practical lessons, which appear to me to follow as legitimate consequences*, from this history of Moses. What has all this to do with us?, some men will say. We do not live in Egypt. We have seen no miracles. We are not Israelites. We are weary of the subject.

Stay a little, if this be the thought of your heart, and by God's help I will show you that all may learn here, and all may be instructed. He that would live a Christian life, and be a really holy man, let him mark the history of Moses and get wisdom.

(1) For one thing, ***if you would ever be saved, you must make the choice that Moses made—you must choose God before the world.***

Mark well what I say. Do not overlook this, though all the rest be forgotten. I do not say that the statesman must throw up his office, and the rich man forsake his property. Let no one fancy that I mean this. But I say, if a man would be saved, whatever be his rank in life, he must be prepared for tribulation. He must make up his mind to choose much which seems evil, and to give up and refuse much which seems good.

I dare say this sounds strange language to some who read these pages. I know well you may have a certain form of religion, and find no trouble in your way. There is a common, worldly kind of Christianity in this day, which many have, and think they have enough—a cheap Christianity which offends nobody, and is worth nothing. I am not speaking of religion of this kind.

But if you really are in earnest about your soul, if your religion is something more than a mere fashionable Sunday cloak, if you are determined to live by the Bible, if you are resolved to be a New Testament Christian, then, I repeat, you will soon find you must carry a cross. You must endure hard 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 men are still the same. The offense of the cross is 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 a weak enthusiast and a fool.

But the matter comes to this. Do you wish your soul to be saved? Then remember, you must choose whom you will serve. You cannot serve God and mammon. 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 which the world considers foolish, and to hold opinions which are only held by a few. It will cost you something. The stream is strong, and you have to stem it. The way is narrow and steep; it is no use saying it is not. But depend on it, there can be no saving religion without sacrifices and self-denial.

Now, are you making any sacrifices? Does your religion cost you anything? I put it to your conscience in all affection and tenderness. Are you, like Moses, preferring God to the world, or not? I beseech you not to take shelter under that dangerous word "we": "we ought," and "we hope," and "we mean," and the like. I ask you plainly, What are you doing *yourself*? Are you willing to give up anything which keeps you back from God? or are you clinging to the Egypt of the world, and saying to yourself, "I must have it, I must have it: I cannot tear myself away?" Is there any cross in your Christianity? Are there any sharp corners in your religion, anything that ever jars and comes in collision with the earthly-mindedness around you? or is 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 heartily joined the people of God? Are you venturing all on Christ? Search and see.

These are hard inquiries and rough questions. I cannot help it. I believe they are founded on Scripture truths. I remember it is written, "There went great multitudes with Jesus, and He turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life, also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luk 14:25-27). Many, I fear, would like glory, who have no wish for grace. They would fain have the wages but not the work; the harvest but not the labour; the reaping but not the sowing; the reward but not the battle. But it may not be. As Bunyan says, "the bitter must go before the sweet." If there is no cross, there will be no crown.

(2) 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, feeling will not, a regular use of outward forms will not, 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 so long as there is no "tribulation of persecution because of the Word;" but as soon as there is any, it will dry up. It is a clock without mainspring or weights; its face may be beautiful, you may turn its fingers round, but it will not go. A religion 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 sure and to be depended on; a real belief that what God says in the Bible is all 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 hard and disagreeable to flesh and blood, and that His way is right and all others wrong. This there must be, or you will never come out from the world, take up the cross, follow Christ, and be saved.

You must learn to believe promises better than possessions; things unseen better than things seen; things in heaven out of sight better than things on earth before your eyes; the praise of the *invisible God* better than the praise of *visible man*. Then, and then only, you will make a choice like Moses, and prefer God to the world.

Now I ask every reader, have you got this faith? If you have, you will find it possible to refuse seeming good, and choose seeming evil. 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 last. If you have not, I warn you, you will never war a good warfare, and "so run as to obtain." You will soon be offended and 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. There must be a settled 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;" "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi 1:21; 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 mocked; and
- Abraham give the choice of land to Lot, and dwell on quietly in tents; and
- Ruth cleave to Naomi, and turn away from her country and her gods; and
- Daniel continue in prayer, though he knew the lions' den was prepared; and
- the three children refuse to worship idols, though the fiery furnace was before their eyes; and
- Moses forsake Egypt, not fearing the wrath of Pharaoh.

All these acted as they did because they believed. They saw the difficulties and troubles of this course. But they saw Jesus by faith above them all, and they pressed on. Well may the Apostle Peter speak of faith as "precious faith" (2Pe 1:1).

(3) The third thing I say is this, ***the true reason why so many are worldly and ungodly persons is that they have no faith.***

We must be aware that multitudes of professing Christians would never think for a moment of doing as Moses did. It is useless to speak smooth things, and shut your eyes to the fact. That man 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 may not like to admit this, and we try hard to blink the fact. But so it is.

And 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 want of time, some of the peculiar difficulties of their position, some of the cares and anxieties of life, some of the strength of temptation, some of the power of passions, and some of the effects of bad companions. But what does it come to after all? There is a far shorter 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*.

They do not really think what God says is true. They secretly flatter themselves with the notion, "It will surely not be fulfilled, there must surely be some other way to heaven beside that which ministers speak of, there cannot surely be so much danger of being lost." In short, they do not put implicit confidence in the words that God has written and spoken, and so do not act upon them.

They do not thoroughly believe...

- hell, and so do not flee from it,
- nor heaven, and so do not seek it,
- nor the guilt of sin, and so do not turn from it,
- nor the holiness of God, and so do not fear Him,
- nor their need of Christ, and so do not trust in Him, nor love Him.

They do not feel confidence in God, and so venture nothing for Him. Like the boy Passion, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, they must have their good things now. They do not trust God, and so they cannot wait.

Now how is it with ourselves? Do we believe all the Bible? Let us ask ourselves that question. Depend on it, it is a much greater thing to believe all the Bible than many suppose. Happy is the man who can lay his hand on his heart and say, "I am a *believer*."

We talk of infidels sometimes as if they were the rarest people in the world. And I grant that open avowed infidelity is happily not very common now. But there is a vast amount of practical infidelity around us, for all that, which is as dangerous in the end as the principles of Voltaire and Paine. There are many who Sunday after Sunday repeat the creed, and make a point of declaring their belief in all that the Apostolic and Nicene forms contain. And yet these very persons will live all the week as if Christ had never died, and as if there were no judgment, and no resurrection of the dead, and no life everlasting 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. And yet their lives show plainly they know not anything as they ought to know; and the saddest part of their state is that they think they do!

It is an awful truth, and worthy of all consideration, that knowledge not acted upon, in God's sight, is not merely 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 man's practice is not worthy of the name. There are only two classes in the Church of Christ, those who believe and those who do not. The difference between the true Christian and the mere outward professor just lies in one word—the true Christian is like Moses, “He has faith;” the mere outward professor has none. The true Christian believes, and therefore lives as he does; the mere professor does not believe, and therefore is what he is. Oh, where is our faith? Let us not be faithless, but believing.

(4) The last thing I say is this, *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 and talk too much, about graces, and gifts, and attainments, and do not sufficiently remember that *faith* is the root and mother of them all. In walking with God, a man will go just as far as he believes, and no further. His life will always be proportioned to his faith. His peace, his patience, his courage, his zeal, his works—all will be according to his faith.

You read the lives of eminent Christians, of such men as Wesley, or Whitefield, or Venn, or Martyn, of Bickersteth, or Simeon, or M'Cheyne. And you are disposed to say, “What wonderful gifts and graces these men had!” I answer, you should rather give honour to the mother-grace which God puts forward in the eleventh chapter of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*: you should give honour to their *faith*. Depend on it, faith was the mainspring in the character of each and all.

I can fancy someone saying, “They were so prayerful—that made them what they were.” I answer, why did they pray much? Simply because they had much faith. What is prayer, but faith speaking to God?

Another perhaps will say, “They were so diligent and laborious—that accounts for their success.” I answer, why were they so diligent? Simply because they had faith. What is Christian diligence, but faith at work?

Another will tell me, “They were so bold—that rendered them useful.” I answer, why were they so bold? Simply because they had much faith. What is Christian boldness, but faith honestly doing its duty?

And another will cry, “It was their holiness and spirituality—that gave them their weight.” For the last time I answer, what made them holy? Nothing but a living, realizing spirit of faith. What is holiness, but faith visible and faith incarnate?

Now, does any reader of this paper desire to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus? Would you bring forth much fruit? Would you be eminently holy and useful? Would you be bright, and shine as a light in your day? Would you, like Moses, make it clear as noonday that you have chosen God before the world? I dare be sure that every believer will reply, “Yes! these are the things we long for and desire.”

Then take the advice I give you this day, go and cry to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the disciples did, “Lord, increase our faith” (Luk 17:5). Faith is the root of a real Christian's character. Let your root be right, and your fruit will soon abound. Your spiritual prosperity will always be according to your faith. He that believeth shall not only be saved, but shall never thirst, shall overcome, shall be established, shall walk firmly on the waters of this world, and shall do great works.

Reader, if you believe the things contained herein, and desire to be a thoroughly holy man, *begin to act on your belief*. Take Moses for your example. Walk in his steps. *Go and do likewise.*

## 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. The man whose name heads this page is set for a beacon to the whole Church of Christ. His character is put before us in one little word, “He lingered.” Let us sit down and look at this beacon for a few minutes. Let us consider Lot.

Who is this man that lingered? It is the nephew of faithful Abraham. And when did he linger? The very morning Sodom was to be destroyed. And where did he linger? Within the walls of Sodom itself. And before whom did he linger? 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 ought to sound like a trumpet in the ears of all who make any profession of religion. I trust they will make every reader of this paper think. Who knows but they are the very words your soul requires? The voice of the Lord Jesus commands you to “remember Lot's wife” (Luk 17:32). The voice of one of His ministers invites you this day to remember Lot.

Let me try to show:

- I. *What Lot was* himself;
- II. What the text already quoted tells you of *his behaviour*;
- III. What *reasons* may account for his lingering;
- IV. What *kind of fruit* his lingering brought forth.

I ask 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.”

## I. What was Lot?

Once more, I say, *Lot is a beacon*.

This is a most important point. If I leave it unnoticed, I shall perhaps miss that class of professing Christians I want especially to benefit. If I did not make it quite clear, many would perhaps say, after reading this paper, "Ah! Lot was a bad man, a poor, wicked, dark creature—an unconverted man, a child of this world! No wonder he lingered."

But mark now what I 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.

Has any one of my readers grace in his heart? So also had Lot. Has any one of my readers a hope of salvation? So also had Lot. Is any one of my readers a traveller in the narrow way which leads unto life? So also was Lot.

Let no one think this is only my private opinion, a mere arbitrary fancy of my own, a notion unsupported by Scripture. Let no one suppose I want him to believe it merely because I say it. The Holy Ghost has placed the matter beyond controversy, by calling him "just" and "righteous" (2Pe 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 (2Pe 2:8), and yet was not wicked himself. Now to be a Daniel in Babylon, an Obadiah in Ahab's house, an Abijah in Jeroboam's family, a saint in Nero's court, and a "righteous man" in Sodom, a man must have the grace of God. Without grace it would be impossible.

A second evidence is that he "vexed his soul with the unlawful deeds" he beheld around him (2Pe 2:8). He was wounded, grieved, pained, and hurt at the sight of sin. This was feeling like holy David, who says, "I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved, because they kept not thy word;" "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law" (Psa 119:136, 158). This was feeling like St. Paul, who says, "I have great sorrow and continual heaviness in my heart...for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:2-3). Nothing will account for this but the grace of God.

A third evidence is that he "vexed his soul from day to day" with the unlawful deeds he saw (2Pe 2:8). He did not at length become cool 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 a man is shocked and startled at the first sight of wickedness, and yet becomes at last so accustomed to see it, that he views it with comparative unconcern. This is especially the case with those who live in towns and cities, or with English people who travel on the Continent. Such persons often become utterly indifferent about Sabbath-breaking, and many forms of open sin. But it was not so with Lot. And this, again, is a great mark of the reality of his grace.

Such an one was Lot—a just and righteous man, a man sealed and stamped as an heir of heaven by the Holy Ghost Himself.

Before we pass on, let us remember that a true Christian may have many a blemish, many a defect, many an infirmity, and yet be a true Christian nevertheless. 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 find that Lot paid dearly for his "lingering." But do not forget, as you read, that Lot was a child of God.

## II. Lot's Behaviour

Let us pass on to the second thing I spoke of. *What does the text, already quoted, tell us about Lot's behaviour?*

The words are incredible and astounding: "He lingered." The more we consider the time and circumstances, the more incredible we shall think them.

Lot knew the awful condition of the city in which he stood. "The cry" of its abominations "had waxen great before the Lord" (Gen 19:13). And yet "he lingered."

Lot knew the fearful judgment coming down on all within its walls. The angels had said plainly, "The Lord hath sent us to destroy it" (Gen 19:13). And yet "he lingered."

Lot knew that God was a God who always kept His word, and if He said a thing would surely do it. He could hardly be Abraham's nephew, and live long with him, 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" (Gen 19:14). And yet "he lingered."

Lot saw the angels of God standing by, waiting for him and his family to go forth. He heard the voice of those ministers of wrath ringing in his ears to hasten him, "Arise! take thy wife and thy two daughters which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city" (Gen 19:15). And 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 hastening,
- loitering when he should have been hurrying, and
- cold when he should have been hot.

It is passing strange! It seems almost unbelievable! It appears too incredible to be true! But the Spirit writes it down for our learning. And so it was.

And yet, incredible as it may appear at first sight, I fear there are many of the Lord Jesus Christ's people very like Lot.

I ask every reader of this paper to mark well what I say. I repeat it that there may be no mistake about my meaning. I have shown you that Lot "lingered." I say that there are many Christian men and Christian women in this day very like Lot.

There are many real children of God who appear to know far more than they live up to, and see far more than they practise, and yet continue in this state for many years. Incredible that they go as far as they do, and yet go no further!

They acknowledge the Head, even Christ, and love the truth. They like sound preaching, and assent to every article of Gospel doctrine, when they hear it. But still there is an indescribable *something* which is not satisfactory about them. They are constantly doing things which disappoint the expectations of their ministers, and of more advanced Christian friends. Marvellous that they should think as they do, and yet stand still!

They believe in heaven, and yet seem faintly to long for it.

They believe also in hell, and yet seem little to fear it.

They love the Lord Jesus; but the work they do for Him is small.

They 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 a man 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; and yet they appear half asleep.

Astonishing they should be what they are, and yet be nothing more!

And what shall we say of these people? They often puzzle godly friends and relations. They often cause great anxiety. They often give rise to great doubts and searchings of heart. But they may be classed under one sweeping description: they are all brethren and sisters of Lot. *They linger.*

These are they who get the notion into their minds that it is impossible for all believers to be so very holy and very spiritual! They allow that eminent 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 are meant to aim at so high a standard. At any rate, they seem to make up their minds it is beyond their reach.

These are they who get into their heads false ideas of *charity*, as they call it. They are morbidly afraid of being illiberal and narrow-minded, and are always flying into the opposite extreme. They would fain please everybody, and suit everybody, and be agreeable to everybody. But they forget they ought first to be sure that they please God.

These are they who dread personal sacrifices, and shrink from self-denial. They never appear able to apply our Lord's command, to "take up the cross," and "cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye" (Mat 5:29-30). They cannot deny that our Lord used these expressions, but they never find a place for them in their religion. They spend their lives in trying to make the gate more wide, and the cross more light. But they never succeed.

These are they who are always trying to keep in with the world.

They are ingenious in discovering reasons for not separating decidedly, and in framing plausible excuses for attending questionable amusements, and keeping up questionable friendships. One day you are told of their attending a Bible-reading: the next day perhaps you hear of their going to a ball. One day they fast, or go to the Lord's table and receive the sacrament: another day they go to the race-course in the morning and the opera at night. One day they are almost in hysterics under the sermon of some sensational preacher: another day they are weeping over some novel. They are constantly labouring to persuade themselves that to mix a *little* with worldly people on their own ground does good. Yet in their case it is very clear they do no good, and only get harm.

These are they who cannot find it in their hearts to quarrel with their besetting sin, whether it be sloth, indolence, ill-temper, pride, selfishness, impatience, or what it may. They allow it to remain a tolerably quiet and undisturbed tenant of their hearts. They say, "it is their health, or their constitutions, or their temperaments, or their trials, or their way. Their father, or mother, or grandmother, was so before themselves, and they are sure they cannot help it." And when you meet after the absence of a year or so, you hear the same thing!

But all, all, all may be summed up in one single sentence. They are the brethren and sisters of Lot. *They linger.*

Ah, if you are a lingering soul, you are not happy! You know you are not. It would be strange indeed if you were so. Lingerer is the sure destruction of a happy Christianity. A lingerer's conscience forbids him to enjoy inward peace.

Perhaps at one time you did run well. But you have left your first love—you have never felt the same comfort since, and you never will till you return to your "first works" (Rev 2:5). Like Peter, when the Lord Jesus was taken prisoner, you are following the Lord afar off; and, like him, you will find the way not pleasant, but hard.

Come and look at Lot. Come and mark Lot's history. Come and consider Lot's "lingering," and be wise.

### III. The Reasons for Lot's Lingerer

Let us next consider *the reasons that may account for Lot's lingering.*

This is a question of great importance, and I ask most serious attention to it. To know the root of a disease is one step towards a remedy. He that is forewarned is forearmed.

Who is there among the readers of this paper that 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 at last.

(1) One thing then I observe in Lot is this, *he made a wrong choice in early life.*

There was a time when Abraham and Lot lived 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” (Gen 13:9).

And what did Lot do? We are told he saw that the plains of Jordan, near Sodom, were rich, fertile, and well watered. It was a good land for cattle, and full of pastures. He had large flocks and herds, and it just suited his requirements. And this was the land he chose for a residence, simply because it was a rich, “well watered land” (Gen 13:10).

It was near the town of Sodom! He cared not for that. The men of Sodom, who would be his neighbours, were wicked! It mattered not. They were sinners before God exceedingly! It made no difference to him. The pasture was rich. The land was good. He wanted such a country for his flocks and herds. And before that argument all scruples and doubts, if indeed he had any, at once went down.

- a) He chose by sight, and not by faith.
- b) He asked no counsel of God, to preserve him from mistakes.
- c) He looked to the things of time, and not of eternity.
- d) He thought of his worldly profit, and not of his soul.
- e) 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.

(2) But I observe also that ***Lot mixed with sinners when there was no occasion for his doing so.***

We are first told that he “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Gen 13:12). This, as I have already shown, was a great mistake.

But the next time he is mentioned, we find him actually living in Sodom itself. The Spirit says expressly, “He dwelt in Sodom” (Gen 14:12). His tents were left. The country was forsaken. He occupied a house in the very streets of that wicked town.

We are not told the reason of this change. We are not aware that any occasion could have arisen for it. We are sure there could have been no command of God. Perhaps his wife liked the town better than the country, for the sake of society. It is plain she had no grace herself. Perhaps she persuaded Lot it was needful for the advantage of his daughters, that they might marry, and get settled in life. Perhaps the daughters urged living in the town for the sake of happy company: they were evidently light-minded young women. Perhaps Lot liked it himself, in order to make more of his flocks and herds. Men never want reasons to confirm their wills. But one thing is very clear, Lot dwelt in the midst of Sodom without good cause.

When a child of God does these two things which I have named, we never need be surprised if we hear, by and by, unfavourable accounts about his soul. We never need wonder if he becomes deaf to the warning voice of affliction, as Lot was (Gen 14:12), and turns out a lingerer in the day of trial and danger, as Lot did.

Make a wrong choice in life, an unscriptural choice, and settle yourself down unnecessarily in the midst of worldly people, and I know no surer way to damage your own spirituality, and to go backward about your eternal concerns. This is the way to make the pulse of your soul beat feebly and languidly. 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, till you can scarcely distinguish good from evil, and stumble as you walk. This is the way to bring a moral palsy on your feet and limbs, and make you go tottering and trembling along the road to Zion, as if the grasshopper was a burden. This is the way to sell the pass to your worst enemy, to give the devil vantage-ground in the battle, to tie your arms in fighting, to fetter your legs in running, to dry up the sources of your strength, to cripple your energies, 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 of this book to mark well what I am saying. Settle these things down in your mind. Do not forget them. Recollect them in the morning. Recall them to memory at night. Let them sink down deeply into your heart. If ever you would be safe from “lingering,” beware of needless mingling with worldly people. Beware of Lot’s choice! If you would not settle down into a dry, dull, sleepy, lazy, barren, heavy, carnal, stupid, torpid state of soul, *beware of Lot’s choice!*

(a) Remember this ***in choosing a dwelling-place, or residence.*** It is not enough that the house is comfortable, the situation good, the air fine, the neighbourhood pleasant, the rent or price small, and the living cheap. There are other things yet to be considered. You must think of your immortal soul. Will the house you think of help you towards heaven or hell? Is the gospel preached within an easy distance? Is Christ crucified within reach of your door? Is there a real man of God near, who will watch over your soul? I charge you, if you love life, not to overlook this. *Beware of Lot’s choice.*

(b) Remember this ***in choosing a calling, a place, 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 getting on most favourable. Think of your soul, 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 beseech you, by the mercies of God, to take heed what you do. Make no rash decision. Look at the place in every light—the light of God as well as the light of the world. Gold may be bought too dear. *Beware of Lot’s choice.*

(c) 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 find congeniality, that there is amiability and affection, and that there is a comfortable home for life. There needs something more than this. There is a life yet to come. Think of your soul, your immortal soul. Will it be helped upwards or dragged downwards by the union you are planning? Will it be made more heavenly or more earthly, drawn nearer to Christ or to the world? Will its religion grow in vigour, or will it decay? I pray you, by all your hopes of glory, allow this to enter into your calculations. “Think,” as old Baxter said, and “think, and think again,” before you commit yourself. “Be not unequally yoked” (2Co 6:14). Matrimony is nowhere named among the means of conversion. *Remember Lot’s choice.*

(d) Remember this, ***if you are ever offered a situation on a railway.*** It is not enough to have good pay and regular employment, the confidence of the directors, and the best chance of rising to a higher post. These things are very well in their way, but they are not everything. How will your soul fare if you serve a railway company that runs Sunday trains? 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 purse, if you bring leanness and poverty on your soul. Beware of selling your Sabbath for the sake of a good place! Remember Esau's mess of pottage. *Beware of Lot's choice!*

Some reader may perhaps think, "A believer need not fear; he is a sheep of Christ, he will never perish, he cannot come to much harm. It cannot be that such small matters can be of great importance."

Well, you may think so. But I warn you, if you neglect these matters, your soul will never prosper. A true believer will certainly not be cast away, although he may linger. But if he does linger, it is vain to suppose that his religion will thrive. Grace is a tender plant. Unless you cherish it and nurse it well, it will soon become sickly in this evil world. It may droop, though 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 letting alone, or a little cold water to become black and hard.

You may be an earnest, zealous Christian now. You may feel like David in his prosperity: "I shall never be moved" (Psa 30:6). But be not deceived. You have only got to walk in Lot's steps and make Lot's choice, and you will soon come to Lot's state of soul. Allow yourself to do as he did, presume to act as he acted, and be very sure you will soon discover you have become a wretched "lingerer" like him. You will find, like Samson, the presence of the Lord is no longer with you. You will prove, to your own shame, an undecided, hesitating man, in the day of trial. There will come a canker on your religion, and eat out its vitality without your knowing it. There will come a slow consumption on your spiritual strength, and waste it away insensibly. And at length you will wake up to find your hands hardly able to do the Lord's work, and your feet hardly able to carry you along the Lord's way, and your faith no bigger than a grain of mustard seed; and this, perhaps, at some turning point in your life, at a time when the enemy is coming in like a flood, and your need is the sorest. (See Psalm 106:15.)

Ah, if you would not become a lingerer in religion, consider these things! Beware of doing what Lot did!

#### IV. The Fruit of Lot's Life

Let us inquire now *what kind of fruit* Lot's lingering spirit bore at last.

I would not pass over this point for many reasons, and especially in the present day. There are not a few who will feel disposed to say, "After all, Lot was saved: he was justified, he got to heaven. I want no more. If I do but get to heaven, I shall be content." If this be the thought of your heart, just stay a moment, and listen to me a little longer. I will show you one or two things in Lot's history which deserve attention, and may perhaps induce you to alter your mind.

I think it of first importance to dwell upon this subject. I always will contend that eminent holiness and eminent usefulness are most closely connected, that happiness and "following the Lord fully" go side by side—and that if believers will linger, they must not expect to be useful in their day and generation, or to be very saintly and Christlike, or to enjoy great comfort and peace in believing.

(a) Let us mark, then, for one thing, 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 of the things of God, and trying to turn away souls from sin. But Lot seems to have effected just 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 which even the men 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 neighbours believed his testimony. Not one of his acquaintances honoured the Lord whom he worshipped. Not one of his servants served his master's God. Not one of "all the people from every quarter" cared a jot for his opinion when he tried to restrain their wickedness. "This one fellow came in to sojourn," said they, "and he will needs be a judge" (Gen 19:9). His life carried no weight; his words were not listened to; his religion drew none to follow him.

And, truly, I do not wonder! As a general rule, lingering souls do no good to the world and bring no credit to God's cause. Their salt has too little savour to season the corruption around them. They are not "epistles of Christ" who can be "known and read of all" (2Co 3:2). There is nothing magnetic, and attractive, and Christ-reflecting about their ways. Let us remember this.

(b) Let us mark, for another thing, that ***Lot helped none of his family, relatives, or connections towards heaven.***

We are not told how large his family was. But this we know, he had a wife and two daughters at least, in the day he was called out of Sodom, if he had not more children besides.

But whether Lot's family was large or small, one thing, I think, is perfectly clear, there was not one among them all that feared God!

When he "went out and spake to his sons-in-law, which married his daughters," and warned them to flee from the judgments coming on Sodom, we are told, "he seemed to them as one that mocked" (Gen 19:14). What fearful words those are! It was as good as saying, "Who cares for anything *you* say?" So long as the world stands, those things will be a painful proof of the contempt with which a "lingerer" in religion is regarded.

And what was Lot's wife? She left the city in his company, but she did not go far. She had not faith to see the need of such a speedy flight. She left her heart in Sodom when she began to flee. She looked back from behind her husband, in spite of the plainest command not to do so (Gen 19:17), and was at once turned into a pillar of salt.

And what were Lot's two daughters? They escaped, indeed, but only to do the devil's work. They became their father's tempters to wickedness, and led him to commit the foulest of sins.

In short, 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!

And I do not wonder. Lingering souls are seen through by their own families; and, when seen through, they are despised. Their nearest relatives understand inconsistency, if they understand nothing else in religion. They draw the sad, but not unnatural, conclusion, "Surely, if he believed all he professes to believe, he would not go on as he does." Lingering parents seldom 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.

(c) Let us mark, for a third thing, that *Lot left no evidences behind him when he died.*

We know but little about Lot after his flight from Sodom, and all that we do know is unsatisfactory.

His pleading for Zoar, because it was "a little one," his departure from Zoar afterwards, and his conduct in the cave—all, all tell the same story. All show the weakness of the grace that was in him, and how low the state of soul into which he had fallen.

We know not how long he lived after his escape. We know not where he died or when he died, whether he saw Abraham again, what was the manner of his death, and what he said or what he thought. All these are hidden things. We are told of the last days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, 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 latter end. He seems to go out like an expiring lamp, and to leave an ill-savour behind him. And had we not been specially told in the New Testament that Lot was "just" and "righteous," I verily believe we should have doubted whether Lot was a saved soul at all.

But I do not wonder at his sad end. Lingering 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 last. They reach heaven, to be sure; but they reach it in poor plight, weary and footsore, in weakness and tears, in darkness and storm. They are saved, but "saved so as by fire" (1Co 3:15).

I ask every reader of this paper to consider the three things which I have just mentioned. Do not misunderstand my meaning. It is amazing to observe how readily people catch at the least excuse for misunderstanding the things that concern their souls!

I do not tell you that believers who do *not* "linger" will, as a matter of course, be great instruments of usefulness to the world. Noah preached one hundred and twenty years, and none 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, as a matter of course, be the means of converting their families and relatives. David's children were, many of them, ungodly. The Lord Jesus was not believed on even by His own brethren.

But I do say it is almost impossible not to see some connection between Lot's evil choice and Lot's lingering—and between Lot's lingering and his unprofitableness to his family and the world. I believe the Spirit meant us to see it. I believe the Spirit meant to make him a *beacon* to all professing Christians. And I am sure the lessons I have tried to draw from the whole history deserve serious reflection.

## Parting Words

And now let me speak a few parting words to all who read this paper, and especially to all who call themselves believers in Christ.

I have no wish to make your hearts sad. I do not want to give you a gloomy view of the Christian course. My only object is to give you friendly warnings. I desire your peace and comfort. I would fain see you happy as well as safe—and joyful, as well as justified. I speak as I have done for your good.

You live in days when a lingering, Lot-like religion abounds. The stream of profession is far broader than it once was, but far less deep in many places. A certain kind of Christianity is almost fashionable now...

- to belong to some party in the Church of England, 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, to subscribe to associations, to discuss the merits of preachers,
- to be enthusiastic and excited about every new form of sensational religion which crops up...

all these are now comparatively easy and common attainments. They no longer make a person singular. They require little or no sacrifice. They *entail no cross*.

But...

- to walk closely with God,
- to be really spiritually-minded,
- to behave like strangers and pilgrims,
- to be distinct from the world in employment of time, in conversation, in amusements, in dress,
- to bear a faithful witness for Christ in all places,
- to leave a savour of our Master in every society,
- to be prayerful, humble, unselfish, good-tempered, quiet, easily pleased, charitable, patient, meek,
- to be jealously afraid of all manner of sin, and tremblingly alive to our danger from the world...

these, these are still rare things! They are not common among those who are called true Christians, and, worst of all, the absence of them is not felt and bewailed as it should be.

In a day like this I venture to offer counsel to every believing reader of this paper. Do not turn away from it. Do not be angry with me for plain speaking. I bid you “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2Pe 1:10). I bid 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 never can be done—I mean, to serve Christ and yet keep in with the world. I call upon you, and beseech you to be a whole-hearted Christian, to follow after eminent holiness, to aim at a high degree of sanctification, to live a consecrated life, to present your body a “living sacrifice” unto God, to “walk in the spirit” (Rom 12:1; Gal 5:25). I charge you, and exhort you—by all your hopes of heaven and desires of glory, if you would be happy, if you would be useful—*do not be a lingering soul.*

Would you know what the times demand? The shaking of nations, the uprooting of ancient things, the overturning of kingdoms, the stir and restlessness of men’s minds—what do they say? They all cry aloud, *Christian! do not linger!*

Would you be found ready for Christ at His second appearing; your loins girded, your lamp burning and yourself bold and prepared to meet Him? *Then do not linger!*

Would you enjoy much sensible comfort in your religion; feel the witness of the Spirit within you, know whom you have believed and not be a gloomy, complaining, sour, downcast, and melancholy Christian? *Then do not linger!*

Would you enjoy strong assurance of your own salvation, in the day of sickness, and on the bed of death? Would you see with the eye of faith heaven opening and Jesus rising to receive you? *Then do not linger!*

Would you leave great broad evidences behind you when you are gone? Would you like us to lay you in the grave with comfortable hope, and talk of your state after death without a doubt? *Then do not linger!*

Would you be useful to the world in your day and generation? Would you draw men from sin to Christ, adorn your doctrine, and make your Master’s cause beautiful and attractive in their eyes? *Then do not linger!*

Would you help your children and relatives towards heaven, and make them say, “We will go with you,” and not make them infidels and despisers of all religion? *Then do not linger!*

Would you have a great crown in the day of Christ’s appearing, and 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, death does not, judgment does not, the devil does not and the world does not. Neither let the children of God linger.

Does any reader feel that he is a lingerer? Has your heart felt heavy, and your conscience sore, while you have been reading these pages? Does something within you whisper, “I am the man”? 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 a thing is to do it. *Do this at once!*

Think not for a moment your case is past recovery. Think not, because you have been long living in a dry, sleepy, and heavy state of soul, 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 devil? Did He not raise poor back-sliding Peter, and put a new song in his mouth? Oh, doubt not, but earnestly believe that He will yet revive His work within you! Only return from lingering, and confess your folly, and come—come at once to Christ. Blessed are the words of the prophet “Only acknowledge thine iniquity.” “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding” (Jer 3:13, 22).

And 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, try to arouse them and try to stir them up. Let us all “exhort one another” as we have opportunity; “Let us provoke unto love and good works” (Heb 3:13; 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.*”

## 10. A Woman to Be Remembered

*“Remember Lot’s wife.”—Luke 17:32*

THERE are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than that which heads this page. The Lord Jesus Christ says to us, “Remember Lot’s wife.”

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

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

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

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

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

It is a solemn warning, when we consider *the manner* in which it was given. He does not merely say, "Beware of following—take heed of imitating—do not be like Lot's wife." He uses a different word: He says, "Remember." He speaks as if we were all in danger of forgetting the subject; He stirs up our lazy memories; He bids us keep the case before our minds. He cries, "Remember Lot's wife."

I propose to examine the lessons which Lot's wife is meant to teach us. I am sure that her history is full of useful instruction to the churches. The last days are upon us; the second coming of the Lord Jesus draws nigh; the danger of worldliness is yearly increasing in the churches. Let us be provided with safeguards and antidotes against the disease that is around us. And, not least, let us become familiar with the story of Lot's wife.

There are three things which I shall do, in order to bring the subject before our minds in order.

- I. I will speak of the *religious privileges* which Lot's wife enjoyed.
- II. I will speak of the *sin* which Lot's wife committed.
- III. I will speak of the *judgment* which God inflicted upon her.

## I. Religious Privileges Which Lot's Wife Enjoyed

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

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

When Abraham first received the promises, it is probable Lot's wife was there. When he built his altar by his tent between Hai and Bethel, it is probable she was there (Gen 12:8). When her husband was taken captive by Chedorlaomer, and delivered by God's interference, she was there (Gen 14). When Melchizedek, king of Salem, came forth to meet Abraham with bread and wine, she was there (Gen 14:18). When the angels came to Sodom and warned her husband to flee, she saw them; when they took them by the hand and led them out of the city, she was one of those whom they helped to escape (Gen 19). Once more, I say, these were no small privileges.

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

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

Learn, then, that ***the mere possession of religious privileges will save no one's soul***. You may have spiritual advantages of every description; you may live in the full sunshine of the richest opportunities and means of grace; you may enjoy the best of preaching and the choicest instruction; you may dwell in the midst of light, knowledge, holiness, and good company. All this may be, and yet you yourself may remain unconverted, and at last be lost for ever.

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

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

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

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

I ask the servants of religious families to mark well what I am saying. It is a great privilege to live in a house where the fear of God reigns. It is a privilege to hear family prayers morning and evening, to hear the Word of God regularly expounded, to have a quiet Sunday, and to be able always to go to church. These are the things that you ought to seek after when you try to get a situation; these are the things which make a really good place. High wages and light work will never make up for a constant round of worldliness, Sabbath-breaking, and sin. But take heed that you do not rest content with these things. Do not suppose because you have all these spiritual advantages, that you will of course go to heaven. You must have grace in your own heart, as well as attend family prayers. If not, *you are at present no better than Lot's wife*.

I ask the children of religious parents to mark well what I am saying. It is the highest privilege to be the child of a godly father and mother, and to be brought up in the midst of many prayers. It is a blessed thing indeed to be taught the gospel from our earliest infancy, and to hear of sin, and Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, and holiness, and heaven, from the first moment we can remember anything. But, oh, take heed that you do not remain barren and unfruitful in the sunshine of all these privileges; beware lest your heart remains hard, impenitent and worldly—notwithstanding the many advantages you enjoy. You cannot enter the kingdom of God on the credit of your parents' religion. You must eat the bread of life for yourself, and have the witness of the Spirit in your own heart. You must have repentance of your own, faith of your own, and sanctification of your own. If not, *you are no better than Lot's wife*.

I pray God that all professing Christians, in these days, may lay these things to heart. May we never forget that privileges alone cannot save us. Light and knowledge, and faithful preaching, and abundant means of grace, and the company of holy people—these are all great blessings and advantages. Happy are they that have them! But, after all, there is one thing without which privileges are useless: that one thing is the grace of the Holy Ghost. Lot's wife had many privileges, but Lot's wife had no grace.

## II. The Sin Which Lot's Wife Committed

I will next speak of *the sin which Lot's wife committed*. The history of her sin is given by the Holy Ghost in few and simple words, "She looked back from behind her husband, and she became a pillar of salt." We are told no more than this. There is a naked solemnity about the history. The sum and substance of her transgression lies in these three words, "She looked back."

Does that sin seem small in the eyes of any reader of this paper? Does the fault of Lot's wife appear a trifling one to be visited with such a punishment? This is the feeling, I dare say, that rises in some hearts. Give your attention while I reason with you on the subject. There was far more in that look than strikes you at first sight; it implied far more than it expressed. Listen, and you shall hear.

(a) 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 man's mind even better than great ones, and little symptoms are often the signs of deadly and incurable diseases. The apple that Eve ate was a little thing, but it proved that she had fallen from innocence and become a sinner. A crack in an arch seems a little thing, but it proves that the foundation is giving way, and the whole fabric is unsafe. A little cough in a morning seems an unimportant ailment, but it is often an evidence of failing in the constitution, and leads on to decline, consumption, and death. A straw may show which way the wind blows, and one look may show the rotten condition of a sinner's heart (Mat 5:28).

(b) That look was a little thing, but *it told of disobedience* in Lot's wife. The command of the angel was strait and unmistakable: "Look not behind thee." (Gen 19:17.) This command Lot's wife refused to obey. But the Holy Ghost says that "to obey is better than sacrifice," and that "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1Sa 15:22-23). When God speaks plainly by His Word, or by His messengers, man's duty is clear.

(c) 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 appeared not to believe there was any danger, or any need for such hasty flight. "But without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). The moment a man begins to think he knows better than God, and that God does not mean anything when He threatens, his soul is in great danger. When we cannot see the reason of God's dealings, our duty is to hold our peace and believe.

(d) That look was a little thing, but *it told of 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 pole. And this was the crowning point of her sin: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (Jam 4:4). "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1Jo 2:15).

I ask the special attention of my readers to this part of our subject. I believe it to be 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 fair and specious, but she never really gave up the world. She seemed at one time in 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 grand lesson which the Lord Jesus means us to learn. Oh, that we may all have an eye to see and a heart to understand!

I believe there never was a time when warnings against worldliness were so much needed by the Church of Christ as they are at the present day. Every age is said to have its own peculiar epidemic disease; the epidemic disease to which the souls of Christians are liable just now is the love of the world. It is a pestilence that walketh in darkness, and a sickness that destroyeth at noonday. It "hath cast down many wounded; yea, many strong men have been wounded by it" (Pro 7:26). I would fain raise a warning voice, and try to arouse the slumbering consciences of all who make a profession of religion. I would fain cry aloud, "Remember the sin of Lot's wife." She was no murderess, no adulteress, no thief, but she was a professor of religion, and she *looked back*.

There are thousands of baptized persons in our churches who are proof against immorality and infidelity, and yet fall victims to the love of the world. There are thousands who run well for a season, and seem to bid fair to reach heaven, but by and by give up the race, and turn their backs on Christ altogether. And what has stopped them? Have they found the Bible not true? Have they found the Lord Jesus fail to keep His Word? No, not at all. But they have caught the epidemic disease; they are infected with the love of this world. I appeal to every true-hearted evangelical minister who reads this paper: I ask him to look round his congregation. I appeal to every old-established Christian: I ask him to look round the circle of his acquaintance. I am sure that I am speaking the truth. I am sure that it is high time to remember the sin of Lot's wife.

(a) How many *children of religious families* begin well and end ill! In the days of their childhood they seem full of religion. They can repeat texts and hymns in abundance; they have spiritual feelings and convictions of sin; they profess to love the Lord Jesus and desire after heaven; they take pleasure in going to church and hearing sermons; they say things which are treasured up by their fond parents as indications of grace; they do things which make relations say, "What manner of child will this be?" But, alas, how often their goodness vanishes like the morning cloud, and like the dew that passes away! The boy becomes a young man, and cares for nothing but amusements, field-sports, revelling, and excess. The girl becomes a young woman, and cares for nothing but dress, gay company, novel-reading, and excitement. Where is the spirituality which once appeared to promise so fair? It is all gone; it is buried; it is overflowed by the love of the world. They walk in the steps of Lot's wife. *They look back*.

(b) How many *married people* do well in religion 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. They regularly attend the preaching of the gospel; they are fruitful in good works; they are never seen in vain and dissipated society. Their faith and practice are both sound, and walk hand in hand. But, alas, 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 forward in life. A leaven of worldliness begins to appear in their habits, dress, entertainments, and employment of time. They are no longer strict about the company they keep and the places they visit. Where is the decided line of separation which they once observed? Where is the unswerving abstinence from worldly amusements which once marked their course? It is all forgotten. It is all laid aside, like an old almanack. 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*.

(c) How many *young women* seem to love decided religion until they are twenty or twenty-one, and then lose all! Up to this time of their life their conduct in religious 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; they teach in Sunday schools when there is an opening; they minister to the temporal and spiritual wants of the poor; they like religious friends; they love to talk on religious subjects; they write letters full of religious expressions and religious experience. But alas, how often they prove 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 out of their minds the "things unseen," and like the plague of locusts, eat up every green thing in their souls. Step by step they go back from the decided position they once took up. They cease to be jealous about sound doctrine; they pretend to find out that it is "uncharitable" to think one person has more religion than another; they discover 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 pretence to decided religion. 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*.

(d) How many *church members* were at one time zealous and earnest professors, and have now become torpid,<sup>52</sup> formal, and cold! Time was when none seemed so much alive in religion as they were. None were so diligent in their attendance on the means of grace; none were so anxious 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.

<sup>52</sup> **torpid** – without movement or feeling; benumbed.

But now, alas, everything seems altered! The “love of other things” has taken possession of their hearts, and choked the good seed of the Word. The money of the world, the rewards of the world, the literature of the world, the honours of the world, have now the first place in their affections. Talk to them, and you will find no response about spiritual things. Mark their daily conduct, and you will see no zeal about the kingdom of God. A religion they have indeed, but it is living religion no more. The spring of their former Christianity is dried up and gone; the fire of the spiritual machine is quenched and cold. Earth has put out the flame which once burned so brightly. They have walked in the steps of Lot’s wife. They have *looked back*.

(e) How many **clergymen** work hard in their profession for a few years, and then become lazy and indolent from the love of this present world! At the outset 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: cottage lectures, prayer meetings, house-to-house visitation, are their weekly delight. But alas, how often after “beginning in the Spirit” they end “in the flesh,” and, like Samson, are shorn of their strength in the lap of that Delilah, the world! They are preferred to some rich living; they marry a worldly wife; they are puffed up with pride, and neglect study and prayer. A nipping frost cuts off the spiritual blossoms which once bade so fair. Their preaching loses its unction and power; their week-day 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 imbibe a morbid fear of “extreme views,” and are filled with a cautious dread of giving offense. And at last the man who at one time seemed likely to be a real successor of the apostles and a good soldier of Christ, settles down on his lees as a clerical gardener, farmer, or diner-out, by whom nobody is offended and nobody is saved. His church becomes half empty; his influence dwindles away; the world has bound him hand and foot. He has walked in the steps of Lot’s wife. He has *looked back*.<sup>53</sup>

It is sad to write of these things, but it is far more sad to see them. It is sad to observe how professing Christians can blind their consciences by specious arguments on this subject, and can defend positive worldliness by talking of the “duties of their station,” the “courtesies of life,” and the necessity of having a “cheerful religion.”

It is sad to see how many a gallant ship launches forth on the voyage of life with every prospect of success and, springing this leak of worldliness, goes down with all her freight in full view of the harbour of safety. It is saddest of all to observe how many flatter themselves that it is all right with their souls when it is all wrong, by reason of this love of the world. Grey hairs are here and there upon them, and they know it not. They began with Jacob, and David, and Peter, and they are likely to end with Esau, and Saul, and Judas Iscariot. They began with Ruth, and Hannah, and Mary, and Persis, and they are likely to end with Lot’s wife.

Beware of a half-hearted religion. Beware of following Christ from any secondary motive: to please relations and friends, to keep in with the custom of the place or family in which you reside, and 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, be whole-hearted. If you have any religion at all, let your religion 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 religion, and of secretly trying to keep in with the world. I want no reader of this paper to become a hermit, a monk, or a nun; I wish every one to do his real duty in that state of life to which he is called. But I do urge on every professing Christian who wishes to be happy, the immense importance of *making 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 lest you overreach yourself, and end by losing all. Love Christ with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Seek first the kingdom of God, and believe that then all other things shall be added to you. Take heed that you do not prove a copy of the character John Bunyan draws, Mr. Facing-both-ways. For your happiness’ sake, for your usefulness’ sake, for your safety’s sake, for your soul’s sake, beware of the sin of Lot’s wife. Oh, it is a solemn saying of our Lord Jesus, “No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luk 9:62).

### III. The Punishment of Lot’s Wife

I will now speak, in the last place, of *the punishment which 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.” A miracle was wrought to execute God’s judgment on this guilty woman. The same Almighty hand which 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. To die amidst kind friends and relations, to die calmly and quietly in one’s bed, to die with the prayers of godly men still sounding in your ears, to die with a good hope through grace in the full assurance of salvation, leaning on the Lord Jesus, buoyed up by gospel promises—to die even so, I say, is a 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 [Anglican] Prayer-book litany, as some do, for retaining this 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

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<sup>53</sup> “Remember Dr. Dodd! I myself heard him tell his own flock, whom he was lecturing in his house, that he was obliged to give up that method of helping their souls, because it exposed him to so much reproach. He gave it up, and fell from one compliance to another with his corrupt nature; and under what reproach did he die!” [He was hanged for forgery.]

– *Venn’s Life and Letters*, p. 238, Edition of 1853.



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 on the case of the penitent thief; we whisper to ourselves, that saving work *may* have gone on even on that dying bed which the dying person had not strength to tell. But there is an end of all such hopes when a person is suddenly cut down in the very act of sin. Charity 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 all to mark these things. It is good to be reminded that God can punish sharply those who sin willfully, and that great privileges misused bring down great wrath on the soul.

Pharaoh saw all the miracles which 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 hard by his door. Ananias and Sapphira joined the church in the days when the apostles were working miracles. And Judas Iscariot was a chosen companion of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself! But 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, unrenewed, and utterly unfit for heaven. And being dead they yet speak. They tell us, like Lot's wife, that it is a perilous thing to sin against light, that God hates sin, and that there is a hell.

### *About Hell*

I feel constrained to speak freely to my readers on the subject of hell. Suffer me to use the opportunity which the end of Lot's wife affords. I believe the time is 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. Men are beginning to tell us "that God is too merciful to punish souls for ever, 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, and the devil, and punishment, are obsolete and old-fashioned. We are to embrace what is called a "kinder theology," and treat hell as a pagan fable, or a bugbear to frighten children and fools. Against such false teaching I desire, for one, to protest. Painful, sorrowful, distressing as the controversy may be, we must not blink at 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 the book of *Revelation*. It is a question which lies at the very foundation of the whole gospel. The moral attributes of God, His justice, His holiness, His purity, are all involved in it. The necessity of personal faith in Christ, and the sanctification of the Spirit, are all at stake. Once let the old doctrine about hell be overthrown, and the whole system of Christianity is unsettled, unscrewed, unpinned, and thrown into disorder.

Believe me, the question is not one in which we are obliged to fall back on the theories and inventions of man. The Scripture has spoken plainly and fully on the subject of hell. I hold it to be 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 it. If language has any sense belonging to it, hell is forever. I believe that the man 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.

(a) Settle it firmly in your mind, that the same Bible which teaches that God in mercy and compassion sent Christ to die for sinners, does also teach that ***God hates sin, and must from His very nature punish*** all who cleave to sin, or refuse the salvation He has provided. The very same chapter which declares, "God so loved the world," declares also, that "the wrath of God abideth" on the unbeliever (Joh 3:16, 36). The very same Gospel which is launched into the earth with the blessed tidings, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," proclaims in the same breath, "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mar 16:16).

(b) 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; 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, the utter destruction of the seven nations of Canaan—all teach the same awful truth. They are all given to us as beacons, and signs, and warnings, that we may not provoke God. They are all meant to lift up the corner of the curtain which 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 turned into hell" (Psa 9:17).

(c) 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 which should make men 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 spake as never man spake, and who said "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me" (Joh 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 which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself employs. Away with the miserable nonsense which people talk in this day, 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 man can honestly read the four Gospels and fail to see that he who would follow the example of Christ *must* speak of hell.

(d) Settle it, lastly, in your mind, that ***the comforting ideas which the Scripture gives us of heaven are at an end, if we once deny the reality or eternity of hell.*** Is there no future separate abode for those who die wicked and ungodly? Are all men, after death, to be mingled together in one confused multitude? Why then, heaven will be no heaven at all! It is utterly impossible for two to dwell happily together except they be agreed. Is there to be a time when the term of hell and punishment will be over? Are the wicked after ages of misery to be admitted into heaven? Why then, the need of the sanctification of the Spirit is cast aside and despised! I read that men can be sanctified and made meet 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 allow that hell is not eternal, and you may as well say that God and heaven are not eternal. The same Greek word which is used in the expression, “everlasting punishment,” is the word that is used by the Lord Jesus in the expression, “life eternal,” and by Paul in the expression, “everlasting God” (Mat 25:46; Rom 16:26).

I know that all this sounds dreadful in many ears. I do not wonder. But the only question we have to settle 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 make it odious by invidious names. I have often heard of “narrow-minded views, and old-fashioned notions, and brimstone theology,” and the like. I have often been told that “broad” views are wanted in the present day. I wish to be as broad as the Bible, neither less nor more. I say that he is the narrow-minded theologian, who pares down such parts of the Bible as the natural heart dislikes, and rejects any portion of the counsel of God.

God knows that I never speak of 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 profligate of mankind on his deathbed, “Repent, and believe on Jesus, and thou shalt be saved” (Act 16:31). But God forbid that I should ever keep back from mortal man that Scripture reveals a hell as well as heaven, and that the gospel teaches that men 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; and the minister who keeps back hell from his people in his sermons is neither a faithful nor a charitable man.

Where is the charity of keeping back any portion of God’s truth? He is the kindest friend who tells me the whole extent of my danger. Where is the use of hiding the future from the impenitent and the ungodly? Surely it is like helping the devil, if we do not tell them plainly that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze 18:4, 20). Who knows but the wretched carelessness of many baptized persons arises from this, that they have never been told plainly of hell? Who can tell but thousands might be converted, if ministers would urge them more faithfully to flee from the wrath to come? Verily, I fear we are many of us guilty in this matter; there is a morbid tenderness amongst us which 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 wretched fear of being thought “low, vulgar and fanatical.” We have forgotten that He who judgeth us is the Lord, and that the man who teaches the same doctrine that Christ taught cannot be wrong.

If you would ever be a healthy scriptural Christian, I entreat 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 of mercy; and that the same everlasting counsels which 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 unrenewed, are utterly unfit for the presence of God and must be lost for ever. 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. Oh, it is a great thing in these days of unbelief to believe the whole Bible!

If you would ever be a healthy and scriptural Christian, I entreat you to ***beware of any ministry which 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 portion of God’s truth without spoiling the whole. That preaching is sadly defective which dwells exclusively on the mercies of God and the joys of heaven, and never sets forth the terrors of the Lord and the miseries of hell. It may be popular, but it is not scriptural; it may amuse and gratify, but it will not save. Give me the preaching which keeps back nothing that God has revealed. You may call it stern and harsh; you may tell us that to frighten people is not the way to do them good. But you are forgetting that the grand object of the gospel is to persuade men to “flee from the wrath to come” (Luk 3:7), and that it is vain to expect men to flee unless they are afraid. Well would it be for many professing Christians if they were more afraid about their souls than they now are!

If you desire to be a healthy 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 always—there must be an end one day. The last sermon will one day be heard; the last prayer will one day be prayed; the last chapter in the Bible will one day be read—meaning, wishing, hoping, intending, resolving, doubting, hesitating—all will at length be over. You will have to leave this world and to stand before a holy God. Oh, that you would be wise! Oh, that you would consider your latter end!

You cannot trifle for ever: a time will come when you must be serious. You cannot put off your soul’s concerns for ever: a day will come when you must have a reckoning with God. You cannot be always singing, dancing, eating, drinking; dressing, reading, laughing, and jesting; scheming, planning, and money-making. The summer insects cannot always sport in the sunshine; the cold chilly evening will come at last, and stop their sport for ever. So will it be with you. You may put off religion now, and refuse the

counsel of God's ministers; but the cool of the day is drawing on, when God will come down to speak with you. And what will your end be? Will it be a hopeless one, like that of Lot's wife?

I beseech you, by the mercies of God, to look this question fairly in the face. I entreat you not to stifle conscience by vague hopes of God's mercy, while your heart cleaves to the world. I implore you not to drown convictions by childish fancies about God's love, while your daily ways and habits show plainly that "the love of the Father is not in" you (1Jo 2:15). There is mercy in God like a river, but it is for the penitent believer in Christ Jesus. There is a love in God towards sinners which is unspeakable and unsearchable, but it is for those who "hear Christ's voice and follow him" (Joh 10:27). Seek to have an interest 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, which interferes with your soul's salvation; give up everything, however precious, which comes between you and heaven. This old shipwrecked world is fast sinking beneath your feet; the one thing needful is to have a place in the lifeboat and get safe to shore. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Whatever happens to your house and property, see that you make sure of heaven. Oh, better a million times be laughed at and thought extreme in this world than go down to hell from the midst of the congregation, and end like Lot's wife!

### Questions for Consciences

And now, let me conclude this paper by offering to all who read it, a few questions to impress the subject on their consciences. You have seen the history of Lot's wife, her privileges, her sin, and her end. You have been told of the uselessness of privileges without the gift of the Holy Ghost, of the danger of worldliness, and of the reality of hell. Suffer me to wind up all by a few direct appeals to your own heart. In a day of much light, knowledge, and profession, I desire to set up a beacon to preserve souls from shipwreck. I would fain moor a buoy in the channel of all spiritual voyagers, and paint upon it, "Remember Lot's wife."

(a) Are you ***careless about the second advent of Christ?*** Alas, many are! They live like the men of Sodom, and the men 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 an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(b) Are you ***lukewarm, and cold in your Christianity?*** Alas, many are! They try to serve two masters; they labour to keep friends both with God and mammon. They strive to be a kind of spiritual bat, neither one thing nor the other: not quite a thorough-going Christian, but not quite men of the world. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(c) Are you ***halting between two opinions***, and disposed to go back to the world? Alas, many are! They are afraid of the cross; they secretly dislike the trouble and reproach of decided religion. They are weary of the wilderness and the manna, and would fain return to Egypt if they could. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(d) Are you ***secretly cherishing some besetting sin?*** Alas, many are! They go far in a profession of religion; they do many things that are right, and are very like the people of God. But there is always some darling evil habit, which they cannot tear from their heart. Hidden worldliness, or covetousness, or lust, sticks to them like their skin. They are willing to see all their idols broken, but that one. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(e) Are you ***trifling with little sins?*** Alas, many are! They hold the great essential doctrines of the gospel. They keep clear of all gross profligacy, or open breach of God's law; but they are painfully careless about little inconsistencies, and painfully ready to make excuses for them. "It is only a little temper, or a little levity, or a little thoughtlessness, or a little forgetfulness." They tell us, "God does not take account of such little matters. We are none of us perfect; God will never require it." If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(f) Are you ***resting on religious privileges?*** Alas, many do! They enjoy the opportunity of hearing the gospel regularly preached, and of attending many ordinances and means of grace, and they settle down on their lees. They seem to be "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev 3:17); while they have neither faith, nor grace, nor spiritual-mindedness nor readiness for heaven. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(g) Are you ***trusting to your religious knowledge?*** Alas, many do! They are not ignorant, as other men; they know the difference between true doctrine and false. They can dispute, they can reason, they can argue, they can quote texts; but all this time they are not converted, and they are yet dead in trespasses and sins. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(h) Are you ***making some profession of religion***, and yet clinging to the world? Alas, many do! They aim at being thought Christians. They like the credit of being serious, steady, proper, regular, church-going people. Yet all the while their dress, their tastes, their companions, and their entertainments tell plainly they are of the world. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(i) Are you ***trusting that you will have a death-bed repentance?*** Alas, many do so! They know they are not what they ought to be: they are not yet born again, and fit to die. But they flatter themselves that when their last illness comes they shall have time to repent and lay hold on Christ, and go out of the world pardoned, sanctified, and prepared for heaven. They forget that people often die very suddenly, and that as they live they generally die. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

(j) Do you ***belong to an evangelical congregation?*** Many do, and, alas, go no further! They hear the truth Sunday after Sunday and remain as hard as the nether-millstone. 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 a favourite minister, and they also keep their favourite sins. If you are such an one, I say to you this day, Take care: "Remember Lot's wife."

Oh, may these solemn words of our Lord Jesus Christ be deeply graven on all our hearts! May they awaken us when we feel sleepy, revive us when we feel dead, sharpen us when we feel dull, and warm us when we feel cold! May they prove a spur to quicken us when we are falling back, and a bridle to check us 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 thy Saviour's warning! Soul, soul, hast thou forgotten His words? Soul, soul, *'REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE!'*" ❧

*[The first portion of this chapter is available as a tract from Chapel Library.]*

## Holiness - Part Two

***Holiness, Part Two***, also available from Chapel Library, contains the last 10 chapters of Ryle's original 21 chapters:

11. *Christ's Greatest Trophy* – the penitent thief's evidences of holiness.
12. *The Ruler of the Waves* – coming to a right understanding of who Jesus is, even in the midst of pain and suffering.
13. *The Church which Christ Builds* – the visible churches and the invisible true Church of Christ.
14. *Visible Churches Warned* – true holiness leans on Christ, not on our religious professions.
15. *"Lovest Thou Me?"* – God's love in us and reflected through us to others; love as the primary motivation for holiness.
16. *"Without Christ"* – the necessity for Christ in the holy life contrasted with existence without Christ.
17. *Thirst Relieved* – the great hope of the growing Christian: true satisfaction of all our desires and needs in Christ.
18. *"Unsearchable Riches"* – magnifying the greatness of God's salvation and sanctification
19. *Wants of the Times* – what most nominal Christians settle for in lieu of vital victorious relationship with Christ.
20. *"Christ Is All"* – the fitting conclusion: Christ is our life!