Practical Religion

Horatius Bonar

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Words of Warning

"Woe unto the wicked! It shall be ill with him."—Isaiah 3:11
"To whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever."—2 Peter 2:17

Unconverted Sinner, thy state is sad, and thy misery is great! No tongue can tell how sad is that state—no soul can conceive how great is that misery. Thine heart may well meditate terror, for thou art still unpardoned, uncleansed, unsaved! Thy feet are just about to stumble upon the dark mountains; and woe, woe, yea, ten thousand times woe to thy poor soul, if this night it were required of thee. Poor forlorn soul! Thou hast no God, and therefore thou hast no happiness! Thou hast no Christ, and therefore thou hast no pardon, no peace! Thou art without a father, without a friend, without a hope, and without a home! This earth is truly to thee "a wilderness and a land of darkness." Thou walkest through it a houseless, homeless wanderer; no arm to lean upon, no chosen companion of your secret thoughts and feelings; no friend to soothe your griefs or share your joys! Thou mayest have what men call a father, a brother, a home, on earth; but thou canst not call God thy father, nor Jesus thy brother, nor heaven thy home above! Thou wanderest on from day to day, a houseless, homeless outcast, seeing nothing around thee but trouble and sorrow, and nothing before thee or above thee but the blackness of darkness forever (Jud 13)!

Thou art an enemy to God (Rom 8:7)! And who has ever hardened his heart against Him and prospered? An enemy to the blessed God! An enemy to Him that made thee—to One that has never wronged thee in ought—to One that has loved thee with a love so true and tender as to give for thee His only begotten Son! Yea, thou hatest Him (Joh 15:24)! Thou treatest Him as if He were some hateful and hated fellow worm, whose company thou couldest not endure (Job 16:14). Oh, what vile ingratitude, what desperate malignity, thus to return enmity for friendship, hatred and scorn for gentleness and love! The most loveable object in all the universe is the object that thou hatest most! Oh, what madness, what enormous wickedness!

Thou art a child of wrath! And oh, what words can express, or what mind can conceive, all that is meant by this? Everything threatens wrath to thee. Thou dost not yet, indeed, gnaw thy tongue for pain, or gnash thy teeth in agony, but thou shalt shortly do so, if grace prevent not. I dare not call thee a "vessel of wrath fitted for destruction" (Rom 9:22); for who knows but thy God may yet pluck thee as a brand from the burning; but at least I know that, so long as thou remainest unconverted, thou art treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. And if to be a child of wrath be so awful a thing, even when seen afar off in this place of mercy, oh, what must be the horrors of that wrath throughout eternity! A child of wrath!—that is, all made up of wrath: whose very being is wrath! The air thou shalt breathe in shall be wrath—burning wrath! The light in which thou shalt dwell shall be scorching wrath; how different from the pleasant sunshine of earth, and the cool fresh air of morning. Wrath shall be within thee and around thee, above thee and beneath thee: wrath shall throb in every pulse and flow in every vein! And it shall be forever! Oh, that word which sums up all despair! Forever! The eternal wrath of the eternal God; the unchangeable wrath of the unchangeable God! Poor child of wrath, wilt thou not turn and flee?

Thou art a child of the devil (Mat 13:38; Act 13:10)! Satan is thy master, and thou art his willing slave. Poor miserable soul, canst thou be content with such a master and such a bondage? Remember! Thy bondage is eternal, thy chains eternal, thy prison house eternal, thy torment and thy tormentors are eternal! If thou diest out of Christ, hell must be thy habitation forever. Oh, what an abode!—amidst flames and wrath; echoing eternally with wailings of woe that might melt the very mountain rock! It is called "a lake burning with fire and brimstone" (Rev 21:8; Psa 11:6); that is, with the hottest, fiercest,

most penetrating, most tormenting of all flames. It is called a lake. Not a river, whose waters of burning anguish might be dried up or pass away; nor a sea which ebbs and flows, and whose wide extent, or perpetual change, or windswept surface might furnish some respite, some cooling relief. No; but a lake—still, stagnant, gloomy, and unchangeable! But more than this—thy soul itself shall be its own hell. Even were there no flames without, the furnace within shall be torment beyond endurance. Thy passions, thy unsatisfied desires, thy conscience, will be thy worse tormentors, worse than all the fiends of darkness—tormentors from which thou canst not flee. All that thou mightest have gained, and all that thou hast lost forever, shall curse thee with their bitter memory. Earth lost—friends lost—possessions lost—time lost—the soul lost—heaven lost—eternity undone! Poor sinner, why wilt thou not live? Precious immortal, why wilt thou die (Pro 1:23; Eze 33:11)?

Poor Christless soul, what a bitter lot is thine! What a doom of wrath and woe! To be tormented day and night forever, in presence of the holy angles and in presence of the Lamb! The bottomless pit encloses thee forever, and seals thy everlasting despair. Ah! The most distant and lonely hill of immortality would be welcome in comparison with this; aye, the gloomiest wilderness of earth would be Paradise when compared with this! There joy is a thing unknown. Love is a thing forgotten, or remembered only as a part of the once-familiar scenes of earth now gone forever! No peace nor hope in all the God-forsaken regions of the damned! No Savior troubles you now with His offers of life. No God wearies you with His messages of love. Life and love belong only to heaven; and thou art in hell. Thy portion is the second death. Who shall undo your prison bolt, or unbind your chain? Who shall fetch water to pour upon the unquenchable fire, or obtain even one drop to cool your burning tongue? Who shall dig the worm that never dies out of your tortured marrow? Who shall soothe your hopeless wailing or dry up your everlasting tears? No friends now; no companions now! The mirth of the world is over, and all its glory is departed. The song and the dance are over (Job 21:12-13). The revelry of midnight is hushed, and the pleasant sunshine of earth has been exchanged for the blackness of darkness forever. With all these certainties in view, Oh! what is this world to a dying creature? What are all its pleasures or its business to a being formed for immortality? Poor dying sinner! Dost thou not know that Jesus died that He might deliver you from a present evil world? Poor child of sin and dust, wilt thou not become an heir of endless glory?

Sinner as thou art, still there is hope—hope for thee; for thou art in the place of hope. This is the acceptable year of the Lord, and God willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (1Ti 2:4; 2Pe 3:9). He has no pleasure in your death. He lays His solemn command on thee that thou shouldest believe and be saved; so that the highest act of iniquity is to refuse salvation, to refuse the free gift of life! He entreats you to turn and live. He yearns over thee with a father's tender love. Yes! The love of thy God is a true and sincere love. It is no mere idea; it is reality. The words in which He has declared this to thee are not the language of mockery; they are not mere words of course. They do mean all that they seem to do: only they come infinitely short of the sincerity, the warmth, the tenderness of His paternal affection. They are but rays from the Sun of love. They are but the scattered drops from the ocean, the measureless ocean of the Father's love!

No fondest parent's melting breast
Yearns like thy God's to make thee blest.

Poor sinner! If thou diest, it is not because of any want of love in God or any want of sufficiency in Christ. It is not because God would not be reconciled to thee, but because thou wouldest not be reconciled to God. His heart is toward thee; His desires are toward thee. He longs to welcome thee again to the family mansion, and to place thee again at the family table. Your sins and iniquities have not made Him cease to care for you. His interest in your welfare is still as sincere and deep. Not that He palliates your sin, or excuses your continuance in it—no; but that He longs to deliver you from it; and so warm

and tender is the interest which He takes in you, that He seeks to compass this deliverance by every means. Do not suppose that there must be something good about you before He can feel kindly towards you. His thoughts towards you have always been, and still are, thoughts of unutterable compassion. In your misery, in your blindness, in your forlorn state of sin and danger, there is something which calls forth the affectionate interest of Him who made you. Oh, despise not, deny not, distrust not love so infinite, so divine. Do not wait, do not delay. Do not say, "I must try to prepare myself for coming to God." No! Come at once: come as you are: come this moment! As the Lord liveth, there is but one step between you and life; one step between you and peace! Take that one step! Believe what thy God hath made known regarding His well-loved Son, "that believing, ye may have life through his name" (Joh 20:31).

Luther's Conversion

"He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters."—Psalm 18:16
"Their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord."—Isaiah 54:17

When first awakened to a sense of sin, Luther became unspeakably troubled. Once and again deep anguish took hold of his soul, and it seemed as if he would sink under it. On one occasion he had been conversing with a friend upon the things of God. No sooner had the conversation ended, than the truths of which they had been speaking struck home with awful power to the tossed soul of Luther. He left the room and sought the nearest chamber to give vent to the feelings of his bursting heart. He threw himself upon the bed and prayed aloud in agony; repeating over and over again these words of the apostle, "He hath shut them all up in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all" (Rom 11:32).

Luther now began to try to make himself holy. He fasted for days together. He shut himself up alone in his cold cell. He passed many nights, sometimes for weeks, without sleep. He read, he studied, he prayed, he wept, he watched, he strove, but all in vain! He found himself as far from holiness and peace as ever! If ever anyone could have gained heaven by his own merits, Luther would have gained it. To those around him, he seemed the holiest man alive. But the light of the law showed him that within all was vile. His soul cried out for rest, but he found it not, for he was seeking it not in God's way, but in a way of his own. He wanted to be sure that his sins were forgiven him, for he felt that until he knew this, he could not have peace. But his fear increased upon him, and he knew not what to do, nor which way to turn. He saw everything that he thought and did to be sin, and how could he rest until he knew that all was forgiven! His friends told him to do good works and that would satisfy the justice of God. Miserable comforters!

"What good works," said he, "can proceed out of a heart like mine; how can I, with works like these, stand before a holy Judge."

The terrors of the fiery law compassed him about and consumed his soul. His "sore ran in the night and ceased not." He saw nothing in God but the angry Judge. He had not yet learned the riches of His grace through Jesus Christ.

His bodily health gave way. "A wounded spirit, who can bear." He wasted away. He became thin and pale. His eyes, which were peculiarly bright, looked wild with despair; and death seemed just at hand. In this state he was visited by an old priest. His name was Staupitz (1524). He pitied the dying monk, and all the more so when he was told the cause of his suffering, for he had himself passed through the same conflict. But he had found the peace of Christ in his soul, and was therefore well fitted to give counsel to Luther.

"It is in vain," said Luther to him, "that I make promises to God; sin is always too strong for me."

"Oh, my friend," said Staupitz, "I have often made vows myself, but I never could keep them; I now make no more vows; for if God will not be merciful to me for Christ's sake, I cannot stand before Him with all my vows and works."

Luther made known to him all his fears. He spoke of God's justice, God's holiness, God's sovereign majesty. How could he stand before such a God?

"Why," said his aged friend, "do you distress yourself with these thoughts? Look to the wounds of Jesus, to the blood which He has shed for you; it is there that you will see the mercy of God. Cast yourself into the arms of the Savior. Trust in Him—in the righteousness of His life—in the atoning sacrifice of His death. Do not shrink away from Him. God is not against you; it is only you who are averse from God. Listen to the Son of God. He became man to assure you of the divine favor."

Still Luther was dark. He thought he had not repented properly, and asked, "How can I dare believe in the favor of God, so long as there is in me no real conversion? I must be changed before He can receive me."

He is told that there can be no real conversion so long as a man fears God as a stern judge. "There is," said his friend, "no true repentance but that which begins in the love of God and righteousness. That which some fancy to be the end of repentance is only its beginning. If you wish to be really converted, do not try these penances. Love Him who has first loved you."

Luther listens and is glad. The day breaks, new light pours in. "Yes," said he, "it is Jesus Christ that comforts me so wonderfully by these sweet and healing words." In order to true repentance we must love God! He had never heard this before. Taking this truth as his guide, he went to the Scriptures. He turned up all the passages which speak of repentance and conversion; and these two words which were formerly his terror, now become precious and sweet. The passages which used to alarm him, now "seemed to run to me from all sides, to smile, to spring up and play around me. Formerly I tried to love God, but it was all force; and there was no word so bitter to me as that of repentance. Now there is none more pleasant. Oh, how blessed are all God's precepts when we read them not in books only, but in the precious wounds of the Savior."

Thus he learned that we are not forgiven because we love God, but we love God because we are forgiven. We cannot repent, we cannot love, until we have known and believed the love that God hath for us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1Jo 4:10).

Still Luther's darkness at times returned. His sins again went over his soul, and hid the face of God.

"Oh, my sin! My sin! My sin!" cried he, one day to his aged friend. "What would you have?" said Staupitz. "Would you like if your sin was not real? Remember, if you have only the appearance of a sinner, you must be content with the mere appearance of a Savior. But learn this, that Jesus Christ is the Savior of those who are real and great sinners, and deserving of utter condemnation."

"Look at the wounds of Christ," said he, on another occasion, "and you will see there shining clearly the purpose of God towards men. We cannot understand God out of Christ."

But Luther's peace sometimes gave way, and his fears returned. He was taken ill and brought down to the gates of death. Terror again took hold on him. Death seemed full of gloom. It was a fearful thing to meet a holy God! An old monk visited him in his sickbed, and in him God gave him another comforter and guide. Sitting at his bedside he repeated this sentence of the Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." These words, thus simply and sweetly brought to mind, were like balm to the soul of Luther. "I believe," said he to himself, "the forgiveness of sins." "Ah, but," said the old man, "we are not merely to believe that there is forgiveness for David or Peter; the command of God is that we believe there is forgiveness for our own sins." Luther's spirit was revived. He found on this rock a sufficient resting place, and his soul rejoiced in the forgiving love of God.

Thus his weary soul found rest. He was now like a vessel that has reached its haven. No storm can reach or harm it. He was like the dove in the clefts of the rock. He was like the man who had reached the city of refuge. He found himself safe and at rest. Jehovah his righteousness was his song, and his joy. It was what he saw in Christ that gave him hope and confidence toward God, and not what he saw in himself. It was what he knew of Christ and His righteousness that took away all fear and filled his soul with peace. He believed and was forgiven. Nor did he reckon it presumption to count himself a forgiven soul. He gloried and rejoiced in this. He counted it one of the most grievous of all sins to doubt it. He saw that the gospel was intended to bring us forgiveness, and to assure us of it. He saw that whenever we really believe in the gospel, then that forgiveness is as completely and certainly ours as if we were already in heaven. This was the very life of Luther's soul. It was this that made him so bold in the cause

of Christ, in all his future life. He was assured of the favor of God, and that took away all fear of men.

There was one text of Scripture which seems to have been greatly blessed to him. It was very frequently on his mind during his many struggles. It was the text which Paul quotes from Habakkuk, to prove that we are justified by faith alone: "The just shall live by faith" (Hab 2:4).

Once, he was sent to Rome on some business, and he thought that good works done at Rome were better and had more merit than those done anywhere else. He was told that if he would crawl up a very long stair, called Pilate's staircase, on his bare knees, he would acquire a great stock of merit. With great earnestness he set himself to do this miserable penance. While he was crawling up the steps, he thought he heard a voice like thunder, saying aloud to him, "The just shall live by faith." Immediately he started from his knees, and stopped in the middle of the ascent. The words went to his soul like the voice of God reproving him for his folly. Filled with shame, he instantly left the place. He saw that it was not by his works that he was to save himself at all, far less by works such as these—"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy he saved us" (Ti 3:5).

At another time, he was appointed to lecture on divinity. After explaining the Psalms, he came to the Epistle to the Romans. In studying this he took great delight. He used to sit in his quiet cell for many hours with the Bible open before him, meditating on that Epistle. The seventeenth verse of the first chapter fixed his eye, and filled his whole thoughts: "The just shall live by faith." In this he saw that there was another life than that possessed by man in general, and that this life was the fruit of faith. In the midst of much darkness these simple words were "a lamp to his feet, and a light to his path" (Psa 119:105) Clearer light soon dawned upon his soul, and through him the bright beams of the gospel shot forth upon the benighted nations of Europe. The conversion of Luther was the dawning of the Reformation.

Sin Our Enemy and God Our Friend

"Know, therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God."—Jeremiah 2:19

"Act but the infant's gentle part, Give up to love thy willing heart,
No fondest parent's melting breast Yearns like thy God's to make thee blest."—Martin Luther (1546)

My dear reader! You have perhaps at times wished to know who were your enemies and who were your friends—whom you might trust and whom you were to shun. I have to tell you, that you have one great enemy, and that is sin—one real friend, and that is God. Oh, reader, have you ever thought on this? Sin is your soul's enemy, and God is your soul's friend. That sin which you have delighted in is your bitterest enemy—that God whom you have forsaken is your truest, tenderest friend! You have none in heaven or on earth like God; not one who takes such a deep and sincere interest in your welfare! You have forgotten Him, but He has not forgotten you. His thoughts towards you are still most tender and kind.

Perhaps you think that the very reverse of this is true. Or at least, if you do not think so, you act as if it were so. You act as if God were your greatest enemy, and sin your peculiar friend. You do not love God. You hate God. You suspect God. You turn away from God. You distrust God. You discredit all His words and professions of friendship and goodwill. You forget Him days without number. Could you do more to Him were He your bitterest enemy? On the other hand, you follow sin; you cling to sin; you delight in sin; you will part with heaven, with God, for sin; you will sell your soul for sin. Could you do more, were sin your best and truest friend? Your thoughts, your words, your feelings, your actions every day of your life, show that you really in your hearts think sin to be your real friend, and God to be your worst enemy. How fearful a state to live in! Haters of God! (Rom 1:30). Lovers of sin!

Reader, believe me—it is sin that is your real enemy! It is an evil thing and bitter to forsake God (Jer 2:19). The way of transgressors is hard!—oh, how hard! Their cup is gall and wormwood. It was sin that first drew Adam from God and drove him out of Paradise. It was sin that brought the flood of waters upon the earth. It was sin that called down fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah. It is sin that has filled the earth with misery and pain—with sorrow and sighing—with weeping eyes and broken hearts. It was sin that dug the grave and kindled hell, and brought man under the power of the devil. Oh, then, must not sin be the worst enemy of man? It is sin that separates us from God, and unfits us for enjoying Him. It is sin that robs our souls of peace, that spoils us of happiness, and fills us full of misery. It is sin that poisons the soul—that lets loose our fiery passions and inflames our lusts. It is sin that disturbs and defiles the conscience, making us a terror to ourselves, and pressing us down with a burden too heavy to be borne. It is sin that grieves, and vexes, and quenches the Holy Spirit. It is sin that takes away our relish for spiritual things; our power of realizing God and holding fellowship with Him. It is sin that darkens the mind and hardens the heart, till we become past feeling and hate the light. Oh, then, must not sin be our real enemy? Could we have a worse enemy than this?

Reader, believe me—it is God who is your soul's true and real friend. His thoughts towards you are most gracious and compassionate. He is the enemy of your sin, but not the enemy of your soul. You admit that He has the power of befriending you, and that all fullness of blessing is with Him; but perhaps you doubt His willingness to bestow His gifts. You suspect His heart. You will not believe that He has any friendly thoughts or wishes towards you, till you can bring a price in your hands, and prove that you are not altogether unworthy of His friendship. You think that He is the enemy of your soul, and will remain your enemy till you have made yourself fit for becoming the object of His regard. Now, let me

ask, has God deserved this at your hands? Has He deserved to be doubted, and to be suspected thus? Are all His professions of friendly concern for us insincere? Are they mere random declarations—mere words of course? No—my friend—no. God is your real, your true, your only friend. His interest in your welfare is unfeigned and true. In clinging to sin, you are cleaving to your worst enemy; in turning away from God you are forsaking your truest friend.

God did not send you to hell when first you sinned; He still keeps you out of hell, and gives you time to repent; He pities your misery and has no pleasure in your death. What greater proof of His tender mercy could He give, than in sparing you even for an hour? "Account that the long-suffering of our God is salvation" (2Pe 3:9, 15). He waits to be gracious to you; He longs for the return of all His prodigals—of all His wandering sheep. Does not this wear a most winning aspect towards you, even as you are? He sends His gospel to you—the glad tidings of great joy—He "publishes peace" to you through the blood of the cross; He makes known to you the work of His Son, in whom there is redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace—He throws open to you the "new and living way" (Heb 10:20) into His presence, a way in which there is not one stumbling-block, one hindrance—He proclaims to you the infinite fullness of Jesus, that out of that fullness you may receive, and grace for grace! What more could He do? If He be not a friend, who can be? Has anyone, either in heaven or in earth, done so much as this, or shown such goodwill to you, such an interest in your welfare? He strives in your heart by His Holy Spirit, awakening strange desires after Himself and after heaven—or filling you with terrors as you think upon eternity and the judgment to come. He knocks at the door of your heart; He knocks unceasingly, day and night, that He may persuade you to open and admit Him, that He may come in and sup with you, and you with Him? Would an enemy do this? Would any but a real friend show such long-suffering love—such tender concern for you? He longs to make you holy; to renew you in the spirit of your mind; He cannot bear your unholy ways, and He would fain have you made holy and blessed. If you would but allow Him, He would do this for you; He would give you His Holy Spirit to take old things away, and to make all things new. Would an enemy do this? He would rejoice over you if you would but turn and seek His face. It is said of the prodigal, that when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, welcoming him back to his house with joy and singing, "This my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found" (Luk 15:24). Would an enemy do this? Are not these the actions, the feelings of a true and tender friend—a friend whose love has been sore tried by your neglect, and coldness, and hatred, but who yet has never ceased to care for you, never ceased to yearn over you with the bowels of tenderness and compassion. Did not Jesus pray for His murderers, and was not that the prayer of a friend—of one who really cared for their souls? Did not Jesus weep over Jerusalem—and were not His tears those of real and tender pity? Did not Jesus say, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life" (Joh 5:40); and did not that show that He really wanted to give them life? Oh, reader, have you any reason for saying that God is your enemy, and desires your death? Has He ever been to you a wilderness or a land of darkness (Jer 2:31)? Have you any reason for thinking God's thoughts to you are not thoughts of tenderness—the thoughts of a real friend?

Reader, God is making proposals of friendship to you! The Most High God is asking you to become His friend! These proposals are sincere! He is really and truly seeking your friendship, and offering His own in return! Precious offer! To a worm of the dust! To a sinner, a rebel, a hater of Himself! He asks no price, no gift, no bribe! All He asks is that you would take His offer—accept His proposals, and become His friend! It matters not how far you have strayed, or how guilty you have become! It matters not how long you have slighted His proposals, and rejected His friendship, thus freely thus warmly pressed upon you. Only now take His offer! Only return! The gate is wide open to you. The welcome is sure. "Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return again to me saith the Lord" (Jer. 3:1, 4). "Wilt Thou

not, from this time, cry unto me, my father, thou art the guide of my youth" (Jer 3:4)? Be thou reconciled to God!

The Anchor of the Soul

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."—Hebrews 6:19

"He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still; then are they glad because they be quiet, so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."—Psalm 107:29-30

"Roar on, ye waves, our souls defy Your roaring to disturb our rest;
In vain t'impair the calm ye try—The calm in a believer's breast."

This world is a sea of perpetual storm; yet in it there are many souls who have found "peace and safety." All these at one time heard the fearful howling of the tempest of wrath, and were tossed with its fury—but yet they have not suffered shipwreck—they have escaped it all. They hear the tempest still, and its ground-swell often heaves them in their safe anchorage; but their security is never shaken. These are sinners who have fled to the hope set before them, "which hope they have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Heb 6:19). The world dislikes and despises these souls; for they were earnest in fleeing from the storm, and the careless world is sore galled by their unfeigned earnestness. They cast away all unnecessary lading, "count it but dung that they might win Christ" (Phi 3:8), and having so done, they found Christ an anchor, "sure and steadfast" (Heb 6:19). But the world is not possessed of this, and therefore hates those who declare it to be their only security in the time of storm. And while the sinner who has betaken himself to this hope proclaims the safety of the anchorage he has found, they who will not flee to it decry his confidence as presumption, pride, vainglory! The world feels that if he be completely safe, then they are altogether wrong—if his hope be real, then they have no hope at all.

But come and examine the anchor, and the shore on which it is cast. There is a hope set before you—a hope of escape. The voice of God in the storm urges you to flee to this hope. It is spoken of fully in Hebrews 6:19-20. It is a hope which is an anchor of the soul. This anchor is itself sure and strong. It will not break nor let go its hold. The shore too on which it is cast is so solid and firm, that the anchor fixed therein will remain steadfast in spite of storm, and wind, and dashing wave.

The anchor of the soul is found in the glad tidings concerning Christ. The awakened sinner's question is, "Will the holy God pardon my sins?" He is tossed up and down till he gets this question answered. He feels as if he were the chief of sinners, and as if it were more difficult for God to pardon him than to pardon Manasseh, or Paul, or Magdalen, or any other sinner in the world. There seems to be the black gloom of wrath, the frown of severe displeasure, on the face of God. Oh, who can tell the anguish of that soul! It wishes to be at peace, yet knows not how. It looks around for rest, but knows not where to find it.

Hear then, "O thou afflicted, and tossed with tempest" (Isa 54:11)! Behold it is written concerning the Lord Jesus, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves" (Psa 88:7). This is the voice of one who has been cast like Jonah into the waves; and now he is in the lowest deep. The floods compass him about, and the billows pass over him! Is this a shipwrecked sinner? No—it is Jesus allowing the tempest to dash the billows of wrath against His own person. And to this He submits in order that He may show to all, that sin deserves nothing less than such a storm of the Almighty's burning wrath. To this He submits, in order that it may be seen how the Holy One abhors to the uttermost every sin of every form—deed, word, or thought. But glad tidings now! Jesus who sank into the depths of this sea, and was buried under its mountain load, reaches the shore, and stands there declaring that whosoever believeth in Him shall not come into condemnation (Joh 5:24). Whosoever will agree that this Savior be his surety, shall not need to plunge into these waves himself, but shall be treated by God as if his sins had been already punished in that fierce storm that spent its violence on Jesus. Is this not rest to

your soul? It shows you how justly and holily God may turn His anger from you; how He expresses His utmost displeasure against your sins, and yet saves you! Is not this quieting to your anxious conscience? Is it not an anchor?

Jesus is the anchor. He has been at the bottom of the depths of wrath, and His strength was tried and found perfect. Nothing can keep your souls from being tossed but this only; for nothing else resists the storm of God's wrath. Your duties are not the anchor: can they endure the fierce blast of Divine displeasure? Your feelings and frames are not the anchor: can they stand the sudden dash even of one wave from the world, far less from the Holy God? The Spirit's work in you is not your anchor; it is the cargo, or the vessel stores, which the sure anchor preserves from damage. Some mourn and say, "Ah, if I had sinned less I should have had less difficulty in finding peace." Now, are you not forging an anchor out of your supposed goodness? If you could put so many acts of holiness in the place of those many sins, you would straightway form an anchor out of these. Others say, "Oh, if I could only see that I had faith, I should then be at rest." Now you are just trying to make your cable your anchor; for faith is the cable that connects the anchor with the soul. Instead of distressing yourself about your own faith, be occupied with observing the soundness and steadfastness of the anchor, and your soul will be no longer tossed.

The anchor must be something out of ourselves: not our duties, nor our saintship, nor our walk with God, nor our evidences of the Spirit's work within us, nor our strength of love—not any, nor all of these together! The anchor of a ship is something that lies without, and by being without secures it. That which quiets and assures the uneasy conscience and troubled soul of a sinner, is what he hears in the glad tidings. It is something said or shown to him by God. It is something that tells him, not of the feelings of his own heart, but of the heart of God. It is something that shows him the face of God, that he may read there, "God is love" (1Jo 4:8). The work of Jesus, or rather Jesus Himself, in this way becomes the sure "anchor of the soul."

The anchor is sure. That is, it can never fail nor break, for its nature is divine. It is also steadfast. It remains fixed whatever storm assails, because it is fixed "within the veil." Let us survey the shore on which it is cast. This shore is the region within the veil. This adds to our grounds of faith, and brightens the confidence of our hope. This Savior on whom our hope rests is an accepted Savior. He is within the veil. The anchor has entered into that within the veil, that is, into the holy region within. The Father examined His work and found it faultless; and as a token of His well-pleasedness received Him within the veil, and placed Him at His right hand in all power and glory. Oh, how great is the consolation here! Our anchor rests, not on shifting sands, but in the bosom of the Father. It is "hid in God" (Col 3:3). Sure anchor, and firm ground on which it is sunk! What storm will drag it up from that mooring? O my soul, keep to this anchor, and neither earth nor hell shall ever move thee from thy safe station on the shore of heaven! True, the vessel is worthless—my vessel with all its freight is worthless—yet nevertheless it is safe! "He bringeth me to my desired haven, and I am glad because all is peace" (Psa 107:30).

My anchor lies within the veil, No wind can make it drive;
It lies where Thou art landed, Lord, And where we shall arrive.

Poor sinner, the night is near, and appearances are very gloomy on the face of sea and land. The sea and its waves are roaring. Men's hearts are beginning to fail them for fear (Luk 21:26). The whirlwind which the Son of man is to send over the earth, as the herald of His coming, seems ready to burst forth. At present there is an ominous stillness—the stillness that precedes the thunderstorm. Are you meditating to flee? Is your hope this, that the storm will blow over at last? Alas! Alas! It never will; for the Living God will never die. Is it your hope that perhaps you may be drifted on the shores of heaven, though you were not directing your sails thitherward? This, too, is vain; for this storm is sent forth in order to drive vessels to the shoals of hell. Do you hope that you may brave it out, because you are not so heavily laden

as others? Ah! But it is too true that one sin attracts the lightning, and one stroke of the thunderbolt will make way for the rushing flood. Oh, flee to the hope set before you! Flee from the wrath to come! Anchor on the sheltered shore! Rest on the Savior, who rests on the Father's bosom! Return through Christ to God; and then, returning sinner, you will be welcomed to the Father's bosom with the very welcome that met the returned Savior!

Do You Go to the Prayer Meeting?

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name."—Malachi 3:16

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication."—Acts 1:14

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is."—Hebrews 10:25

Reader! Is there a prayer meeting in your neighborhood? If there is, do you attend it? If you do not, have you good reasons for staying away? Perhaps there is one just by your door, or at least within a few minutes' walk of your dwelling. Do you go to it? I have known people walk many miles every week to a prayer meeting. They did not grudge the distance. The way seemed short and pleasant. No wonder. They were in earnest about their souls! And if you neglect or despise such meetings, it is to be feared that you are altogether unconcerned about eternity and the kingdom to come. If you were thirsty for the water of life, you would be glad of such opportunities of drawing it out of the wells of salvation.

I ask then again, do you attend the prayer meeting? If not, what are your reasons? If they are good reasons, you need not be ashamed of them either before God or man, and they will serve you at the judgment seat of Christ. If they are not, the sooner you give them up the better. Very soon the last sermon will be done, the last Sabbath will close, the last prayer meeting will be over, the last message of salvation delivered, the last warning sounded, and the last invitation given! Then, what bitter regret and agonizing remorse! What will you think of your excuses then? Oh, you will give the wealth of worlds for another prayer meeting, another day of hope. No more making light of such precious opportunities, nor scoffing at those who prized them! The follies and vanities of earth are all over then; and invisible realities are seen to be all in all. Will the memory of your days and scenes of pleasure or sin be soothing to your soul when they have passed away like a vision of the night? Will the remembered hours of carnal levity, the idle word, the thoughtless jest, the gay smiles of companionship, the halls of gaiety, or the haunts of sin (all of which you once preferred to the prayer meeting), will these breathe comfort to your dying soul, or bear you up when giving in your account before the Judge of all? Laughter shall then be exchanged for burning tears; nights of harmless merriment for ages of endless woe. Oh, waste not then one precious hour—one precious moment! Thy eternity may hang on it! It may soon be too late to think of prayer. Up, sleeper, up! Turn, sinner, turn! Thy days are but an handbreadth—flee! oh, flee from the wrath to come!

Let me speak to you, with all kindness, for a little, about your reasons for not attending the prayer meeting. Let us weigh them in the balances of the sanctuary; and may the Holy Spirit, in this respect, convince you of sin!

a. Do you not care for prayer meetings?

Do you not like them? Do you count them a weariness, or do you call them fanaticism? Is this your reason? If so, can your soul be in a right state with God? Can that man be a child of God who dislikes either private or social prayer? Can there be real or living religion in that soul that does not relish such meetings? Is it not strange and sad that you should relish the things of the body, the things of time—and yet turn away from the things of the soul, the things of eternity? Is it not awful that you should love the society of sinners, the friendship of the world; and yet dislike so much the companionship of saints, the

fellowship of God. If you prefer worldly company or pleasure to a prayer meeting, this shows beyond all doubt that you are not a child of God, or a follower of the Lamb.

b. Have you no time to attend prayer meetings?

Is this your reason? Ah! Think for a moment, is it really true that you have no time to spare for them? Can you say so honestly before God? Will you be able to plead this with the Judge in the great day of account? Do you never attend other meetings which take up more of your time? Or do you not waste more time idly, or in foolish company, than would be spent at the meeting? What?! Have you time to eat, and to drink, and make merry, but none to pray?! Have you time for business, for company, for folly, for pleasure, for lusts, for sin, but none for prayer?! Have you time for the shop, the market, the ballroom, the card table, the public house, the political club—but none for the prayer meeting?! You can spare days and weeks for the things of time, can you not spare an hour for the things of eternity?

c. Are you ashamed to go to a prayer meeting?

Would your companions laugh at you? Is this your reason? What?! Ashamed to pray! Afraid to be laughed at! You are not ashamed to be seen in idle, foolish company, yet you are ashamed to be seen in the society of the people of God! You are not ashamed to saunter about the streets, nor to "stand in the way of sinners," nor to "sit in the seat of the scornful" (Psa 1:1), yet you are ashamed to be seen at a meeting for prayer! Perhaps you are one of those who are not ashamed to be seen in a public house—who are not ashamed to swear, nor to get drunk—yet you are ashamed to attend a prayer meeting! Ashamed of God's service, but not ashamed of the devil's! Ashamed to pray, but not ashamed to sin! Will God accept such an excuse at your hands in the day of reckoning? "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when me cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels" (Mar 8:38).

d. Do you think it is being too religious?

Now let me ask you what you mean by religious? Does it not mean loving and serving God? And can a man love God too much? Can he serve Him too constantly or devotedly? Was the apostle too religious when he said "whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1Co 10:31)? Or was he too religious when he commanded us to "pray always" (Eph 6:18); to "pray without ceasing" (1Th 5:17). Was David too religious when he praised God seven times a day (Psa 119:164). Are the angels and the redeemed saints in heaven too religious, who serve Him "day and night in His temple" (Rev 7:15). With such a feeling as you have about prayer meetings, it is plain that there is far too much religion in heaven for you ever to think of going to such a place, or even to wish to be there. The man that has no relish for a prayer meeting, could have no relish for heaven. He is utterly unfit to be there. He would be wretched there. An eternity of prayer and praise would be hell to a man who is wearied with an hour of a prayer meeting on earth.

e. Are you better employed at home?

Can you honestly say so before God? If you can, I leave you to answer to God for the time thus spent at home or elsewhere. He will take a strict account of those hours. If you are one who loves to read the Bible and pray at home, I am sure you will not object to a meeting for prayer. If you are not, can you

really say that you are better employed, or even half so well? Oh, no. You cannot be half so well employed as in preparing for eternity, in praying with God's people, in hearing of His dear Son, in making ready for the coming of the Lord.

Reader, are these your reasons? Then I ask you, are they sufficient? Does your conscience say they are? Or do you not see that the real reason is just your "carnal mind which is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7)? You do not love to pray, therefore you do not like the prayer meeting. You do not love God, and therefore you do not desire fellowship with Him. You do not love His saints, therefore you do not wish to join with them in prayer. You do not care about forgiveness of sin, and therefore you do not go to hear how "in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace" (Eph 1:7). You have no relish for the things of Christ, no sense of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and therefore you do not desire to join His people in singing the new song—Worthy is the Lamb that was Slain!

"The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer"—1 Peter 4:7

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving"—Colossians 4:2

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit"—Ephesians 6:18

"Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching"—Hebrews 10:25

Behold He Cometh with Clouds

"Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints."—Jude 1:14

"Behold I come as a thief! Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."—Revelation 16:15

My Dear Reader, Let me speak to you a few words respecting this solemn subject—the second coming of the Lord. In doing so, I shall confine myself, as much as possible, to the words of God Himself, both because they are the fittest and the plainest —"quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12); and because I do not wish you to evade the matter, by saying that I am pressing upon you the uncertain opinions of man. "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev 2:29). Reader! "That same Jesus who was taken up into heaven shall so come in like manner as He went up into heaven" (Act 1:11). The heavens must receive Him until the times of restitution of all things (Act 3:21). Then shall He come in His own glory, and in His Father's glory, and with all His mighty angels, to call you to account for the deeds done in the body. Are you ready for His coming? Can you abide His presence? Will you be able to stand before the Judge of all? He once came in meekness; He shall then come in majesty; He once came in shame; He shall then come in glory; He once came in weakness; He shall then come in power; He once came to save; He shall then come to judge—to give to every man according as his work shall be (Rev 22:12).

a. He comes to take vengeance upon them that know not God, and that obey not His Gospel (2Th 1:8).

This is the day of grace; that shall be the day of vengeance; this is the time of His mercy; that shall be the time of His fierce anger. His long-suffering shall then be wearied out, and His love shall then have passed away. His eyes—those very eyes that wept over Jerusalem, shall then be a flame of fire, piercing you like lightning, and consuming you with their terrible glance. His feet—those very feet that rested in their weariness upon the well of Sychar, shall be "fine brass," to tread you down, as in the wine press of His wrath (Rev 14:19). "The day of the Lord cometh; it is nigh at hand: a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Joe 2:1-2). Are you prepared for that day of terror and darkness? Have you fled like the dove to the clefts of the rock? (Song 2:14). Have you found shelter in the man who is the hiding place from the wind, and the covert from the tempest? (Isa 32:2).

b. He comes to raise the dead.

"Every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits, afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming" (1Co 15:23). The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first (1Th 4:16). That resurrection morning is the believer's joyful hope; for then he shall see Jesus face to face; and the last relics of sin and suffering be left behind him in his tomb. But is it full of hope and joy to you? Does the thought of that morning fill your soul with joy unspeakable and full of glory? Or are you of those who, when that day arrives, would, a thousand times over, wish to be allowed to remain forever in the tomb, rather than be dragged up, as criminals from their cells, to hear their final doom? If so, oh, then flee now to a risen Savior! His

resurrection tells you of a finished atonement—an open fountain—a rent veil—a free mercy seat—a gracious welcome from an injured but still loving Father. Flee now—tarry not; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh!

c. He comes to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (2Th 1:10).

Reader, are you a saint? Are you one of those in whom Jesus shall be glorified in that day? Are you one of those who shall admire Him then? Ah! Do you glorify Him now? Do you admire Him now? Or do you despise and reject Him? All His saints admire Him; do you admire Him too? Angels praise Him; do you praise Him too? The Father delights in Him; do you delight in Him also? He is the Father's beloved; is He your beloved too? Oh, "kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when once His wrath is kindled but a little" (Psa 2:2).

d. He comes to judge the world in righteousness (Psa 96:13).

He is now the Savior; but He shall then be the Judge; He is now upon the mercy seat; He shall then be on the throne—the great white throne, before which the living and the dead, the small and great, shall stand. His judgment shall be just and wise. It shall be impartial and unchangeable. His sentences shall never be reversed or altered throughout eternity! All nations, and kindreds, and tongues shall be summoned to His bar. You shall be there. You, who are now reading these lines, and thinking perhaps but little of that awful day! How will you answer the summons? How will you give in your account? Do you not tremble? Does unforgiven sin fill you with alarm? Then look to Jesus now! (Isa 45:22). Look, and be forgiven! Look, and be saved forever!

e. He comes to make all things new (Rev 21:5).

He comes as the second Adam, to undo all that the first Adam did. He comes to repeal and remove the curse to which creation has been subjected by the fall (Rom. 8:19-23). We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2Pe 3:13). Reader! If all things are to be made new, your heart must also be made new. There must be a new creation within you, if you would possess or enjoy the new creation without you. There must be the new heart before you can sing the new song. Have you been renewed? Have old things passed away? If not, you are as yet without any hope of, or meetness for the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away? Oh, hear the words of Jesus! "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed" (Rev 3:18). Then thou shalt walk with Him in white, and shalt eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

f. He comes to bind Satan (Rev 20:1-3).

As the woman's promised seed He comes to bruise and crush the serpent's head. In this His saints rejoice. But, Reader, have you a share in that rejoicing? Are Christ's triumphs your triumphs? Are the victories of the Lamb your victories? Or, are you of the serpent's seed, who are all in that day to share its doom? If you are now in Satan's ranks, then your overthrow and perdition are certain. Oh, quit these ranks forever! Join the Captain of our salvation. Take up your cross and follow Him. Then the conquests of Jesus shall be your conquests; and the spoils of Jesus shall be your spoils!

g. He comes to the marriage supper (Rev 19:7-9).

He is the bridegroom. He is now "tarrying" (Mat 25:5). He will not tarry long. He will soon be here, and the cry will be raised—Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him. Reader, are you ready? Have you oil in your vessels? Are your loins girt about, and your lamps burning? Have you the fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of the saints (Rev 19:8)? Oh, be warned, lest you be a foolish virgin! Lest you should have no wedding garment! Lest, ere you seek admittance, the door be shut. Oh, remember, blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

h. He comes to "sit upon the throne of his glory" (Mat 19:28).

"He shall judge among the nations" (Isa 2:4). He shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before His ancients gloriously (Isa 24:23). He is to be the true Solomon—the Prince of Peace. All things are to be put under His feet (Heb 2:8). He is to reign in righteousness (Isa 11:4-9; 32:1; Psa 72:2). His kingdom and His scepter are a kingdom and a scepter of righteousness (Psa 45:6-7). The kingdoms of this world shall become His one glorious kingdom; and the crowns of earth be placed upon the head of Him who alone is worthy.

But into that kingdom nothing that defileth shall enter (Rev 21:27). Respecting it He Himself declared, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3). Reader! Are You Born Again? If not, then the gates of that kingdom are closed against you. You cannot enter there. Oh, "Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat 4:17). The coming of the Lord draweth nigh. It is but a little, and you shall hear the last trumpet sound. It is but a little, and it shall be said to you, "Come to judgment, come away." He that shall come will come, and will not tarry. The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2Co 6:2).

Who Shall Dwell with the Devouring Fire?

"The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites; who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire, who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"—Isaiah 33:14

There is a day coming when sinners shall be afraid, and when terrors shall overtake them as a flood. They are not afraid just now; they eat and drink and make merry, as if they had no eternity to prepare for, no danger to alarm them. But it shall soon be different. What is now far off shall then be near, and sinners shall realize too late the horrors of that wrath from which they refused to flee. In the agonies of despair, when the flames are kindling round them, they will burst forth in such bitter outcries as these, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire, who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings" (Isa 33:14)? Oh, that shriek of agony! Oh, that awful outcry of surprise and despair! Careless sinner! That cry shall soon be yours; these words shall soon be the very language in which your wretched soul shall give vent to its hopeless anguish when it sees itself shut in within the flaming walls, and feels damnation sure! Oh, then, flee from the wrath to come! Make haste to escape from the devouring fire!

a. There is such a thing as devouring fire.

It may appear a shadow now, but it shall soon be reality—and oh, what a reality! It is fire, the most torturing and excruciating of elements. It is devouring fire; not merely fire that can pain or scorch, but devour, swallow up the wretched sinner in its undying flame. His abode is a prison house of fire—a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone (Rev 19:20). Hear how God Himself speaks of this, and learn that it is no mere dark imagination of cruel men to torment you before the time. "A fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell" (Deu 32:22). "Upon the wicked he shall rain quick-burning coals, fire and brimstone, and a burning tempest" (Psa 11:6, margin). "Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger, the Lord shall swallow them up in his anger wrath, and the fire shall devour them" (Psa 21:9). "Behold the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the grievousness of flame; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire" (Isa 30:27, margin). Ah! Sinner, these are awful words, and they shall soon be realized in you, except you turn and flee!

b. It is everlasting fire; burnings that shall never grow less intense or die away.

They are kindled by God's own breath (Isa 30:33); and He who kindled them alone can quench them. But this He will never do, they must burn on forever and forever. It is called "unquenchable fire," "everlasting fire," whose smoke goeth up forever and ever. It shall be kept alive, fanned, increased, watched over, but it shall never go out nor abate! Nor shall there be anything to make it tolerable—not a drop of cold water to cool the sinner's scorching tongue. Long custom shall never make it less tormenting or more easy to be borne. A vain dreamer of earth might say, "This horror will grow mild, this darkness light"; but it shall not be. There shall be nothing to mitigate it, or render it less intolerable throughout eternity. That horror shall never grow mild; that darkness shall never grow light; that fire shall never abate! Oh, what a dungeon, what a furnace! It is not called eternal solitude, though that would be awful; neither is it called eternal darkness, though that would be insupportable. It is called everlasting fire!

c. It is prepared for the ungodly.

It is said to have been at first prepared for the devil and his angels (Mat 25:41), but it is also to be the abode of all who neglect the great salvation. It is for them that forget God (Psa 9:17). It is for them who have refused to turn to the Lord, and slighted the blood of sprinkling. Shut out of heaven and shut into hell; this is their doom. They turned away from God, and now He turns away from them! They rejected love, and now wrath comes on them to the uttermost. They obeyed the devil on earth, and now they are handed over to his company and his abode in hell forever. They would not believe that God was holy, and did not care whether He was gracious; but now they are compelled to feel how holy He is, and at the same time to feel how He has forgotten to be gracious! For them grace is past. They might have had it once, but they despised it; and now it is gone. It is all wrath and indignation now (Rev 14:10).

d. They must dwell in it. They cannot flee.

Escape is hopeless, for it is the Judge of all that pronounces the sentence, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (Mat 25:31). The sinner may shrink, but he cannot flee. He may struggle, but it is all in vain. The command is given; angels hasten to see it executed, and devils seize him for their prey, and drag him along to his eternal abode. As the sentence falls on his ear, "Depart, ye cursed," his spirit sinks within him, and he exclaims, "Who shall dwell with the devouring fire?" As he is hurried away from the judgment seat, with the sentence ringing in his ears, he cries out, "Who shall dwell with the devouring fire?" As he nears the gate and sees the flaming walls, he cries out with a yet more bitter cry, "Oh, who shall dwell with these everlasting burnings?" As the gate is opened, as he is thrust in, as it closes behind him, as he looks round upon the whole flaming circle, as he hears the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth on every side, as he takes his place among the damned, those "spirits in prison" who shall go out no more, he shrieks out the piercing exclamation, "Oh! Who shall dwell with this devouring fire; who shall dwell with these everlasting burnings?" Yet dwell he must, and that forever. No opening of the gates, no scaling of its walls, no loosing of the chain, no ray of hope, no respite, no Savior, no mercy now! His eternity is sealed. He has reached his everlasting dwelling place, where all is "lamentation, and mourning, and woe."

Sinners of every class, especially sinners in Zion, to whom these words are spoken, listen to these warning words! You are sinners in Zion, not sinners among the heathen; yet this only makes your case more awful, and your doom more inevitable. You profess to be Christians, but have never been born again. You do many things like God's people—pray, read, hear, speak, observe ordinances, yet still one thing is lacking. You are not born again! Surely, then, it is time to search yourselves. It is time to be alarmed. The Judge is at the door. Your hypocrisy will not serve you then. You will be detected and unveiled, and all your hollow pretensions to religion laid bare. The day of His coming will be a terrible one to you. He comes with His fan in His hand, thoroughly to purge His floor, gathering the wheat into His garner, and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. He comes with His sieve to sift you, and can you stand His sifting? He comes with His touchstone to try and to detect you. He comes with His balances to weigh you, to see what is the real value of all your professions—whether after all you may be found wanting. He comes with His lighted candles to search you in every part. He comes with His flaming eye to penetrate at one glance your inmost soul, and to discover all its hidden abominations. With such a prospect before you, would it not be wise to take immediate alarm, and inquire whether all be well with your souls, lest you perish at the rebuke of Him who is a consuming fire.

Why should wrath be your portion? It was the portion of Jesus once, just that it might never be yours. The pains of hell took hold on Him (Psa 116:3), just that they might never take hold of you. He was

forsaken of the Father that you might not be forsaken. In enduring the fire of that wrath for sinners, He was constrained to cry, “My heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death” (Psa 22:14-15). Seeing that He has passed through all this that you might not pass through it, why should you reject such a substitute as this? The burnt offerings and sin offerings under the law, in all of which consuming fire was employed, tell us what the great sacrifice had to undergo when iniquity was laid on Him. When these offerings had been duly presented, then Israel was forgiven. In our case no question can arise as to the due offering of the sacrifice. We know that it has been duly offered once for all, and has been accepted of the Father. The one sacrifice has been offered, and now the worshippers, once purged thereby, have no more conscience of sins (Heb 10:2). Do we consent to take that sacrifice for sins? We do not need to offer it anew. It has been already offered. But are we willing that it be reckoned to us as a substitute? If not, then we must bear that wrath in our own persons—the fire which otherwise would have passed over us, will descend with devouring fierceness on our heads. We must either take refuge under the wing of the Substitute, or bear the wrath eternally ourselves. Which is the wiser, safer way for a helpless sinner?

The True Heart

"Let us draw near with a true heart."—Hebrews 10:22

Man's heart, by nature, is not true. It is neither true to himself nor to God. In some respects it may be said to be true to himself and his fellow men, when it is true to his own interests and true to his usual character, or when it is true to the friendships and affections of earth. In the last of these respects we often hear of the heart's truth. We hear how truly hearts beat in affection for each other. We hear of friends being true to friends, so as to maintain their mutual constancy unshaken amid distance, suffering, and peril. But in all this, how seldom is it that we hear of hearts that are true to God and to Christ.

What is a true heart? It is not a perfect heart, for where is that to be found on earth? It is not a heart where sin has no place at all, and where all is holy and spiritual, for who, save the spirits of the just made perfect, have reached this stature? It is not a heart that never wavers, never saddens, never droops, never languishes, never grows cold, for that we must seek a brighter world and a more genial clime.

A true heart is one that has ceased to misunderstand and mistrust the character of God, that takes that character simply as it is revealed in grace, and rests where God would have the sinner to rest, on His forgiving love. A true heart is one that has ceased to suspect God or to look upon Him as an austere and hard master. The trueness of the heart consists in its right apprehensions of the character of God; in "knowing the Father" as He has made Himself known to sinners in Christ Jesus. To be true to God is to know Him as the gracious One, as the pardoning One, as the sin-hating, yet sinner-loving God. He who has not yet seen enough of Him in the Cross, as to dispel all his wicked doubts and guilty fears, is not yet true to God.

A false heart is one which does not know the Father. Its views of God's character are distorted and dim. It seeks, in self-righteousness, to do something or feel something which may draw towards it the favor of God, and it cannot rest or trust without finding this. It does not understand the entire freeness of the grace revealed in Jesus, and will not believe that this grace is so free and wide as to meet it, even as it is, without one particle of good about it either in feeling or in action. It suspects God, because it is not satisfied with itself. It thinks it right to cherish doubts and fears, nay, and it thinks it wrong to have confidence so long as there is so much of evil and so little of good about itself. All this is being false-hearted to God. It looks like humility, but it is pride. It looks like dissatisfaction with self, but it is just a trying to get something in self to be satisfied with. It looks like a sense of unworthiness, but it is just self-righteousness, and a refusal to be content to be so altogether unworthy, as to be indebted for entire salvation to a grace that has to do with none but the unworthy.

Some may think that though we may call this false-heartedness to God, it is at least being true to His holiness and true to His law, for it is a dread of these that produces this despondency and keeps the soul from rest. But this is not even being true to His holiness, for it is supposing that God's holiness is at variance with His grace, and that we best magnify His holiness by distrusting His grace. And is not this being false to God—false to His holiness as much as to His grace? Is it not just saying, that God has taken so little care to guard His holiness that it is necessary for the sinner to do something for this end, and that the best way to do this is just to continue doubting until evidences of being holy can be discovered in the soul. But God has taken care of His own holiness and has not left it to us to do this. He has so fully provided for it in the gospel, that, the more we trust His grace, the more we honor His holiness, while, on the other hand, by distrusting His grace, we refuse to give to His holiness the honor that is its due.

What, then, is the cure of false-heartedness? How is a true heart to be found? I need not say that all must come from the Holy Spirit. The same mighty power that wrought in Christ, when He was raised from the dead, must be put forth towards us. But how does the Holy Spirit produce this true heart? What is that He shows us which removes our falseness of heart and makes it true? How does God set hearts right with Himself?

God does all this by showing us what He really is. He shows us how much we have mistaken His character and how little we have done justice to His love. He shows us that He is not what our false hearts have supposed Him to be. We have sadly misjudged Him, and imagined Him to be such an one as we ourselves, that will give only as He gets and loves only as He is loved in return. Now, the Holy Spirit withdraws the veil and reveals the gracious countenance of God. He shows us how much we have wronged Him, how little we have understood either the freeness or the largeness of His grace, and then it is that the suspicions of our false hearts give way; then, instead of standing afar off, we draw nigh; then, instead of cherishing fears and doubts because of our sinfulness, we lay all these aside, seeing that, since God has not made these a reason for not loving us, we should not make them a reason for doubting that love. When thus we get "acquainted with God," we are at peace. We feel that nothing more is needed, for producing perfect peace, but this acquaintanceship with God in His true character. It was our not knowing Him that filled us with trouble, and it is our knowing Him that fills us with peace. The knowledge of the Father is the sunshine of Heaven to our benighted souls. Thus our false-heartedness is removed, and we become true to God, and true to Christ. It is what we see in them that makes us true to them. When we see them as they are, trueness of heart springs up unbidden. We find the resting place sufficient, and so we rest.

But do not our sins rob us of this? Perhaps, in point of fact, they often do, but, most assuredly, they ought not. For what amount of sin in us can make God less an object to be trusted? Can any sin that we have committed make it right for us to be untrue to God, untrue to Christ? Is one sin to be the ground for our committing another? Are we to be false to Jesus because sin has been found upon us? Dare any of us say it is right to be false to Jesus, because we have been guilty of sin? Ought we not rather to say, we have certainly transgressed, but still we dare not add to the guilt of these transgressions, the still greater sin of being false to Jesus. No degree of sin in us can make Him less the sinner's Savior and the sinner's Friend. Nothing can alter His character of grace, or render less efficacious His infinitely precious blood. Should the consciousness of sin, then, make us false to Jesus? Was it the knowledge that we were not sinners that first made us true to Him? No it was not. In the full view and sense of all our guilt, we were drawn to Him, because He was altogether such an one as a sinner might lean upon. And how, then, can the fuller discovery of our guilt make us lean upon Him less, or make us think it necessary to be untrue to Him? Has He deserved this at our hands?

The knowledge of immediate and complete forgiveness, through the belief of the gospel, is that which alone can give us true hearts. An imperfect knowledge of this keeps us untrue. A doubtful pardon, uncertainty as to our acceptance with God, cannot make us true. A gospel which brings us merely the hope of pardon, which makes reconciliation with God a future and distant privilege, cannot deliver us from the natural falseness of our hearts. But a gospel that assures us of God's gracious mind towards sinners, and tells us of sin put away by the sacrifice of God's own Son, does surely proclaim enough to disarm our dread, to allay our suspicion, and to inspire us at once with the most childlike confidence. A gospel that tells us how true Jesus has been to us is the only gospel that can make us true to Him. Anything which would awaken in us the very slightest doubt of His grace and love, tends to make us false to Him. And surely He has been true to us whatever we have been to Him. He was true to us when He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will O God" (Heb 10:9). He was true to us, when, in the fullness of time, He was made flesh and dwelt among us. He was true to us, when, during three and thirty years, He

sojourned below in this world of sin, seeking the lost, and gathering those who, like sheep had gone astray. He was true to us when He went into the garden of Gethsemane and drank the bitter cup. He was true to us when He endured the cruel mocking and scourging and spitting, and when He allowed the hands of wicked men to place upon His head the crown of thorns. He was true to us when He died and when He went down into the grave, when He rose again, and when He ascended on high leading captivity captive. He is true to us now in heaven, as true as He was on earth, for He ever liveth to make intercession for us. If, then, He has been so true to us, how can we be false to Him?

Look at Jesus, believers, and that will keep you true to Him! Look at Jesus, sinners, and the sight of what He is and what He has done will make you ashamed of that false heart of yours. It will make you ashamed of your doubts, ashamed of your treachery, ashamed of your unkindness, ashamed of your unbelief, and make you fall at His feet, saying, "My Lord and my God!" Looking at yourself may make you afraid to trust, but looking at Him will make you afraid and ashamed to distrust. Looking unto Jesus is the cure for a false heart, and the only way for producing a true one.

Without God

"Having no hope and without God in the world."—Ephesians 2:12

"Be astonished O ye heavens at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord; for my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."—Jeremiah 2:12-13

Without God! What a fearful condition of soul! What a state of misery, of gloom, of solitude, of dark and dismal emptiness. A wilderness at midnight is nothing to this. A world without a sun is nothing to this. It is the summing up of all that is forlorn and sad in a sinner's lost estate. It can scarcely be called a picture, for it consists but of a single stroke, yet it conveys to us as full an idea of utter desolation and despair as could have been done by a thousand touches.

How awful the condition of an immortal being, of whom it can be said, that it is "without God." His presence is peace, His love is bliss, His fellowship the fullness of joy. There is no sunshine like the sunshine of His countenance, and no warmth like the warmth of His affection. What a dreary void, then, must that soul be that is "without God in the world"—without God in such a world as this? Men feel this, though they will not own it. Hence they run from one occupation to another, from scene to scene, from pleasure to pleasure, in order that, by keeping their minds incessantly engaged, they may drown the consciousness of the dread emptiness within. Hence they prefer to be burdened with cares and toils, to be annoyed with the over-pressure of business, rather than be left to the feeling of this dreary void within the soul. They are like children afraid to be alone in the dark. All without is lonely, for God is not there, and all within is still more lonely, for God is not there.

But, then, even when brought to see this, even when brought to see, or at least to suspect, that all this uneasiness arises from the absence of God, they shrink from the idea of becoming religious. They cannot bear the thought of His near presence, of His coming in to fill and possess their souls. An absent God, no doubt, they felt to be the source of their misery, but still a near, a present God they cannot bear to realize.

Why is it thus? Whence this dread of God? Whence this unwillingness to re-admit Him into their hearts? Because they are afraid of Him, and think that they can neither be safe in His hands nor happy in His presence. They feel uncomfortable at the thought of His coming so near. They willingly go through a form of religion, because its whole design and effect are to keep out God. Strange as the statement may seem, still it is true, that the religious observances of all mere professors are gone through with the express end of keeping God at a distance. By paying Him the compliment of their devotions, they think to bribe Him to keep at a distance from them and not break their repose by coming too near. This preference of forms which create a sort of fence between the soul and God, and this dislike of a religion that would bring us into personal contact with Him, plainly arise from an aversion at His holy character, and a distrust of His intentions towards us.

It is awful to think that there should be such estrangement between the soul and the God that made it, and that there should be any jealous suspicion of Him in man's breast, or any unwillingness to have Him for our friend and father. No conduct can be more unnatural than this, no ingratitude more monstrous and inexcusable. When a son hates his father, shuns his company, and leaves his house, we call his conduct unnatural and abominable. But what is this in comparison with the sinner, who has ill-treated the God that made him? The earthly ties of blood, the closest, dearest, relationships of men are as mere threads of air when compared with the bonds which unite the creature and Creator together. Dislike of God, then, must be a thing so hateful and monstrous as to stand at the very top of human guilt, the sum of nameless

crime! Surely He, whose offspring we are, in whom we live and move and have our being, is our nearest and ought to be our dearest relative of all in earth or heaven; far nearer than father or mother, brother or sister, husband or wife. These, no doubt, are names of tenderness and affection. They are relationships both close and dear. Yet how weak are all of them together, to convey even an idea of the near and tender relationship that subsists between the Creator and His offspring. The love and endearment with which these beloved names are associated, are but as shadows when compared with the love, the tender, the profound, the unutterable love which ought to overflow in us towards Him who is so infinitely better, kinder, nobler, truer, tenderer, more loveable than all. If their love be so deep and warm, what must His be? If their sympathy be so sweet and pleasant that, without it, earth is a blank, and even home a desolation, what must His be? If their character be so endearing and attractive, what must His be who constituted all these relationships as emblems of the one blessed and absorbing relationship between Him and His creatures? If the things of earth, even of a fallen earth, be so very beautiful, what must He be who clothed them with all that loveliness, and who is Himself the birthplace of all beauty, the center of all perfection, and who scatters abroad all this goodliness as a drop out of the infinite ocean of divine excellence and glory? How awful, then, must be the guilt, how desperate the misery of those who neither know nor love this Being of Beings, the ever-blessed, ever-glorious God and Father of all!

Without God! How awful the doom were such a sentence pronounced against any region of God's dominions. How awful when such is the state of the human soul!

Sinner! Such is your present state. Is it not truly sad? You do not yet know what it means in all its reality, but there is enough in what you do know to make you feel how fatal to your peace is the existence of that aching void within. Terror is not yet revealed. Wrath is still in reserve. The sword still slumbers in its sheath. But there is something even now eating, like a canker, into all your enjoyments, and poisoning all your pleasures; something which makes life a weariness and death a terror. You feel that all is not right, that there is a dreary blank in the midst of all that you enjoy. That secret undefinable want which you feel is the want of God's friendship. Nothing else will remove that sense of hollowness within, which casts a shade over your life. You are without God and, therefore, without peace. You cannot be happy so long as He is absent. There cannot be any true enjoyment so long as you enjoy nothing in Him, and Him in nothing.

But if such be the secret of your unhappiness, then you see where lies the secret of your peace. You see whence your joy is to flow. It must be from having the friendship of God—from having His love shed abroad in your heart. Nothing but the knowledge of that love can remove the uneasiness that preys upon you, or put you in possession of that which will fill up the dreary void within and dissipate all your gloom. "Acquaint thyself now with God, and be at peace, and thereby good shall come unto thee. If thou return to the Almighty thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles, then shalt thou lay up gold as the dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks. Yea, the Almighty shall be thy gold, and thou shalt have plenty of silver; for thou shalt have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God; thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows; thou shalt also decree a thing and it shall be established unto thee, and the light shall shine upon thy ways" (Job 22:21-28).

Perhaps you are saying, "Who will show me any good?" You are looking round for someone to point out to you the way to rest. Well, Jesus stands before you, and says to you, what He did to the blind man in the days of His flesh, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" Is your answer the same as that of the blind man? "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Like him, perhaps, you may know little of Jesus, little of what the light really is, little of what true joy consists in; but are you putting your soul into the hands of Jesus? Then shall you receive your sight and be made altogether whole. As a sinner, blind, naked, miserable and vile, draw near to Him. He refuses none. He will open your eyes. He will relieve

your weariness. He will bless you with the fullness of His own free love. He will fill up the aching void within. He will give you rest. He will satisfy your weary soul. He will lead you to the Father, and, in the fullness of the Father's love, you will learn to bury all your griefs and cares. "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance forever."

The Last Time

"Little children, it is the last time; and as ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many Antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time."—1 John 2:18

"The coming of the Lord draweth nigh."—James 5:8

The Apostle John, in the first of these passages, tells us, that the last time was begun in his days. It was going on when he wrote. The Apostle Peter tells us, that the last days were to end in the coming of the Lord, as we read throughout the whole of the third chapter of his Second Epistle. We thus discover the beginning and end of the period so often spoken of in Scripture as the last days. Its beginning was in the Lord's first coming and its end was in His second coming. The whole period between His first and second comings is called by this name.

Now, what was to be the character of these days? Was it to be good or evil? Evil, undoubtedly, to the very last. John tells us, that the special mark of these times was to be the prevalence of Antichrists. The last days were to be the times wherein Antichrist should have sway. They were not to be Christian but Antichristian in their character. There were to be "many Antichrists," but, as they drew near their close, there was to be One Great Power—one great adversary of God and His Christ exercising dominion. He is called Antichrist! The Antichristian tendencies began to show themselves even in the Apostles' days. They have gone on since then, showing themselves in many different forms. But as the days draw near their close, there is to be one great Antichrist, more hateful, more blasphemous, more atheistical, and more powerful and extensive in his sway than any heretofore. He is to rise up in awful strength and cruelty, in daring defiance of God and hatred of His people, till he be utterly destroyed by the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus.

That the whole period between the First and Second Comings of Christ is evil and not good, may be shown from many passages, both of the Old and New Testament. We select a few. Our Lord, when answering the questions of His disciples about His coming, and the signs of it (See Mat 24; Mar 13; Luk 21), makes no mention of anything but wars and wickedness, tribulation and sorrow, onward without interval or cessation, until His coming. So far were these from ceasing, as the time of His coming drew on, they were to increase and grow worse as time went on. Iniquity was to abound, and the love of many wax cold. The time before His coming was to be like that before the deluge; like Noah's days, when wickedness overflowed, or like the days of Lot, when Sodom and Gomorrah were consumed.

Paul, when speaking of the last days, tells us that they were to be wholly evil. "This know, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (2Ti 3:1-5). And he adds, that so far from their growing better, they are to increase unto more ungodliness; "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." He tells us, moreover, in the second chapter of Second Thessalonians, that the "man of sin" had begun to work even in his own days, that it would go on increasing more and more, until the appearing of the Lord, and that then, but not till then, would it be overthrown—"whom the Lord shall consume by the spirit of His mouth, and destroy by the brightness of His coming." It is plain, then, that the whole period called the last days, the period between the First and Second Comings of the Lord, was to be one of Antichristian wickedness and tyranny.

Daniel also gives us a description of this period. First, under the symbol of a great image, he sets before us the history of the empires which were to exist, until the stone cut out of the mountain without hands falls on the toes of the image—that is, upon the Roman empire in its divided state, which stone must refer to the Second, and not to the First Coming of Christ, as that empire was not divided in that

manner till long after the First Coming of Christ. Under the symbol of the four beasts, he gives us another picture of the times of Gentile oppression and wickedness. These times began in the prophet's days, and they are to continue till the Second Coming of Christ. This is plain from the prophet's description. First, the Babylonish empire rises up into power, and then passes away. Then the Persian empire succeeds, and passes away. Then the Macedonian empire succeeds, and passes away. Then the Roman empire follows, and is still in existence, and shall continue so, says the prophet, until the fifth or last kingdom comes—the kingdom of Christ and His saints. "I saw in the night visions, and behold one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of Heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days; and they brought Him near before Him: and there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him." Thus we learn that the whole period called the times of the Gentiles, is to be one of oppression and ungodliness, and wearing out the saints of the Most High, and that this period does not end till the Second Coming of the Lord.

During all this period of the last days, the Church of Christ is to be a "little flock"—a small and despised remnant; like Noah in the days before the flood, like Lot in Sodom, like Abraham among the Canaanites, like Israel in Egypt, like the captives in Babylon, like the early Christians at Rome and Corinth. Her present state is to be one of oppression and persecution by the world. She is an injured and afflicted widow, having none to vindicate her cause on earth against the cruelty of her adversaries. Her clothing is sackcloth, and her only crown the crown of thorns. Hence all the promises of Scripture, especially of the New Testament, take for granted this afflicted state. They suppose that she is to continue in that state until her Lord and Master come. In the Bridegroom's absence the Spouse mourns and weeps. Consolation is administered, and promise upon promise is given to sustain her during the absence of her Lord. But all these consolations point forward to a time when the Bridegroom shall come, and the Church shall no longer sit desolate and sad. Till He come, however, she has no promise of deliverance from her widowhood and sorrow. Till He come, her tribulation does not end nor her triumph begin. These "exceeding great and precious promises" (2Pe 1:4) are to uphold her in the day of her sorrow, and to be as a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise. Hence it is to His coming that she is looking as her blessed hope. It is for His arrival that she is waiting with such longing expectation, wearying for the times of the restitution of all things, and saying, "Make haste, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices" (Song 8:14).

Meanwhile, she has the Holy Spirit dwelling in her, as "the earnest of the inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Eph 1:14). She walks by faith, and not by sight, and her faith is to her the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. Saved by grace, and assured of her salvation in believing, she has peace with God, and learns to glory in tribulation. Resting on the free love of God to her, in Christ Jesus her Lord, she is "always confident," knowing that when He who is her life shall appear, she shall appear with Him in glory. Having received a kingdom that cannot be moved as her promised portion, she holds fast that grace of God which she believed at first, and serves God with reverence and godly fear, looking for and hasting to the day of God, when that kingdom shall be hers in possession, as it is now hers in promise.

It is this hope that separates her from the world. It is a hope of which it knows nothing. It is so sure, so free, and so glorious, that it cannot even conceive of it aright. Hence there can be no community of feeling between the world and her. She is a stranger and a pilgrim here, and has nothing in common with the world at all. Many things mark her out as peculiar, but her hope especially does this—this hope she holds fast, knowing that it shall not be put to shame. And as the last days draw nearer to their close, and her hope brightens and approaches, she seeks to walk more and more worthy of her calling. She comes out from the world more entirely, and fixes her eye and soul more intently upon the glory which is so soon to be revealed. The thickening darkness of the last days is to her the sign of coming dawn—the

forerunner of the long-expected kingdom. As the clouds grow denser and more threatening she lifts up her head, knowing that her redemption draweth nigh.

The False Peace and the True

"They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace."—Jeremiah 6:14

Have you peace with God? I do not ask, do you hope to have peace, or do you think you shall one day get peace, but have you, at this moment, peace with God? Perhaps you have not. Well then, is all right? Do you feel no uneasiness within you? Is there not a secret voice which says, there is something awanting still, and, until that something is supplied, I cannot be happy. The world may smile or frown, still I cannot be happy. Riches may come or go, still I cannot be happy. It may be storm or sunshine, still I cannot be happy. There is a blank within, a feeling of dissatisfaction, a consciousness that all is not right with this soul of mine. It is to this feeling that the prophet Jeremiah refers, when he speaks of "the hurt of the daughter of his people" (Jer 8:21).

Israel was "hurt." She was smitten and wounded. Her sins had wounded her. God's chastisements had wounded her. There was a breach between her and her God. The whole land lay bleeding under the fearful wound. Her false prophets tried to heal it. They prophesied smooth things. They tried to persuade her that her case was not so bad, and that God was not so angry. Thus they skinned over the wound. They healed it slightly. It looked as if it were healed, but that was all. It soon broke out again, and brought the nation to utter ruin and death.

So the sinner is "hurt." He is wounded to death by sin. It is no slight bruise, no partial or transient sickness. No, the whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint, from the sole of the foot unto the head, there is no health in any part. It is a desperate and deadly wound, incurable by the skill of man. When a limb is out of joint or wrenched from the body, there is a "hurt"—there is pain most grievous and agonizing; so, when the soul is torn asunder from Him that made it, there is a still more terrible wound. The separation of the soul from God is our deadly hurt. It is this that puts the soul out of a condition for enjoying anything, just as, when a limb is dislocated, the body is unfitted for any kind of enjoyment. It is not possible that the sinner can be happy so long as this wound remains unhealed. And besides, this alienation from God is in itself misery. It is the misery of being at enmity with God. It is the misery of having His wrath abiding upon us. It is the misery of being severed from the fountain of all blessedness, and of having no prospect before us but that of the everlasting vengeance of Him who is a consuming fire. What a deadly wound is this! It is surely enough to make every sinner tremble when he thinks that this is the hurt under which his soul is pining away; that this is the secret source of all that present misery which he feels, and of all that future misery which is in reserve for him throughout eternity. The sting of the second death is in his vitals already. The worm that never dies is wreathing and tightening its folds around him even now. The fire that shall never be quenched is already kindled within him and sending forth its intolerable heat.

There is a slight way of healing the sinner's hurt—saying, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Israel's false prophets healed her hurt slightly by prophesying smooth things, and uttering "false burdens"; so there is a way in which false teachers heal the sinner's wound slightly, or in which the sinner himself heals it slightly. It is sometimes said, Your sins are not so great, and there are many excuses for you. But this is unavailing, for conscience tells that our sins are great and that all excuses are vain. Or, it is said, The state of your soul is not so bad, not so corrupt as it is represented, and you can amend when you like. This, too, is unavailing. The sinner feels that his state of soul is really bad, and that he cannot improve himself. Or, it is said, God is not so angry and His law is not so strict. But this, too, is vain. It may soothe the soul for a little, but conscience tells that God does hate sin, and that His law is

"exceeding broad." Or, it is said, future punishment is not so terrible as it is supposed to be, and there will be multitudes in the same condemnation. But neither does this bring peace. Still the soul hears the voice of God asking, "Who can dwell with the devouring fire?" And it feels that no amount of companionship can make the flames of hell more tolerable. Or, it is said, Do good works, give alms, live well, and this will pacify the soul. Alas, no! Still it is felt that no good works or alms-deeds can ever make God forget that we have sinned, or blot out that penalty, "the soul that sinneth it shall die." In all these ways there may be a temporary relief, a transient ease, but that is all! There is a covering over of the wound, but nothing more. The hurt is still unhealed. The wound is still there, as deadly and as desperate as ever. And why is it so? Because all these different methods of cure still leave the root of the malady the same. They do not touch the seat of the disease. They do not replace the severed limb in its original position. They do not bring back the soul to God. They all stop short of perfect reconciliation with God. Unless this is reached, all is vain. Any method which leaves the soul still uncertain as to its relationship to God and friendship with Him, is vain. It is a slight healing of the hurt. It does not go deep enough. It does not embrace the whole disease. It says, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.

But there is a true way of healing the sinner's hurt. There is a sufficient and suitable cure provided. There is balm in Gilead and there is a Physician there. The false cure was saying Peace when there was no peace. The true cure is saying Peace when there is peace. Right peace, in a right way, is the cure of the soul. Nothing will heal it but this. Peace with God, forgiveness, reconciliation, friendship, the assurance of His love, these are the means by which the wound is thoroughly and eternally healed. This is the removing of all distance, the bringing back the soul to its original state of blessed relationship to Him who gave it being. This is the reunion of the soul with that God in whose favor is life, and whose friendship is the sunshine of eternity.

There is ground for this assured peace. Not because we are less than the chief of sinners, but because Christ died for the chief. Not because we can make peace for ourselves, but because God has made peace for us through the blood of the cross. It is the cross of Christ that heals. "By His stripes we are healed" (Isa 55:3). From His wounds there flows a healing virtue, so that as many as touch them are made perfectly whole. His blood has opened a fountain whence the waters of life pour themselves, in healing streams, through this diseased world. Israel was healed in the wilderness, by looking to the brazen serpent. So, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

"Acquaint thyself now with God and be at peace, and thereby good shall come unto thee" (Job 22:21). It is simply acquaintanceship with God that brings peace, and that peace draws after it every good. It is what the soul sees, in the character of that God who has given His Son, that relieves the troubled conscience. It is this that unburdens the spirit and eases the heart. It is this that makes us feel at home with God, and assures us that there is forgiveness with Him. It is this that makes us feel that He is just such a God as we can perfectly trust, just such a God as a sinner may flee to. This knowledge of what God is, and what God has done in sending His Son into the world that we might live through Him, removes our suspicion and dread. It shows us how unkind and unjust it was in us to eye Him as a hard master, whose presence could only disturb our peace. And this goes to the very root and seat of the disease. It says Peace, peace, when there is peace. This is the very health of the soul. This peace with God, through the knowledge of the blood that has been shed, acts like a new wellspring of life to the soul. It pours new joy, new energy, new strength into the whole man. It makes the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing. It enlarges the heart, so as to enable us to run in the way of God's commandments. It makes the service of God, which before this was bondage, to become perfect liberty. Why, then, so many doubts? Has God not done everything to take all these utterly away? Has He not told you of His love to sinners, and of that love pouring itself freely down through the channel which

righteousness has made for it? Has He not sent to you the message of love by the lips of incarnate love, His own Son manifest in flesh? Why, then, still doubt? You are hindering the healing of the hurt. Every such doubt is hindering this. For all these doubts cherish the disease and check the cure. They have their root in unbelief. They show the tendency of the soul to recur to the false methods of healing, and its unwillingness to receive the true. They are just so many attempts to mix up the false with the true, and so many grievings of that loving Spirit who is seeking to lead you at once into the free full grace of God, as the fountain of all health and joy.