Holiness
Part Two

John C. Ryle

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Chapter 11

Christ's GreatestTrophy

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."—Luke 23:39-43

THERE are few passages in the New Testament which are more familiar to men's ears than the verses which head this chapter. They contain the well-known story of "the penitent thief."

And it is right and good that these verses should be well known. They have comforted many troubled minds; they have brought peace to many uneasy consciences; they have been a healing balm to many wounded hearts; they have been a medicine to many sin-sick souls; they have smoothed down not a few dying pillows. Wherever the gospel of Christ is preached, they will always be honoured, loved, and had in remembrance.

I wish to say something about these verses. I will try to unfold the leading lessons which they are meant to teach. I cannot see the peculiar mental state of anyone into whose hands this paper may fall. But I can see truths in this passage which no man can ever know too well. Here is the greatest trophy which Christ ever won.

I. Christ's Power and Willingness to Save Sinners

First of all, we are meant to learn from these verses, Christ's power and willingness to save sinners.

This is the main doctrine to be gathered from the history of the penitent thief. It teaches us that which ought to be music in the ears of all who hear it. It teaches us that Jesus Christ is "mighty to save" (Isa 63:1).

I ask anyone to say whether a case could look more hopeless and desperate than that of this penitent thief once did?

He was a wicked man, a malefactor and a thief, if not a murderer. We know this, for such only were crucified. He was suffering a just punishment for breaking the laws. And as he had lived wicked, so he seemed determined to die wicked; for at first, when he was crucified, he railed on our Lord.

And he was a dying man. He hung there, nailed to a cross, from which he was never to come down alive. He had no longer power to stir hand or foot. His hours were numbered; the grave was ready for him. There was but a step between him and death.

If ever there was a soul hovering on the brink of hell, it was the soul of this thief. If ever there was a case that seemed lost, gone, and past recovery, it was his. If ever there was a child of Adam whom the devil made sure of as his own, it was this man.

But see now what happened. He ceased to rail and blaspheme, as he had done at the first; he began to speak in another manner altogether. He turned to our blessed Lord in prayer. He prayed Jesus to "remember him when he came into His kingdom." He asked that his soul might be cared for, his sins pardoned, and himself thought of in another world. Truly this was a wonderful change!

And then mark what kind of answer he received. Some would have said he was too wicked a man to be saved; but it was not so. Some would have fancied it was too late: the door was shut, and there was no room for mercy; but it proved not too late at all. The Lord Jesus returned him an immediate answer, spoke kindly to him, assured him he should be with Him that day in paradise, pardoned him completely, cleansed him thoroughly from his sins, received him graciously, justified him freely, raised him from the gates of hell, and gave him a title to glory. Of all the multitude of saved souls, none ever received so glorious an assurance of his own salvation as did this penitent thief. Go over the whole list, from Genesis to Revelation, and you will find none who had such words spoken to him as these, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

I believe the Lord Jesus never gave so complete a proof of His power and will to save, as He did upon this occasion. In the day when He seemed most weak, He showed that He was a strong Deliverer. In the hour when His body was racked with pain, He showed that He could feel tenderly for others. At the time when He Himself was dying, He conferred on a sinner eternal life.

Now, have I not a right to say, Christ is "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him" (Heb 7:25)? Behold the proof of it. If ever a sinner was too far gone to be saved, it was this thief. Yet he was plucked as a brand from the fire (Zec 3:2).

Have I not a right to say, Christ will receive any poor sinner who comes to Him with the prayer of faith, and cast out none? Behold the proof of it. If ever there was one that seemed too bad to be received, this was the man. Yet the door of mercy was wide open even for him.

Have I not a right to say, By grace ye may be saved through faith, not of works: fear not, only believe? Behold the proof of it. This thief was never baptized; he belonged to no visible church; he never received the Lord's Supper; he never did any work for Christ; he never gave money to Christ's cause! But he had faith, and so he was saved.

Have I not a right to say, The youngest faith will save a man's soul, if it only be true? Behold the proof of it. This man's faith was only one day old; but it led him to Christ, and preserved him from hell.

Why then should any man or woman despair with such a passage as this in the Bible? Jesus is a Physician who can cure hopeless cases. He can quicken dead souls, and call the things which be not as though they were.

Never should any man or woman despair! Jesus is still the same now that He was eighteen hundred years ago. The keys of death and hell are in His hand. When He opens none can shut.[1]

What though your sins be more in number than the hairs of your head? What though your evil habits have grown with your growth, and strengthened with your strength? What though you have hitherto hated good, and loved evil, all the days of your life? These things are sad indeed; but there is hope, even for you. Christ can heal you; Christ can raise you from your low estate. Heaven is not shut against you. Christ is able to admit you, if you will humbly commit your soul into His hands.

Are your sins forgiven? If not, I set before you this day a full and free salvation. I invite you to follow the steps of the penitent thief: come to Christ and live. I tell you that Jesus is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. I tell you He can do everything that your soul requires. Though your sins be as scarlet, He can make them white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa 1:18). Why should you not be saved as well as another? Come unto Christ and live!

Are you a true believer? If you are, you ought to glory in Christ. Glory not in your own faith, your own feelings, your own knowledge, your own prayers, your own amendment, your own diligence. Glory in nothing but Christ. Alas! The best of us know but little of that merciful and mighty Saviour. We do not exalt Him and glory in Him enough. Let us pray that we may see more of the fulness there is in Him.

Do you ever try to do good to others? If you do, remember to tell them about Christ. Tell the young, tell the poor, tell the aged, tell the ignorant, tell the sick, tell the dying—tell them all about Christ. Tell them of His power, and tell them of His love; tell them of His doings, and tell them of His feelings; tell them what He has done for the chief of sinners; tell them what He is willing to do to the last day of time: tell it them over and over again. Never be tired of speaking of Christ. Say to them broadly and fully, freely and unconditionally, unreservedly and undoubtingly, "Come unto Christ, as the penitent thief did: come unto Christ, and you shall be saved."

II. Some Are Saved in the Hour of Death – Others Are Not

The second lesson we are meant to learn from this passage is this: if some are saved in the very hour of death, others are not.

This is a truth that never ought to be passed over, and I dare not leave it unnoticed. It is a truth that stands out plainly in the sad end of the other malefactor, and is only too often forgotten. Men forget that there were "two thieves."

What became of the other thief who was crucified? Why did he not turn from his sin, and call upon the Lord? Why did he remain hardened and impenitent? Why was he not saved? It is useless to try to answer such questions. Let us be content to take the fact as we find it, and see what it is meant to teach us.

We have no right whatever to say that this thief was a worse man than his companion—there is nothing to prove it. Both plainly were wicked men, both were receiving the due reward of their deeds, both hung by the side of our Lord Jesus Christ, both heard Him pray for His murderers, both saw Him suffer patiently. But while one repented, the other remained hardened; while one began to pray, the other went on railing; while one was converted in his last hours, the other died a bad man just as he had lived; while one was taken to paradise, the other went to his own place—the place of the devil and his angels.

Now these things are written for our warning. There is warning, as well as comfort in these verses, and it is a very solemn warning too.

They tell me loudly, that though some may repent and be converted on their deathbeds, it does not at all follow that all will. A deathbed is not always a saving time.

They tell me loudly, that two men may have the same opportunities of getting good for their souls, may be placed in the same position, see the same things, and hear the same things. And yet only one of the two shall take advantage of them, repent, believe and be saved.

They tell me, above all, that repentance and faith are the gifts of God and are not in a man's own power; and that if anyone flatters himself that he can repent at his own time, choose his own season, seek the Lord when he pleases, and, like the penitent thief, be saved at the very last—he may find at length he is greatly deceived.

And it is good and profitable to bear this in mind. There is an immense amount of delusion in the world on this very subject. I see many allowing life to slip away, quite unprepared to die. I see many allowing that they ought to repent, but always putting off their own repentance. And I believe one grand reason is, that most men suppose they can turn to

God just when they like! They wrest the parable of the labourer in the vineyard, which speaks of the eleventh hour, and use it as it never was meant to be used. They dwell on the pleasant part of the verses I am now considering, and forget the rest. They talk of the thief that went to paradise and was saved, and they forget the one who died as he had lived—and was lost.[2]

I entreat every man of common sense who reads this paper, to take heed that he does not fall into this mistake.

Look at the history of men in the Bible, and see how often these notions I have been speaking of are contradicted. Mark well how many proofs there are that two men may have the same light offered them, and only one use it; and that no one has a right to take liberties with God's mercy, and presume he will be able to repent just when he likes.

Look at Saul and David. They lived about the same time; they rose from the same rank in life; they were called to the same position in the world; they enjoyed the ministry of the same prophet, Samuel; they reigned the same number of years! Yet one was saved, and the other lost.

Look at Sergius Paulus and Gallio. They were both Roman governors; they were both wise and prudent men in their generation; they both heard the Apostle Paul preach! But one believed and was baptised, the other "cared for none of those things" (Act 18:17).

Look at the world around you. See what is going on continually under your eyes. Two sisters will often attend the same ministry, listen to the same truths, hear the same sermons; and yet only one shall be converted unto God, while the other remains totally unmoved. Two friends often read the same religious book: one is so moved by it, that he gives up all for Christ; the other sees nothing at all in it, and continues the same as before. Hundreds have read Doddridge's Rise and Progress without profit: with Wilberforce it was one of the beginnings of spiritual life. Thousands have read Wilberforce's Practical View of Christianity and laid it down again unaltered: from the time Leigh Richmond read it, he became another man. No man has any warrant for saying, "Salvation is in my own power."

I do not pretend to explain these things. I only put them before you as great facts, and I ask you to consider them well.

You must not misunderstand me. I do not want to discourage you. I say these things in all affection, to give you warning of danger. I do not say them to drive you back from heaven. I say them rather to draw you on, and bring you to Christ, while He can be found.

I want you to beware of presumption. Do not abuse God's mercy and compassion. Do not continue in sin, I beseech you, and think you can repent, and believe, and be saved, just when you like, when you please, when you will, and when you choose. I would always set before you an open door. I would always say, "While there is life there is hope." But if you would be wise, put nothing off that concerns your soul.

I want you to beware of letting slip good thoughts and godly convictions, if you have them. Cherish them and nourish them, lest you lose them for ever. Make the most of them, lest they take to themselves wings and flee away. Have you an inclination to begin praying? Put it in practice at once. Have you an idea of beginning really to serve Christ? Set about it at once. Are you enjoying any spiritual light? See that you live up to your light. Trifle not with opportunities, lest the day come when you will want to use them, and not be able. Linger not, lest you become wise too late.

You may say, perhaps, "It is never too late to repent." I answer, "That is right enough: but late repentance is seldom true. And I say further, you cannot be certain if you put off repenting, that you will repent at all."

You may say, "Why should I be afraid? The penitent thief was saved." I answer, "That is true: but look again at the passage which tells you that the other thief was LOST!"

III. The Spirit Always Leads Saved Souls in One Way

The third lesson we are meant to learn from these verses is this: the Spirit always leads saved souls in one way.

This is a point that deserves particular attention, and is often overlooked. Men look at the broad fact that the penitent thief was saved when he was dying, and they look no further.

They do not consider the evidences this thief left behind him. They do not observe the abundant proof he gave of the work of the Spirit in his heart. And these proofs I wish to trace out. I wish to show you that the Spirit always works in one way, and that—whether He converts a man in an hour, as He did the penitent thief, or whether by slow degrees, as He does others—the steps by which He leads souls to heaven are always the same.

Let me try to make this clear to everyone who reads this paper. I want to put you on your guard. I want you to shake off the common notion that there is some easy, royal road to heaven from a dying bed. I want you thoroughly to understand, that every saved soul goes through the same experience, and that the leading principles of the penitent thief's religion were just the same as those of the oldest saint that ever lived.

(a) See then, for one thing, how strong was the faith of this man.

He called Jesus "Lord." He declared his belief that He would have a "kingdom." He believed that He was able to give him eternal life and glory, and in this belief prayed to Him. He maintained His innocence of all the charges brought against Him. "This man," said he, "hath done nothing amiss." Others perhaps may have thought the Lord innocent; none

said so openly but this poor dying man.

And when did all this happen? It happened…

- when the whole nation had denied Christ—shouting, "Crucify him, crucify him: we have no king but Caesar" (Joh 19:6),
- when the chief priests and Pharisees had condemned and found Him "guilty of death,"
- when even His own disciples had forsaken Him and fled,
- when He was hanging, faint, bleeding, and dying on the cross, numbered with transgressors, and accounted accursed.

This was the hour when the thief believed in Christ, and prayed to Him! Surely such faith was never seen since the word began.[3]

The disciples had seen mighty signs and miracles. They had seen the dead raised with a word, lepers healed with a touch, the blind receiving sight, the dumb made to speak, and the lame made to walk. They had seen thousands fed with a few loaves and fishes. They had seen their Master walking on the water as on dry land. They had all of them heard Him speak as no man ever spake, and hold out promises of good things yet to come. Some of them had a foretaste of His glory in the Mount of Transfiguration. Doubtless their faith was "the gift of God," but still they had much to help it.

The dying thief saw none of the things I have mentioned. He only saw our Lord in agony, and in weakness, in suffering, and in pain. He saw Him undergoing a dishonourable punishment; deserted, mocked, despised, blasphemed. He saw Him rejected by all the great, and wise, and noble of His own people—His strength dried up like a potsherd, His life drawing nigh to the grave (Psa 22:15; 88:3). He saw no sceptre, no royal crown, no outward dominion, no glory, no majesty, no power, no signs of might. And yet the dying thief believed, and looked forward to Christ's kingdom.

Would you know if you have the Spirit? Then mark the question I put to you this day. Where is your faith in Christ?

(b) See, for another thing, what a right sense of sin the thief had. He says to his companion, "We receive the due reward of our deeds." He acknowledges his own ungodliness, and the justice of his punishment. He makes no attempt to justify himself, or excuse his wickedness. He speaks like a man humbled and self-abased by the remembrance of past iniquities. This is what all God's children feel. They are ready to allow they are poor, hell-deserving sinners. They can say with their hearts as well as with their lips, "We have left undone the things that we ought to have done, and we have done those things that we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us" (see Mat 23:23).

Would you know if you have the Spirit? Then mark my question: Do you feel your sins?

(c) See, for another thing, what brotherly love the thief showed to his companion. He tried to stop his railing and blaspheming, and bring him to a better mind. "Dost not thou fear God," he says, "seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" There is no surer mark of grace than this! Grace shakes a man out of his selfishness, and makes him feel for the souls of others. When the Samaritan woman was converted, she left her water-pot, and ran to the city, saying, "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (Joh 4:28-29). When Saul was converted, immediately he went to the synagogue at Damascus and testified to his brethren of Israel that "Christ was the Son of God" (Act 9:20).

Would you know if you have the Spirit? Then where is your charity and love to souls?

In one word, you see in the penitent thief a finished work of the Holy Ghost. Every part of the believer's character may be traced in him. Short as his life was after conversion, he found time to leave abundant evidence that he was a child of God. His faith, his prayer, his humility, his brotherly love, are unmistakable witnesses of the reality of his repentance. He was not a penitent in name only, but in deed and in truth.

Let no man therefore think, because the penitent thief was saved, that men can be saved without leaving any evidence of the Spirit's work. Let such an one consider well what evidences this man left behind, and take care.

Deathbed Evidences

It is mournful to hear what people sometimes say about what they call deathbed evidences. It is perfectly fearful to observe how little satisfies some persons, and how easily they can persuade themselves that their friends have gone to heaven.

They will tell you when their relative is dead and gone, that "he made such a beautiful prayer one day, that he talked so well, that he was so sorry for his old ways and intended to live so differently if he got better, that he craved nothing in this world, or that he liked people to read to him and pray with him." And because they have this to go upon, they seem to have a comfortable hope that he is saved! Christ may never have been named—the way of salvation may never have been in the least mentioned. But it matters not; there was a little talk of religion, and so they are content!

Now I have no desire to hurt the feelings of anyone who reads this paper, but I must and will speak plainly upon this

subject.

Once for all, let me say, that as a general rule, nothing is so unsatisfactory as deathbed evidences. The things that men say, and the feelings they express when sick and frightened, are little to be depended on. Often, too often, they are the result of fear, and do not spring from the ground of the heart. Often, too often, they are things said by rote; caught from the lips of ministers and anxious friends, but evidently not felt. And nothing can prove all this more clearly than the well-known fact, that the great majority of persons who make promises of amendment on a sick bed and then for the first time talk about religion, if they recover, go back to sin and the world.

When a man has lived a life of thoughtlessness and folly, I want something more than a few fair words and good wishes to satisfy me about his soul, when he comes to his deathbed. It is not enough for me that he will let me read the Bible to him and pray by his bedside or that he says, "he has not thought so much as he ought of religion, and he thinks he should be a different man if he got better." All this does not content me: it does not make me feel happy about his state. It is very well as far as it goes, but it is not conversion. It is very well in its way, but it is not faith in Christ. Until I see conversion, and faith in Christ, I cannot and dare not feel satisfied. Others may feel satisfied if they please, and after their friend's death say, they hope he is gone to heaven. For my part, I would rather hold my tongue and say nothing. I would be content with the least measure of repentance and faith in a dying man, even though it be no bigger than a grain of mustard seed. But to be content with anything less than repentance and faith, seems to me next door to infidelity.

What kind of evidence do you mean to leave behind as to the state of your soul? Take example by the penitent thief, and you will do well.

When we have carried you to your narrow bed, let us not have to hunt up stray words, and scraps of religion, in order to make out that you were a true believer. Let us not have to say in a hesitating way one to another, "I trust he is happy; he talked so nicely one day; and he seemed so pleased with a chapter in the Bible on another occasion; and he liked such a person, who is a good man." Let us be able to speak decidedly as to your condition. Let us have some solid proof of your repentance, your faith, and your holiness, so that none shall be able for a moment to question your state. Depend on it, without this, those you leave behind can feel no solid comfort about your soul. We may use the form of religion at your burial, and express charitable hopes. We may meet you at the churchyard gate and say, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." But this will not alter your condition! If you die without conversion to God, without repentance and without faith, your funeral will only be the funeral of a lost soul; you had better never have been born.

IV. Believers in Christ Are with the Lord when They Die

We are meant, in the next place, to learn from these verses, that believers in Christ when they die are with the Lord.

This you may gather from our Lord's words to the penitent thief: "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." And you have an expression very like it in the Epistle to the Philippians, where Paul says he has a desire to "depart and be with Christ" (Phi 1:23).

I shall say but little on this subject. I would simply lay it before you, for your own private meditations. To my own mind it is very full of comfort and peace.

Believers after death are "with Christ." That answers many a difficult question, which otherwise might puzzle man's busy, restless mind. The abode of dead saints, their joys, their feelings, their happiness, are all met by this simple expression: they are "with Christ."

I cannot enter into full explanations about the separate state of departed believers. It is a high and deep subject, such as man's mind can neither grasp nor fathom. I know their happiness falls short of what it will be when their bodies are raised again, in the resurrection at the last day, and Jesus returns to earth. Yet I know also they enjoy a blessed rest, a rest from labour, a rest from sorrow, a rest from pain, and a rest from sin. But it does not follow because I cannot explain these things, that I am not persuaded they are far happier than they ever were on earth. I see their happiness in this very passage, "They are with Christ," and when I see that, I see enough.

If the sheep are with the Shepherd, if the members are with the Head, and if the children of Christ's family are with Him who loved them and carried them all the days of their pilgrimage on earth, all must be well, all must be right.

I cannot describe what kind of place paradise is, because I cannot understand the condition of a soul separate from the body. But I ask no brighter view of paradise than this—that Christ is there.[4] All other things in the picture which imagination draws of the state between death and resurrection, are nothing in comparison of this. How He is there, and in what way He is there, I know not. Let me only see Christ in paradise when my eyes close in death, and that sufficeth me. Well does the Psalmist say, "In thy presence is fulness of joy" (Psa 16:11). It was a true saying of a dying girl, when her mother tried to comfort her by describing what paradise would be. "There," she said to the child, "there you will have no pains, and no sickness; there you will see your brothers and sisters who have gone before you, and will be always happy." "Ah, mother!" was the reply, "but there is one thing better than all, and that is, Christ will be there."

It may be you do not think much about your soul. It may be you know little of Christ as your Saviour, and have never

tasted by experience that He is precious. And yet perhaps you hope to go to paradise when you die. Surely this passage is one that should make you think. Paradise is a place where Christ is. Then can it be a place that you would enjoy?

It may be you are a believer, and yet tremble at the thought of the grave. It seems cold and dreary. You feel as if all before you was dark and gloomy, and comfortless. Fear not, but be encouraged by this text. You are going to paradise, and Christ will be there.

V. The Eternal Portion of Every Man's Soul Is Close to Him

The last thing we are meant to learn from these verses is this: the eternal portion of every man's soul is close to him.

"Today," says our Lord to the penitent thief, "today shalt thou be with me in paradise." He names no distant period. He does not talk of his entering into a state of happiness as a thing "far away," He speaks of today, "this very day in which thou art hanging on the cross."

How near that seems! How awfully near that word brings our everlasting dwelling-place! Happiness or misery, sorrow or joy, the presence of Christ or the company of devils—all are close to us. "There is but a step," says David, "between me and death" (1Sa 20:3). There is but a step, we may say, between ourselves and either paradise or hell.

None of us realize this as we ought to do. It is high time to shake off the dreamy state of mind in which we live on this matter. We are apt to talk and think, even about believers, as if death was a long journey and as if the dying saint had embarked on a long voyage. It is all wrong, very wrong! Their harbour and their home is close by, and they have entered it.

Some of us know by bitter experience what a long and weary time it is between the death of those we love, and the hour when we bury them out of our sight. Such weeks are the slowest, saddest, heaviest weeks in all our lives. But, blessed be God, the souls of departed saints are free from the very moment their last breath is drawn. While we are weeping, and the coffin is preparing, and the mourning being provided, and the last painful arrangements being made, the spirits of our beloved ones are enjoying the presence of Christ. They are freed for ever from the burden of the flesh. They are "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest" (Job 3:17).

The very moment that believers die they are in paradise. Their battle is fought; their strife is over. They have passed through that gloomy valley we must one day tread; they have gone over that dark river we must one day cross. They have drunk that last bitter cup which sin has mingled for man; they have reached that place where sorrow and sighing are no more. Surely we should not wish them back again! We should not weep for them, but for ourselves.

We are warring still, but they are at peace. We are labouring, but they are at rest. We are watching, but they are sleeping. We are wearing our spiritual armour, but they have forever put it off. We are still at sea, but they are safe in harbour. We have tears, but they have joy. We are strangers and pilgrims, but as for them they are at home. Surely better are the dead in Christ than the living! Surely the very hour the poor saint dies, he is at once higher and happier than the highest upon earth.[5]

I fear there is a vast amount of delusion on this point. I fear that many, who are not Roman Catholics and profess not to believe in purgatory, have, notwithstanding, some strange ideas in their minds about the immediate consequences of death.

I fear that many have a sort of vague notion that there is some interval or space of time between death and their eternal state. They fancy they shall go through a kind of purifying change, and that though they die unfit for heaven, they shall yet be found meet for it after all!

But this is an entire mistake. There is no change after death; there is no conversion in the grave; there is no new heart given after the last breath is drawn. The very day we go, we launch forever; the day we go from this world, we begin an eternal condition. From that day there is no spiritual alteration—no spiritual change. As we die, so we shall receive our portion after death; as the tree falls, so it must lie (Ecc 11:3).

If you are an unconverted man, this ought to make you think. Do you know you are close to hell? This very day you might die; and if you died out of Christ you would open your eyes at once in hell, and in torment.

If you are a true Christian, you are far nearer heaven than you think. This very day if the Lord should take you, you would find yourself in paradise. The good land of promise is near to you. The eyes that you closed in weakness and pain would open at once on a glorious rest, such as my tongue cannot describe.

Conclusion

And now let me say a few words in conclusion, and I am done.

(1) This paper may fall into the hands of some humble-hearted and contrite sinner. Are you that man? Then here is encouragement for you. See what the penitent thief did, and do likewise. See how he prayed; see how he called on the Lord Jesus Christ; see what an answer of peace he obtained. Brother or sister, why should not you do the same? Why should not you also be saved?

(2) This paper may fall into the hands of some proud and presumptuous man of the world. Are you that man? Then take warning. See how the impenitent thief died as he had lived and beware lest you come to a like end. Oh, erring brother or sister, be not too confident, lest you die in your sins! Seek the Lord while He may be found. Turn you, turn: why will you die?

(3) This paper may fall into the hands of some professing believer in Christ. Are you such an one? Then take the penitent thief's religion as a measure by which to prove your own. See that you know something of true repentance and saving faith, of real humility and fervent charity. Brother or sister, do not be satisfied with the world's standard of Christianity. Be of one mind with the penitent thief, and you will be wise.

(4) This paper may fall into the hands of someone who is mourning over departed believers. Are you such an one? Then take comfort from this Scripture. See how your beloved ones are in the best of hands. They cannot be better off. They never were so well in their lives as they are now. They are with Jesus, whom their souls loved on earth. Oh, cease from your selfish mourning! Rejoice rather that they are freed from trouble, and have entered into rest.

(5) And this paper may fall into the hands of some aged servant of Christ. Are you such an one? Then see from these verses how near you are to home. Your salvation is nearer than when you first believed. A few more days of labour and sorrow, and the King of kings shall send for you; and in a moment your warfare shall be at end, and all shall be peace.

Chapter 12

The Ruler of the Waves

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. Following Christ Will Not Prevent Earthly Sorrows

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

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

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

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

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

vexations and disappointments, so long as you are in the body. Christ never undertakes that you shall get to heaven without these. He has undertaken that all who come to Him shall have all things pertaining to life and godliness; but He has never undertaken that He will make them prosperous, or rich, or healthy, and that death and sorrow shall never come to their family.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. The Lord Jesus Christ Is Truly Man

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

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

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

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

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

Sympathy is far better than money, and far rarer too. Thousands can give who know not what it is to feel. Sympathy has the greatest power to draw us and to open our hearts. Proper and correct counsel often falls dead and useless on a heavy heart. Cold advice often makes us shut up, shrink, and withdraw into ourselves, when tendered in the day of trouble. But genuine sympathy in such a day will call out all our better feelings, if we have any, and obtain an influence

over us when nothing else can. Give me the friend who, though poor in gold and silver, has always ready a sympathizing heart.

Our God knows all this well. He knows the very secrets of man's heart. He knows the ways by which that heart is most easily approached, and the springs by which that heart is most readily moved. He has wisely provided that the Saviour of the gospel should be feeling as well as mighty. He has given us one who has not only a strong hand to pluck us as brands from the burning, but a sympathizing heart on which the labouring and heavy-laden may find rest.

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

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

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

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

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

Acquainted with Human Nature

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. There May Be Much Weakness Even in a True Christian

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But suddenly some unlooked-for trial assails them. Their property makes itself wings and flies away. Their own health fails. Death comes up into their house. Tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word. And where now is their faith? Where is the strong confidence they thought they had? Where is their peace, their hope, their resignation? Alas, they are sought for and not found. They are weighed in the balances and found wanting. Fear, doubt, distress, and anxiety break in upon them like a flood, and they seem at their wits' end. I know that this is a sad description. I only put it to the conscience of every real Christian, whether it is not correct and true.

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

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

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

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

Does any reader of this paper think that he believes in Christ? Do you feel such love and confidence in Him that you cannot understand being greatly moved by any event that could happen? It is all well. I am glad to hear it. But has this faith been tried? Has this confidence been put to the test? If not, take heed of condemning these disciples hastily. Be not high-minded, but fear. Think not because your heart is in a lively frame now, that such a frame will always last. Say not, because your feelings are warm and fervent today, “tomorrow shall be as today, and much more abundant.” Say not, because your heart is lifted up just now with a strong sense of Christ’s mercy, “I shall never forget Him as long as I live.” Oh, learn to abate something of this flattering estimate of yourself. You do not know yourself thoroughly. There are more things in your inward man than you are at present aware of. The Lord may leave you as He did Hezekiah, to show you all that is in your heart (2Ch 32:31). Blessed is he that is “clothed with humility.” “Happy is he that feareth always.” “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” (1Pe 5:5; Pro 28:14; 1Co 10:12.)

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

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

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

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

IV. The Power of the Lord Jesus Christ

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

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

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

Calm the waves with a voice! What reader of history does not know that a mighty King of England tried in vain to

stop the tide rising on the shore? Yet here is one who says to raging waves in a storm, “Peace, be still,” and at once there was a calm. Here was power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

V. The Lord Jesus Deals Tenderly with Weak Believers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let all the world know that the Lord Christ is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. As a father pitieth his children, so He pitieth them that fear Him. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will He comfort His people. (Jam 5:11; Mat 12:20; Psa 103:13; Isa 66:13.) He cares for the lambs of His flock as well as for the old sheep. He cares for the sick and feeble ones of His fold as well as for the strong. It is written that He will carry them in His bosom, rather than let one of them be lost (Isa 40:11). He cares for the least members of His body, as well as for the greatest. He cares for the babes of His family as well as the grown-up men. He cares for the tenderest little plants in His garden as well as for the cedar of Lebanon. All are in His book of life, and all are under His charge. All are given to Him in an everlasting covenant, and He has undertaken, in spite of all weaknesses, to bring every one safe home. Only let a sinner lay hold on Christ by faith and then, however feeble, Christ's word is pledged to him, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." He may correct him occasionally in love. He may gently reprove him at times. But He will never, never give him up. The devil shall never pluck him from Christ's hand.

Let all the world know that the Lord Jesus will not cast away His believing people because of shortcomings and infirmities. The husband does not put away his wife because he finds failings in her. The mother does not forsake her infant because it is weak, feeble and ignorant. And the Lord Christ does not cast off poor sinners who have committed their souls into His hands because He sees in them blemishes and imperfections. Oh, no! It is His glory to pass over

the faults of His people, and heal their backslidings—to make much of their weak graces and to pardon their many faults. The eleventh of Hebrews is a wonderful chapter. It is marvellous to observe how the Holy Ghost speaks of the worthies whose names are recorded in that chapter. The faith of the Lord's people is there brought forward and had in remembrance. But the faults of many a one, which might easily have been brought up also, are left alone, and not mentioned at all.

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

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

Deal gently with backsliders. Do not turn your back on them as if their case was hopeless. Use every lawful means to restore them to their former place. Consider yourself, and your often infirmities, and do as you would be done by. Alas, there is a painful absence of the Master's mind among many of His disciples. There are few churches, I fear, in the present day, which would have received Peter into communion again for many a long year, after denying His Lord. There are few believers ready to do the work of Barnabas—willing to take young converts by the hand, and encourage them at their first beginnings. Verily we want an outpouring of the Spirit upon believers almost as much as upon the world.

Practical Applications

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

- First, that Christ's service will not secure you against troubles. The holiest saints are liable to them.
- Second, that Christ is very Man as well as God.
- Third, that believers may have much weakness and infirmity, and yet be true believers.
- Fourth, that Christ has all power; and
- Fifth, that Christ is full of patience and kindness towards His people.

Remember these five lessons, and you will do well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Come then, this day, and be advised by one who loves your soul. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Forsake the foolish, and go in the path of understanding. Cast away that pride which hangs about your heart, and seek the Lord

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 13

The Church which Christ Builds

"Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."—Matthew 16:18

DO we belong to the Church which is built upon a rock? Are we members of the only Church in which our souls can be saved? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration. I ask the attention of all who read this paper, while I try to show the one true, holy, catholic [universal] Church, [6] and to guide men's feet into the only safe fold. "What is this Church? What is it like? What are its marks? Where is it to be found?" On all these points I have something to say. I am going to unfold the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, which stand at the head of this page. He declares, "Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

There are five things in these famous words which demand our attention:

- I. ABuilding: "My Church."
- II. ABuilder: Christ says, "I will build my Church."
- III. AFoundation: "Upon this rock I will build my Church."
- IV. PerilsImplied: "The gates of hell."
- V. SecurityAsserted: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The whole subject demands special attention in the present day. Holiness, we must never forget, is the prominent characteristic of all who belong to the one true Church.

I. The Building

We have, firstly, a Building mentioned in the text. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of "my church."

Now what is this Church? Few inquiries can be made of more importance than this. For want of due attention to this subject, errors that have crept into the world are neither few nor small.

The Church of our text is no material building. It is no temple made with hands of wood, or brick, or stone, or marble. It is a company of men and women. It is no particular visible church on earth. It is not the Eastern Church or the Western Church. It is not the Church of England or the Church of Scotland. Above all, it certainly is not the Church of Rome. The Church of our text is one that makes far less show than any visible church in the eyes of man, but is of far more importance in the eyes of God.

The Church of our text is made up of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, of all who are really holy and converted people. It comprehends all who have repented of sin, and fled to Christ by faith, and been made new creatures in Him. It comprises all God's elect, all who have received God's grace, all who have been washed in Christ's blood, all who have been clothed in Christ's righteousness, all who have been born again and sanctified by Christ's Spirit. All such, of every name, rank, nation, people, and tongue, compose the Church of our text. This is the body of Christ. This is the flock of Christ. This is the bride. This is the Lamb's wife. This is "the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church" of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. This is "the blessed company of all faithful people," spoken of in the Communion Service of the Church of England. This is "THE CHURCH ON THE ROCK."

The members of this Church do not all worship God in the same way, or use the same form of church government. Some of them are governed by bishops and some of them by elders. Some of them use a prayer-book when they meet for public worship and some of them use none. The Thirty-fourth Article of the Church of England most wisely declares, "It is not necessary that ceremonies should be in all places one, and alike." But the members of this Church all come to one throne of grace. They all worship with one heart. They are all led by one Spirit. They are all really and truly holy. They can all say "Alleluia," and they can all reply, "Amen."

This is that Church to which all visible churches on earth are servants and handmaidens. Whether they are Episcopalian, Independent, or Presbyterian, they all serve the interests of the one true Church. They are the scaffolding behind which the great building is carried on. They are the husk under which the living kernel grows. They have their various degrees of usefulness. The best and worthiest of them is that which trains up most members for Christ's true Church. But no visible church has any right to say, "We are the only true church. We are the men, and wisdom shall die with us" (cp. Job 12:2). No visible church should ever dare to say, "We shall stand for ever. The gates of hell shall not prevail against me."

This is that Church to which belong the Lord's gracious promises of preservation, continuance, protection, and final

glory. “Whatsoever,” says Hooker, “we read in Scripture concerning the endless love and saving mercy which God showeth towards His churches, the only proper subject thereof is this Church, which we properly term the mystical body of Christ.” Small and despised as the true Church may be in this world, it is precious and honourable in the sight of God. The temple of Solomon in all its glory was mean and contemptible in comparison with that Church which is built upon a rock.

I trust the things I have just been saying will sink down into the minds of all who read this paper. See that you hold sound doctrine upon the subject of “the Church.” A mistake here may lead on to dangerous and soul-ruining errors. The Church which is made up of true believers is the Church for which we, who are ministers, are specially ordained to preach. The Church which comprises all who repent and believe the gospel is the Church to which we desire you to belong. Our work is not done, and our hearts are not satisfied until you are made a new creature, and are a member of the one true Church. Outside of the Church which is “built on the rock” there can be NO SALVATION.

II. The Builder

I pass on to the second point to which I propose to invite your attention. Our text contains not merely a building, but a Builder. The Lord Jesus Christ declares, “I will build my church.”

The true Church of Christ is tenderly cared for by all the three Persons in the blessed Trinity. In the plan of salvation revealed in the Bible, beyond doubt God the Father chooses, God the Son redeems, and God the Holy Ghost sanctifies every member of Christ’s mystical body. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, cooperate for the salvation of every saved soul. This is truth, which ought never to be forgotten. Nevertheless, there is a peculiar sense in which help for the Church is laid on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is peculiarly and pre-eminently the Redeemer and Saviour of the Church. Therefore it is that we find Him saying in our text, “I will build—the work of building is My special work.”

It is Christ who calls the members of the Church in due time. They are “the called of Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:6). It is Christ who quickens them. “The Son quickeneth whom he will” (Joh 5:21). It is Christ who washes away their sins. He “has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5). It is Christ who gives them peace. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (Joh 14:27). It is Christ who gives them eternal life. “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish” (Joh 10:28). It is Christ who grants them repentance. “Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance” (Act 5:31). It is Christ who enables them to become God’s children. “To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God” (Joh 1:12). It is Christ who carries on the work within them when it is begun. “Because I live, ye shall live also” (Joh 14:19). In short, it has “pleased the Father that in Christ should all fullness dwell” (Col 1:19). He is the author and finisher of faith. He is the life. He is the head. From Him every joint and member of the mystical body of Christians is supplied. Through Him they are kept from falling. He shall preserve them to the end, and present them faultless before the Father’s throne with exceeding great joy. He is all things in all believers.

The mighty agent by whom the Lord Jesus Christ carries out this work in the members of His Church is without doubt the Holy Ghost. He it is who is ever renewing, awakening, leading to the cross, transforming, taking out of the world stone after stone, and adding to the mystical building. But the great chief Builder, who has undertaken to execute the work of redemption and bring it to completion, is the Son of God, the “Word [who] was made flesh” (Joh 1:14) It is Jesus Christ who “builds.”

In building the true Church, the Lord Jesus condescends to use many subordinate instruments. The ministry of the gospel, the circulation of the Scriptures, the friendly rebuke, the word spoken in season, the drawing influence of afflictions—all are means and appliances by which His work is carried on, and the Spirit conveys life to souls. But Christ is the great superintending Architect, ordering, guiding, directing all that is done. Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase (1Co 3:6). Ministers may preach and writers may write, but the Lord Jesus Christ alone can build. And except He builds, the work stands still.

Great is the wisdom wherewith the Lord Jesus Christ builds His Church! All is done at the right time, and in the right way. Each stone in its turn is put in its right place. Sometimes He chooses great stones, and sometimes He chooses small stones. Sometimes the work goes on fast, and sometimes it goes on slowly. Man is frequently impatient and thinks that nothing is doing. But man’s time is not God’s time. A thousand years in His sight are but as a single day. The great Builder makes no mistakes. He knows what He is doing. He sees the end from the beginning. He works by a perfect, unalterable, and certain plan. The mightiest conceptions of architects, like Michelangelo and Wren, are mere trifling and child’s play in comparison with Christ’s wise counsels respecting His Church.

Great is the condescensionandmercy which Christ exhibits in building His Church! He often chooses the most unlikely and roughest stones, and fits them into a most excellent work. He despises none, and rejects none, on account of former sins and past transgressions. He often makes former Pharisees and Publicans become favored pillars of His house.

He delights to show mercy. He often takes the most thoughtless and ungodly, and transforms them into polished

corners of His spiritual temple.

Great is the power which Christ displays in building His Church! He carries on His work in spite of opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. In storm, in tempest, through troublous times, silently, quietly, without noise, without stir, without excitement, the building progresses, like Solomon's temple. "I will work," He declares, "and who shall let it?" (Isa 43:13).

The children of this world take little or no interest in the building of this Church. They care nothing for the conversion of souls. What are broken spirits and penitent hearts to them? What is conviction of sin, or faith in the Lord Jesus to them? It is all "foolishness" in their eyes. But while the children of this world care nothing, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God. For the preserving of the true Church, the laws of nature have oftentimes been suspended. For the good of that Church, all the providential dealings of God in this world are ordered and arranged. For the elect's sake, wars are brought to an end, and peace is given to a nation. Statesmen, rulers, emperors, kings, presidents, heads of governments, have their schemes and plans, and think them of vast importance. But there is another work going on of infinitely greater moment, for which they are only the "axes and saws" in God's hands (Isa 10:15). That work is the erection of Christ's spiritual temple, the gathering in of living stones into the one true Church.

We ought to feel deeply thankful that the building of the true Church is laid on the shoulders of One that is mighty. If the work depended on man, it would soon stand still. But, blessed be God, the work is in the hands of a Builder who never fails to accomplish His designs! Christ is the almighty Builder. He will carry on His work, though nations and visible churches may not know their duty. Christ will never fail. That which He has undertaken He will certainly accomplish.

III. The Foundation

I pass on to the third point which I propose to consider, The Foundation upon which this Church is built. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us, "Upon this rock will I build my church."

What did the Lord Jesus Christ mean when He spoke of this foundation? Did He mean the Apostle Peter, to whom He was speaking? I think assuredly not. I can see no reason, if He meant Peter, why He did not say, "Upon thee" will I build my Church. If He had meant Peter, He would surely have said, I will build my Church on thee, as plainly as He said, "to thee will I give the keys." No, it was not the person of the Apostle Peter, but the good confession which the apostle had just made! It was not Peter, the erring, unstable man, but the mighty truth which the Father had revealed to Peter. It was the truth concerning Jesus Christ Himself which was the rock. It was Christ's Mediatorship and Christ's Messiahship. It was the blessed truth that Jesus was the promised Saviour, the true Surety, the real Intercessor between God and man. This was the Rock, and this the foundation, upon which the Church of Christ was to be built.

The foundation of the true Church was laid at a mighty cost. It needed that the Son of God should take our nature upon Him, and in that nature live, suffer, and die—not for His own sins, but for ours. It needed that in that nature Christ should go to the grave, and rise again. It needed that in that nature Christ should go up to heaven, to sit at the right hand of God, having obtained eternal redemption for all His people. No other foundation could have met the necessities of lost, guilty, corrupt, weak, helpless sinners.

That foundation, once obtained, is very strong. It can bear the weight of the sins of all the world. It has borne the weight of all the sins of all the believers who have built on it. Sins of thought, sins of the imagination, sins of the heart, sins of the head, sins which everyone has seen, and sins which no man knows, sins against God, and sins against man, sins of all kinds and descriptions—that mighty Rock can bear the weight of all these sins, and not give way. The mediatorial office of Christ is a remedy sufficient for all the sins of all the world.

To this one foundation every member of Christ's true Church is joined. In many things believers are disunited and disagreed; but in the matter of their soul's foundation they are all of one mind. Whether Episcopalians or Presbyterians, Baptists or Methodists, believers all meet at one point. They are all built on the Rock. Ask where they get their peace, and hope, and joyful expectation of good things to come. You will find that all flows from that one mighty source, Christ the Mediator between God and man, and the office that Christ holds, as the High Priest and Surety of sinners.

Look to your foundation, if you would know whether or not you are a member of the one true Church. It is a point that may be known to yourself. Your public worship we can see; but we cannot see whether you are personally built upon the Rock. Your attendance at the Lord's table we can see; but we cannot see whether you are joined to Christ, and one with Christ, and Christ in you. Take heed that you make no mistake about your own personal salvation. See that your own soul is upon the Rock. Without this, all else is nothing. Without this, you will never stand in the day of judgment. Better a thousand times in that day to be found in a cottage "upon the Rock," than in a palace upon the sand!

IV. The Implied Trials of the Church

I proceed in the fourth place to speak of the impliedtrials of the Church, to which our text refers. There is mention made of "the gates of hell." By that expression we are meant to understand the power of the prince of hell, even the devil. (Compare Psa 9:13; 107:18; Isa 38:10.)

The history of Christ's true Church has always been one of conflict and war. It has been constantly assailed by a deadly enemy, Satan, the prince of this world. The devil hates the true Church of Christ with an undying hatred. He is ever stirring up opposition against all its members. He is ever urging the children of this world to do his will, and to injure and harass the people of God. If he cannot bruise the head, he will bruise the heel. If he cannot rob the believers of heaven, he will vex them by the way.

Warfare with the powers of hell has been the experience of the whole body of Christ for six thousand years. It has always been a bush burning, though not consumed—a woman fleeing into the wilderness, but not swallowed up. (Exo 3:2; Rev 12:6, 16.) The visible churches have their times of prosperity and seasons of peace, but never has there been a time of peace for the true Church. Its conflict is perpetual; its battle never ends.

Warfare with the powers of hell is the experience of every individual member of the true Church. Each has to fight. What are the lives of all the saints, but records of battles? What were such men as Paul, James, Peter, John, Polycarp, Chrysostom, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Latimer, and Baxter, but soldiers engaged in a constant warfare? Sometimes the persons of the saints have been assailed, and sometimes their property. Sometimes they have been harassed by calumnies and slanders, and sometimes by open persecution. But in one way or another the devil has been continually warring against the Church. The "gates of hell" have been continually assaulting the people of Christ.

We who preach the gospel can hold out to all who come to Christ, "exceeding great and precious promises" (2Pe 1:4). We can offer boldly to you, in our Master's name, the peace of God which passeth all understanding. Mercy, free grace, and full salvation, are offered to every one who will come to Christ, and believe on Him. But we promise you no peace with the world, or with the devil. We warn you, on the contrary, that there must be warfare so long as you are in the body. We would not keep you back, or deter you from Christ's service. But we would have you "count the cost," and fully understand what Christ's service entails (Luk 14:28).

(a) Marvelnot at the enmity of the gates of hell. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own" (Joh 15:19). So long as the world is the world, and the devil the devil, so long there must be warfare, and believers in Christ must be soldiers. The world hated Christ, and the world will hate true Christians, as long as the earth stands. As the great reformer, Luther, said, "Cain will go on murdering Abel so long as the Church is on earth."

(b) Beprepared for the enmity of the gates of hell. Put on the whole armour of God (Eph 6). The tower of David contains a thousand bucklers (Song 4:4), all ready for the use of God's people. The weapons of our warfare have been tried by millions of poor sinners like ourselves, and have never been found to fail.

(c) Bepatient under the enmity of the gates of hell. It is all working together for your good (Rom 8:28-29). It tends to sanctify. It will keep you awake. It will make you humble. It will drive you nearer to the Lord Jesus Christ. It will wean you from the world. It will help to make you pray more. Above all, it will make you long for heaven. It will teach you to say with heart as well as lips, "Come, Lord Jesus. Thy kingdom come."

(d) Benotcastdown by the enmity of hell. The warfare of the true child of God is as much a mark of grace as the inward peace which he enjoys. No cross, no crown! No conflict, no saving Christianity! "Blessed are ye," said our Lord Jesus Christ, "when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake." If you are never persecuted for religion's sake, and all men speak well of you, you may well doubt whether you belong to "the Church on the Rock" (Mat 5:11; Luk 6:26).

V. The Security of the True Church of Christ

There remains one thing more to be considered, the security of the true Church of Christ. There is a glorious promise given by the Builder, "The gates of hell shall not prevail."

He who cannot lie has pledged His word that all the powers of hell shall never overthrow His Church. It shall continue, and stand, in spite of every assault. It shall never be overcome. All other created things perish and pass away, but not the Church which is built on the Rock.

Empires have risen and fallen in rapid succession. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Tyre, Carthage, Rome, Greece, Venice. Where are all these now? They were all the creations of man's hand, and have passed away. But the true Church of Christ lives on.

The mightiest cities have become heaps of ruins. The broad walls of Babylon have sunk to the ground. The palaces of Nineveh are covered with mounds of dust. The hundred gates of Thebes are only matters of history. Tyre is a place where fishermen hang their nets. Carthage is a desolation. Yet all this time the true Church stands. The gates of hell do not prevail against it.

The earliest visible churches have in many cases decayed and perished. Where is the church of Ephesus and the church of Antioch? Where is the church of Alexandria and the church of Constantinople? Where are the Corinthian, and Philippian, and Thessalonian churches? Where, indeed, are they all? They departed from the Word of God. They were proud of their bishops, and synods, and ceremonies, and learning, and antiquity. They did not glory in the true cross of Christ. They did not hold fast the gospel. They did not give the Lord Jesus His rightful office, or faith its rightful place. They are now among the things that have been. Their candlestick has been taken away. But all this time the true

Church has lived on.

Has the true Church been oppressed in one country? It has fled to another. Has it been trampled on and oppressed in one soil? It has taken root and flourished in some other climate. Fire, sword, prisons, fines, penalties, have never been able to destroy its vitality. Its persecutors have died and gone to their own place, but the Word of God has lived, and grown, and multiplied. Weak as this true Church may appear to the eye of man, it is an anvil which has broken many a hammer in times past, and perhaps will break many more before the end. "He that lays hands on it, is touching the apple of his eye" (Zec 2:8).

The promise of our text is true of the wholebody of the true Church. Christ will never be without witness in the world. He has had a people in the worst of times. He had seven thousand in Israel even in the days of Ahab. There are some now, I believe, in dark places of the Roman and Greek churches, who, in spite of much weakness, are serving Christ. The devil may rage horribly. The Church in some countries may be brought exceedingly low. But the gates of hell shall never entirely "prevail."

The promise of our text is true of everyindividual member of the Church. Some of God's people have been so much cast down and disquieted, that they have despaired of their safety. Some have fallen sadly, as David and Peter did. Some have departed from the faith for a time, like Cranmer and Jewell. Many have been tried by cruel doubts and fears. But all have got safe home at last, the youngest as well as the oldest, the weakest as well as the strongest. And so it will be to the end. Can you prevent tomorrow's sun from rising? Can you prevent the tide in the Bristol Channel from ebbing and flowing? Can you prevent the planets moving in their respective orbits? Then, and then alone, can you prevent the salvation of any believer, however feeble—the final safety of any living stone in that Church which is built upon the Rock, however small or insignificant that stone may appear.

The true Church is Christ's body. Not one bone in that mystical body shall ever be broken. The true Church is Christ's bride. Those whom God has joined in everlasting covenant, shall never be put asunder. The true Church is Christ's flock. When the lion came and took a lamb out of David's flock, David arose and delivered the lamb from his mouth. Christ will do the same. He is David's greater son. Not a single sick lamb in Christ's flock shall perish. He will say to His Father in the last day, "Of them which thou gavest me I have lost none" (Joh 18:9). The true Church is the wheat of the earth. It may be sifted, winnowed, buffeted, tossed to and fro. But not one grain shall be lost. The tares and chaff shall be burned; but the wheat shall be gathered into the barn. The true Church is Christ's army. The Captain of our salvation loses none of His soldiers. His plans are never defeated. His supplies never fail. His muster-roll is the same at the end as it was at the beginning. Of the men that marched gallantly out of England many years ago in the Crimean war, how many ever came back! Regiments that went forth, strong and cheerful, with bands playing and banners flying, laid their bones in a foreign land and never returned to their native country. But it is not so with Christ's army. Not one of His soldiers shall be missing at last. He Himself declares, "They shall never perish" (Joh 10:28).

The devil may cast some of the members of the true Church into prison. He may kill, and burn, and torture, and hang. But after he has killed the body, there is nothing more that he can do. He cannot hurt the soul. When the French troops took Rome years ago, they found on the walls of a prison cell, under the Inquisition, the words of a prisoner. Who he was, we know not. But his words are worthy of remembrance ("though dead, he yet speaketh"). He had written on the walls, very likely after an unjust trial and a still more unjust excommunication, the following striking words: "Blessed Jesus, they cannot cast me out of Thy true Church." That record is true! Not all the power of Satan can cast out of Christ's true Church one single believer.

I trust that no reader of this paper will ever allow fear to prevent his beginning to serve Christ. He to whom you commit your soul has all power in heaven and earth, and He will keep you. He will never let you be cast away. Relatives may oppose. Neighbours may mock. The world may slander, ridicule, jest, and sneer. Fear not! The powers of hell shall never prevail against your soul. Greater is He that is for you, than all they that are against you.

Fear not for the Church of Christ when ministers die, and saints are taken away. Christ can ever maintain His own cause. He will raise up better servants and brighter stars. The stars are all in His right hand. Leave off all anxious thought about the future. Cease to be cast down by the measures of statesmen, or the plots of wolves in sheep's clothing. Christ will ever provide for His own Church. Christ will take care that "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." All is going on well, though our eyes may not see it. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of our God, and of His Christ.

Practical Applications

I will now conclude this paper with a few words of practical application.

(1) My first word of application shall be aquestion. What shall that question be? What shall I ask? I will return to the point with which I began. I will go back to the first sentence with which I opened my paper. I ask you, whether you are a member of the one true Church of Christ? Are you in the highest, the best sense, a "churchman" in the sight of God? You know now what I mean. I look far beyond the Church of England. I am not speaking of church or chapel. I speak of "the Church built upon the Rock." I ask you, with all solemnity, Are you a member of that Church? Are you joined to the great

Foundation? Are you on the Rock? Have you received the Holy Ghost? Does the Spirit witness with your spirit, that you are one with Christ, and Christ with you? I beseech you, in the name of God, to lay to heart these questions, and to ponder them well. If you are not converted, you do not yet belong to the "Church on the Rock."

Let every reader of this paper take heed to himself, if he cannot give a satisfactory answer to my inquiry. Take heed, take heed, that you do not make shipwreck of your soul to all eternity. Take heed, lest at last the gates of hell prevail against you, the devil claim you as his own, and you be cast away for ever. Take heed, lest you go down to the pit from the land of Bibles, and in the full light of Christ's gospel. Take heed, lest you are found at the left hand of Christ at last—a lost Episcopalian or a lost Presbyterian, a lost Baptist or a lost Methodist—lost because, with all your zeal for your own party and your own communion table, you never joined the one true Church.

(2) My second word of application shall be aninvitation. I address it to every one who is not yet a true believer. I say to you, come and join the one true Church without delay. Come and join yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ in an everlasting covenant not to be forgotten.

Consider well what I say. I charge you solemnly not to mistake the meaning of my invitation. I do not bid you leave the visible church to which you belong. I abhor all idolatry of forms and parties. I detest a proselytising spirit. But I do bid you come to Christ and be saved. The day of decision must come some time. Why not this very hour? Why not today, while it is called today? Why not this very night, ere the sun rises tomorrow morning? Come to Him, who died for sinners on the cross and invites all sinners to come to Him by faith, and be saved. Come to my Master, Jesus Christ. Come, I say, for all things are now ready. Mercy is ready for you. Heaven is ready for you. Angels are ready to rejoice over you. Christ is ready to receive you. Christ will receive you gladly and welcome you among His children. Come into the ark. The flood of God's wrath will soon break upon the earth; come into the ark and be safe.

Come into the lifeboat of the one true Church. This old world will soon break into pieces! Hear you not the tremblings of it? The world is but a wreck hard upon a sandbank. The night is far spent, the waves are beginning to rise, the wind is getting up, and the storm will soon shatter the old wreck. But the lifeboat is launched, and we, the ministers of the gospel, beseech you to come into the lifeboat and be saved. We beseech you to arise at once and come to Christ.

Dost thou ask, "How can I come? My sins are too many. I am too wicked yet. I dare not come." Away with the thought! It is a temptation of Satan. Come to Christ as a sinner. Come just as you are. Hear the words of that beautiful hymn:

> "Just as I am, without one plea,
>
> But that Thy blood was shed for me,
>
> And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
>
> O Lamb of God I come."

This is the way to come to Christ. You should come waiting for nothing and tarrying for nothing. You should come as a hungry sinner to be filled, as a poor sinner to be enriched, and as a bad, undeserving sinner to be clothed with righteousness. So coming, Christ would receive you. "Him that cometh" to Christ, He "will in no wise cast out." Oh! come, come to Jesus Christ. Come into "the true Church" by faith and be saved.

(3) Last of all, let me give a word of exhortation to all true believers into whose hands this paper may fall.

Strive to live a holy life. Walk worthy of the Church to which you belong. Live like citizens of heaven. Let your light shine before men, so that the world may profit by your conduct. Let them know whose you are, and whom you serve. Be epistles of Christ, known and read of all men—written in such clear letters that none can say of you, "I know not whether this man be a member of Christ or not." He that knows nothing of real, practical holiness is no member of "the Church on the Rock."

Strive to live a courageous life. Confess Christ before men. Whatever station you occupy, in that station confess Christ. Why should you be ashamed of Him? He was not ashamed of you on the cross. He is ready to confess you now before His Father in heaven. Why should you be ashamed of Him? Be bold. Be very bold. The good soldier is not ashamed of his uniform. The true believer ought never to be ashamed of Christ.

Strive to live a joyful life. Live like men who look for that blessed hope, the second coming of Jesus Christ. This is the prospect to which we should all look forward. It is not so much the thought of going to heaven as of heaven coming to us, that should fill our minds. "There is a good time coming" for all the people of God, a good time for all the Church of Christ, a good time for all believers—a bad time for the impenitent and unbelieving, but a good time for true Christians. For that good time, let us wait, and watch, and pray.

The scaffolding will soon be taken down. The last stone will soon be brought out. The top-stone will be placed upon the edifice. Yet a little time, and the full beauty of the Church which Christ is building shall be clearly seen.

The great Master Builder will soon come Himself. A building shall be shown to assembled worlds in which there shall be no imperfection. The Saviour and the saved shall rejoice together. The whole universe shall acknowledge that in the building of Christ's Church all was well done. "Blessed"—it shall be said in that day, if it was never said before —"BLESSED ARE ALL THEY WHO BELONG TO THE CHURCH ON THE ROCK!"

Chapter 14

Visible Churches Warned

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."–Revelation 3:22

I suppose I may take it for granted that every reader of this paper belongs to some visible church of Christ. I do not ask now whether you are an Episcopalian, a Presbyterian, or an Independent. I only suppose that you would not like to be called an atheist or an infidel. You attend the public worship of some visible, particular, or national body of outwardly professing Christians.

Now, whatever the name of your church may be, I invite your special attention to the verse of Scripture before your eyes. I charge you to remember that the words of that verse concern yourself. They are written for your learning, and for all who call themselves Christians. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

This verse is repeated seven times over in the second and third chapters of the Book of Revelation. Seven different letters does the Lord Jesus there send by the hand of His servant John to the seven churches of Asia. Seven times over He winds up His letter by the same solemn words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Now the Lord God is perfect in all His works. He does nothing by chance. He caused no part of the Scriptures to be written by chance. In all His dealings you may trace design, purpose and plan. There was design in the size and orbit of each planet. There was design in the shape and structure of the least fly's wing. There was design in every verse of the Bible. There was design in every repetition of a verse, wherever it took place. There was design in the sevenfold repetition of the verse before our eyes. It had a meaning, and we were intended to observe it.

This verse appears to me to call the special attention of all true Christians to the seven "epistles to the churches." I believe it was meant to make believers take particular notice of the things which these seven epistles contain.

Let me try to point out certain leading truths which these seven epistles seem to me to teach. They are truths for the times we live in, truths for the latter days, truths which we cannot know too well and truths which it would be good for us all to know and feel far better than we do.

I. Matters of Doctrine, Practice, Warning, and Promise

I ask my readers to observe in the first place, that the Lord Jesus, in all the seven epistles, speaks of nothing but matters of doctrine, practice, warning, and promise. I ask you to look over these seven epistles to the churches, quietly and at your leisure, and you will soon see what I mean.

You will observe that the Lord Jesus sometimes finds fault with false doctrines, and ungodly, inconsistent practices –and rebukes them sharply. You will observe that He sometimes praises faith, patience, work, labour, perseverance– and bestows on these graces high commendation. You will sometimes find Him enjoining repentance, amendment, return to the first love, renewed application to Himself–and the like.

But I want you to observe that you will not find the Lord in any of the epistles dwelling upon church government or ceremonies. He says nothing about sacraments or ordinances. He makes no mention of liturgies or forms. He does not instruct John to write one word about baptism, the Lord's Supper, or the apostolical succession of ministers. In short, the leading principles of what may be called "the sacramental system" are not brought forward in any one of the seven epistles from first to last.

Now why do I dwell on this? I do it because many professing Christians in the present day would have us believe these things are of first, of cardinal, of paramount importance. There are not a few who seem to hold that there can be no church without a bishop and no godliness without a liturgy. They appear to believe that to teach the value of the sacraments is the first work of a minister, and to keep to their parish church the first business of a people.

Now let no man misunderstand me when I say this. Do not run away with the notion that I see no importance in sacraments. On the contrary, I regard them as great blessings to all who receive them "rightly, worthily, and with faith." Do not fancy that I attach no value to episcopacy, liturgy, and the parochial system. On the contrary, I consider that a church well-administered, which has these three things, and an evangelical ministry, is a far more complete and useful church than one in which they are not to be found.

But this I say, that sacraments, church government, the use of a liturgy, the observance of ceremonies and forms, are all as nothing compared to faith, repentance, and holiness. And my authority for so saying is the whole tenor of our Lord's words to the seven churches.

I never can believe, if a certain form of church government was so important as some say, that the great Head of the Church would have said nothing about it here. I should have expected to have found something said about it to Sardis and Laodicea. But I find nothing at all. And I think that silence is a great fact.

I cannot help remarking just the same fact in Paul's parting words to the Ephesian elders (Act 20:27-35). He was then leaving them for ever. He was giving his last charge on earth, and spoke as one who would see the faces of his hearers no more. And yet there is not a word in the charge about the sacraments and church government. If ever there was a time for speaking of them, it was then. But he says nothing at all; and I believe it was an intentional silence.

Now here lies one reason why we, who, rightly or wrongly, are called evangelical clergy, do not preach about bishops, and the Prayer-book, and ordinances more than we do. It is not because we do not value them in their place, proportion, and way. We do value them as really and truly as any, and are thankful for them. But we believe that repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and a holy conversation, are subjects of far more importance to men's souls. Without these no man can be saved. These are the first and most weighty matters, and therefore on these we dwell.

Here again lies one reason why we so often urge on men not to be content with the mere outward part of religion. You must have observed that we often warn you not to rest on church membership and church privileges. We tell you not to be satisfied all is right because you come to church on Sunday and come up to the Lord's table.

We often urge you to remember that he is not a Christian who is one outwardly—but rather that you must be "born again," that you must have a "faith that worketh by love," that there must be a "new creation" by the Spirit in your heart. We do it because this seems to us the mind of Christ. These are the kind of things He dwells upon, when writing seven times over to seven different churches. We feel that if we follow Him we cannot greatly err.

I am aware that men charge us with taking "low views" of the subjects to which I have adverted. It is a small thing that our views are thought "low," so long as our consciences tell us they are scriptural. High ground, as it is called, is not always safe ground. What Balaam said must be our answer, "What the Lord saith that will I speak" (Num 24:13).

The plain truth is, there are two distinct and separate systems of Christianity in England at the present day. It is useless to deny it. Their existence is a great fact and one that cannot be too clearly known.

According to one system, religion is a mere corporatebusiness. You are to belong to a certain body of people. By virtue of your membership of this body, vast privileges, both for time and eternity, are conferred upon you. It matters little what you are and what you feel. You are not to try yourself by your feelings. You are a member of a great ecclesiastical corporation. Then all its privileges and immunities are your own. Do you belong to the one true, visible corporation? That is the grand question.

According to the other system, religion is eminently apersonalbusiness between yourself and Christ. It will not save your soul to be an outward member of any ecclesiastical body whatever, however sound that body may be. Such membership will not wash away one sin, or give you confidence in the day of judgment. There must be personal faith in Christ, personal dealings between yourself and God, and personal felt communion between your own heart and the Holy Ghost. Have you this personal faith? Have you this felt work of the Spirit in your soul? This is the grand question. If not, you will be lost.

This last system is the system which those who are called evangelical ministers cleave to and teach. They do so because they are satisfied that it is the system of Holy Scripture. They do so because they are convinced that any other system is productive of most dangerous consequences, and calculated to delude men fatally as to their actual state. They do so because they believe it to be the only system of teaching which God will bless, and that no church will flourish so much as that in which repentance, faith, conversion, and the work of the Spirit are the grand subjects of the minister's sermon.

II. "I Know Thy Works"

Once more I say, let us often look carefully over the seven "epistles to the churches." I ask my readers, in the second place, to observe that in every epistle the Lord Jesus says, "I KNOW THY WORKS." That repeated expression is very striking. It is not for nothing that we read these words seven times over.

To one church the Lord Jesus says, I know thy labour and patience—to another, thy tribulation and poverty—to a third, thy charity, and service, and faith. But to all, He uses the words I now dwell on: "I know thy works." It is not, "I know thy profession, thy desires, thy resolutions, and thy wishes," but thy WORKS. I know thy WORKS.

The works of a professing Christian are of great importance. They cannot save your soul. They cannot justify you. They cannot wipe out your sins. They cannot deliver you from the wrath of God. But it does not follow because they cannot save you, that they are of no importance. Take heed and beware of such a notion. The man who thinks so is fearfully deceived.

I often think I could willingly die for the doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. But I must earnestly contend, as a general principle, that a man's WORKS are the evidence of a man's religion. If you call yourself a Christian, you must show it in your daily ways and daily behaviour. Call to mind that the faith of Abraham and of Rahab was proved by their works (Jam 2:21-26). Remember it avails you and me nothing to profess we know God, if in works we deny Him (Tit 1:16). Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, "Every tree is known by its own fruit" (Luk 6:44).

But whatever the works of a professing Christian may be, Jesus says, "I know them!" "His eyes are in every place,

beholding the evil and the good" (Pro 15:3). You never did an action, however private, but Jesus saw it. You never spoke a word, no, not even in a whisper, but Jesus heard it. You never wrote a letter, even to your dearest friend, but Jesus read it. You never thought a thought, however secret, but Jesus was familiar with it. His eyes are as a flaming fire. The darkness is no darkness with Him. All things are open and manifest before Him. He says to every one, "I know thy works."

(a) The Lord Jesus knows the works of all impenitent and unbelieving souls, and will one day punish them. They are not forgotten in heaven, though they may be upon earth. When the great white throne is set, and the books are opened, the wicked dead will be judged "according to their works" (Rev 20:12-13).

(b) The Lord Jesus knows the works of His own people, and weighs them. "By him actions are weighed" (1Sa 2:3). He knows the why and the wherefore of the deeds of all believers. He sees their motives in every step they take. He discerns how much is done for His sake, and how much is done for the sake of praise. Alas! not a few things are done by believers which seem very good to you and me, but are rated very low by Christ.

(c) The Lord Jesus knows the works of all His own people, and will one day reward them. He never overlooks a kind word or a kind deed done in His name. He will own the least fruit of faith, and declare it before the world in the day of His appearing. If you love the Lord Jesus and follow Him, you may be sure your work and labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. The works of those that die in the Lord "shall follow them" (Rev 14:13). They shall not go before them, nor yet by their side, but they shall follow them, and be owned in the day of Christ's appearing. The parable of the pounds shall be made good (Luk 19:12-27). "Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour" (1Co 3:8). The world knows you not, for it knows not your Master. But Jesus sees and knows all. "I know thy works."

Think what a solemn warning there is here to all worldly and hypocritical professors of religion. Let all such read, mark, and digest these words. Jesus says to you, "I know thy works." You may deceive me or any other minister; it is easy to do so. You may receive the bread and wine from my hands, and yet be cleaving to iniquity in your hearts. You may sit under the pulpit of an evangelical preacher, week after week, and hear his words with a serious face, but believe them not. But remember this, you cannot deceive Christ. He who discovered the deadness of Sardis and the lukewarmness of Laodicea, sees you through and through, and will expose you at the last day, except you repent.

Oh, believe me, hypocrisy is a losing game. It will never answer to seem one thing and be another; to have the name of Christian, and not the reality. Be sure, if your conscience smites you and condemns you in this matter—be sure your sin will find you out. The eye that saw Achan steal the golden wedge and hide it, is upon you. The book that recorded the deeds of Gehazi, and Ananias, and Sapphira, is recording your ways. Jesus mercifully sends you a word of warning today. He says, "I know thy works."

But think also what encouragement there is here for every honest and true-hearted believer. To you also Jesus says, "I know thy works." You see no beauty in any action that you do. All seems imperfect, blemished, and defiled. You are often sick at heart of your own short-comings. You often feel that your whole life is one great arrear, and that every day is either a blank or a blot. But know now that Jesus can see some beauty in everything that you do from a conscientious desire to please Him. His eye can discern excellence in the least thing which is a fruit of His own Spirit. He can pick out the grains of gold from amidst the dross of your performances, and sift the wheat from amidst the chaff, in all your doings. Your tears are all put into His bottle (Psa 56:8). Your endeavours to do good to others, however feeble, are written in His book of remembrance. The least cup of cold water given in His name shall not lose its reward. He does not forget your work and labour of love, however little the world may regard it.

It is very wonderful; but so it is. Jesus loves to honour the work of His Spirit in His people, and to pass over their frailties. He dwells on the faith of Rahab, but not on her lie. He commends His apostles for continuing with Him in His temptations, and passes over their ignorance and want of faith (Luk 12:28). "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Psa 103:13). And as a father finds a pleasure in the least acts of his children, of which a stranger knows nothing, so I suppose the Lord finds a pleasure in our poor feeble efforts to serve Him.

But it is all very wonderful. I can well understand the righteous in the day of judgment saying, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee, or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick or in prison, and came unto thee?" (Mat 25:37-39). It may well seem incredible and impossible that they can have done anything worth naming in the great day! Yet so it is. Let all believers take the comfort of it. The Lord says, "I know thy works." It ought to humble you. But it ought not to make you afraid.

III. A Promise to the Man that Overcomes

I ask my readers to observe, in the third and last place, that in every epistle the Lord Jesus makes a promise to the man that OVERCOMES.

Seven times over Jesus gives to the churches exceeding great and precious promises. Each is different, and each full of strong consolation; but each is addressed to the overcoming Christian. It is always "he that overcometh," or "to him that overcometh." I ask you to take notice of this.

Every professing Christian is the soldier of Christ. He is bound by his baptism to fight Christ's battle against sin, the

world, and the devil. The man that does not do this breaks his vow. He is a spiritual defaulter. He does not fulfil the engagements made for him. The man that does not do this is practically renouncing his Christianity. The very fact that he belongs to a church, attends a Christian place of worship, and calls himself a Christian, is a public declaration that he desires to be reckoned a soldier of Jesus Christ.

Armour is provided for the professing Christian, if he will only use it. "Take unto you," says Paul to the Ephesians, "the whole armour of God." "Stand, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness." "Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." "Above all, take the shield of faith" (Eph 6:13-17).

And not least, the professing Christian has…

- the best of leaders: Jesus the Captain of salvation, through whom he may be more than conqueror;
- the best of provisions: the bread and water of life; and
- the best of pay promised to him: an eternal weight of glory.

All these are ancient things. I will not be drawn off from my subject in order to dwell on them now.

The one point I want to impress upon your soul just now is this, that the true believer is not only a soldier, but a victorious soldier. He not only professes to fight on Christ's side against sin, the world, and the devil, but he does actually fight and overcome.

Now this is one grand distinguishing mark of true Christians. Other men, perhaps, like to be numbered in the ranks of Christ's army. Other men may have lazy wishes, and languid desires after the crown of glory. But it is the true Christian alone who does the work of a soldier. He alone fairly meets the enemies of his soul, really fights with them, and in that fight overcomes them.

One great lesson I want men to learn from these seven epistles is this, that if you would prove you are born again and going to heaven, you must be a victorious soldier of Christ. If you would make it clear that you have any title to Christ's precious promises, you must fight the good fight in Christ's cause, and in that fight you must conquer.

Victory is the only satisfactory evidence that you have a saving religion. You like good sermons perhaps. You respect the Bible, and read it occasionally. You say your prayers night and morning. You have family prayers, and give to religious societies. I thank God for this. It is all very good. But how goes the battle? How does the great conflict go on all this time? Are you overcoming the love of the world and the fear of man? Are you overcoming the passions, tempers, and lusts of your own heart? Are you resisting the devil and making him flee from you? How is it in this matter? You must either rule or serve sin, and the devil, and the world. There is no middle course. You must either conquer or be lost.

I know well it is a hard battle that you have to fight, and I want you to know it too. You must fight the good fight of faith, and endure hardships, if you would lay hold of eternal life. You must make up your mind to a daily struggle, if you would reach heaven. There may be short roads to heaven invented by man; but ancient Christianity, the good old way, is the way of the cross—the way of conflict. Sin, the world, and the devil must be actually mortified, resisted, and overcome.

This is the road that saints of old have trodden in, and left their record on high.

(a) When Moses refused the pleasures of sin in Egypt and chose affliction with the people of God, this was overcoming: he overcame the loveofpleasure.

(b) When Micaiah refused to prophesy smooth things to king Ahab, though he knew he would be persecuted if he spoke the truth, this was overcoming: he overcame the loveofease.

(c) When Daniel refused to give up praying, though he knew the den of lions was prepared for him, this was overcoming: he overcame the fearofdeath.

(d) When Matthew rose from the receipt of custom at our Lord's bidding, left all and followed Him, this was overcoming: he overcame the loveofmoney.

(e) When Peter and John stood up boldly before the council and said, "We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard," this was overcoming: they overcame the fearofman.

(f) When Saul the Pharisee gave up all his prospects of preferment among the Jews, and preached that very Jesus whom he had once persecuted, this was overcoming: he overcame the loveofman'spraise.

The same kind of thing which these men did you must also do if you would be saved. They were men of like passions with yourself, and yet they overcame. They had as many trials as you can possibly have, and yet they overcame. They fought. They wrestled. They struggled. You must do the same.

What was the secret of their victory? Their faith. They believed on Jesus and, believing, were made strong. They believed on Jesus and, believing, were held up. In all their battles, they kept their eyes on Jesus, and He never left them nor forsook them. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony," and so may you (Rev 12:11).

I set these words before you. I ask you to lay them to heart. Resolve, by the grace of God, to be an overcoming Christian.

I fear much for many professing Christians. I see no sign of fighting in them, much less of victory. They never strike one stroke on the side of Christ. They are at peace with His enemies. They have no quarrel with sin. I warn you, this is not Christianity. This is not the way to heaven.

I often fear much for those who hear the gospel regularly. I fear lest you become so familiar with the sound of its doctrines, that insensibly you become dead to its power. I fear lest your religion should sink down into a little vague talk about your own weakness and corruption, and a few sentimental expressions about Christ, while real, practical fighting on Christ's side is altogether neglected. Oh! beware of this state of mind. "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only." No victory—no crown! Fight and overcome! (Jam 1:22).

Young men and women, and specially those who have been brought up in religious families, I fear much for you. I fear lest you get a habit of giving way to every temptation. I fear lest you become afraid of saying, "No!" to the world and the devil—and, when sinners entice you, think it least trouble to consent. Beware, I do beseech you, of giving way. Every concession will make you weaker. Go into the world resolved to fight Christ's battle and fight your way on.

Believers in the Lord Jesus, of every church and rank in life, I feel much for you. I know your course is hard. I know it is a sore battle you have to fight. I know you are often tempted to say, "It is of no use," and to lay down your arms altogether.

Cheer up, dear brethren and sisters. Take comfort, I entreat you. Look at the bright side of your position. Be encouraged to fight on. The time is short. The Lord is at hand. The night is far spent. Millions as weak as you have fought the same fight. Not one of all those millions has been finally led captive by Satan. Mighty are your enemies, but the Captain of your salvation is mightier still. His arm, His grace, and His Spirit shall hold you up. Cheer up. Be not cast down.

What though you lose a battle or two? You shall not lose all. What though you faint sometimes? You shall not be destroyed. Watch against sin, and sin shall not have dominion over you. Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you. Come out boldly from the world, and the world shall be obliged to let you go. You shall find yourselves in the end more than conquerors—you shall "overcome."

Practical Application

Let me draw from the whole subject a few words of application, and then I am done.

(1) For one thing, let me warn all who are living only for the world,to take heed what they are doing. You are enemies of Christ, though you may not know it. He marks your ways, though you turn your backs on Him, and refuse to give Him your hearts. He is observing your daily life, and reading your daily ways. There will yet be a resurrection of all your thoughts, words and actions. You may forget them, but God does not. You may be careless about them, but they are carefully marked down in the book of remembrance. Oh! Worldly man, think of this! Tremble, tremble and repent.

(2) For another thing, let me warn all formalists and self-righteous people to take heed that they are not deceived. You fancy you will go to heaven because you go regularly to church. You indulge an expectation of eternal life, because you are always at the Lord's table, and are never missing in your pew. But where is your repentance? Where is your faith? Where are your evidences of a new heart? Where is the work of the Spirit? Where are your evidences of regeneration? Oh, formal Christian, consider these questions! Tremble, tremble and repent.

(3) For another thing, let me warn all careless members of churches to beware lest they trifle their souls into hell. You live on year after year as if there was no battle to be fought with sin, the world, and the devil. You pass through life a smiling, laughing, gentleman-like or lady-like person, and behave as if there was no devil, no heaven, and no hell. Oh, careless churchman, careless Episcopalian, careless Presbyterian, careless Independent, careless Baptist, awake to see eternal realities in their true light! Awake and put on the armour of God! Awake and fight hard for life! Tremble, tremble and repent.

(4) For another thing, let me warn every one who wants to be saved, not to be content with the world's standard of religion. Surely, no man with his eyes open can fail to see that the Christianity of the New Testament is something far higher and deeper than the Christianity of most professing Christians. The formal, easy-going, do-little thing which most people call religion, is evidently not the religion of the Lord Jesus. The things that He praises in these seven epistles are not praised by the world. The things that He blames are not things in which the world sees any harm. Oh, if you would follow Christ, be not content with theworld's Christianity! Tremble, tremble and repent.

(5) In the last place, let me warn every one who professes to be a believer in the Lord Jesus, not to be content with a little religion.

Of all sights in the church of Christ, I know none more painful to my own eyes than a Christian contented and satisfied with a little grace, a little repentance, a little faith, a little knowledge, a little charity, and a little holiness. I do beseech and entreat every believing soul that reads this tract not to be that kind of man. If you have any desires after usefulness—if you have any wishes to promote your Lord's glory and if you have any longings after much inward peace, be not content with a little religion.

Let us rather seek, every year we live, to make more spiritual progress than we have done, to grow in grace and in

the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to grow in humility and self-acquaintance, to grow in spirituality and heavenly-mindedness, and to grow in conformity to the image of our Lord.

Let us beware of leaving our first love like Ephesus, of becoming lukewarm like Laodicea, of tolerating false practices like Pergamos, of tampering with false doctrine like Thyatira, and of becoming half dead, ready to die, like Sardis.

Let us rather covet the best gifts. Let us aimateminentholiness. Let us endeavour to be like Smyrna and Philadelphia. Let us hold fast what we have already, and continually seek to have more. Let us labour to be unmistakable Christians. Let it not be our distinctive character that we are men of science, or men of literary attainments, or men of the world, or men of pleasure, or men of business, but “men of God.” Let us so live that all may see that to us the things of God are the first things, and the glory of God the first aim in our lives—to follow Christ our grand object in time present, to be with Christ our grand desire in time to come.

Let us live in this way, and we shall be happy. Let us live in this way, and we shall do good to the world. Let us live in this way, and we shall leave good evidence behind us when we are buried. Let us live in this way, and the Spirit’s word to the churches will not have been spoken to us in vain.

Chapter 15

“Lovest Thou Me?”

“Lovest thou me?”–John 21:16

THE question which heads this chapter was addressed by Christ to the Apostle Peter. A more important question could not be asked. Nineteen hundred years have passed away since the words were spoken. But to this very day the inquiry is most searching and useful.

A disposition to love somebody is one of the commonest feelings, which God has implanted in human nature. Too often, unhappily, people set their affection on unworthy objects. I want this day, to claim a place for Him who alone is worthy of all our hearts’ best feelings. I want men to give some of their love to that Divine Person who loved us, and gave Himself for us. In all their loving, I would have them not forget TO LOVE CHRIST.

Suffer me to press this mighty subject upon the attention of every reader of this paper. This is no matter for mere enthusiasts and fanatics. It deserves the consideration of every reasonable Christian who believes the Bible. Our very salvation is bound up with it. Life or death, heaven or hell, depend on our ability to answer the simple question, “Do you love Christ?”

There are two points which I wish to bring forward in opening up this subject.

I. A True Christian Loves Christ

In the first place, let me show the peculiar feeling of a true Christian towards Christ–he loves Him.

A true Christian is not a mere baptized man or woman. He is something more. He is not a person who only goes, as a matter of form, to a church or chapel on Sundays and lives all the rest of the week as if there was no God. Formality is not Christianity. Ignorant lip-worship is not true religion. The Scripture speaketh expressly: “They are not all Israel which are of Israel” (Rom 9:6). The practical lesson of those words is clear and plain. All are not true Christians who are members of the visible church of Christ.

The true Christian is one whose religion is in his heart and life. It is felt by himself in his heart. It is seen by others in his conduct and life. He feels his sinfulness, guilt, and badness–and repents. He sees Jesus Christ to be that Divine Saviour whom his soul needs, and commits himself to Him. He puts off the old man with his corrupt and carnal habits and puts on the new man. He lives a new and holy life, fighting habitually against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Christ Himself is the cornerstone of his Christianity. Ask him in what he trusts for the forgiveness of his many sins, and he will tell you in the death of Christ. Ask him in what righteousness he hopes to stand innocent at the Judgment Day, and he will tell you it is the righteousness of Christ. Ask him by what pattern he tries to frame his life, and he will tell you that it is the example of Christ.

But, beside all this, there is one thing in a true Christian which is eminently peculiar to him. That thing is love to Christ. Knowledge, faith, hope, reverence, obedience, are all marked features in a true Christian’s character. But his picture would be very imperfect if you omitted his “love” to his Divine Master. He not only knows, trusts, and obeys. He goes further than this–he loves.

This peculiar mark of a true Christian is one which we find mentioned several times in the Bible. “Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” is an expression which many Christians are familiar with. Let it never be forgotten that love is mentioned by the Holy Ghost in almost as strong terms as faith. Great as the danger is of him “that believeth not,” the danger of him that “loveth not” is equally great. Not believing and not loving are both steps to everlasting ruin.

Hear what Paul says to the Corinthians: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha”(1Co 16:22). Paul allows no way of escape to the man who does not love Christ. He leaves him no loophole or excuse. A man may lack clear head-knowledge and yet be saved. He may fail in courage and be overcome by the fear of man, like Peter. He may fall tremendously, like David, and yet rise again. But if a man does not love Christ, he is not in the way of life. The curse is yet upon him. He is on the broad road that leadeth to destruction.

Hear what Paul says to the Ephesians, “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” (Eph 6:24). The apostle is here sending his good wishes, and declaring his good will to all true Christians. Many of them, no doubt, he had never seen. Many of them in the early churches, we may be very sure, were weak in faith, and knowledge, and self-denial. How, then, shall he describe them in sending his message? What words can he use which will not discourage the weaker brethren? He chooses a sweeping expression which exactly describes all true Christians under one common name. All had not attained to the same degree, whether in doctrine or practice. But all loved Christ in sincerity.

Hear what our Lord Jesus Christ Himself says to the Jews, “If God were your Father, ye would love me” (Joh 8:42). He saw His misguided enemies satisfied with their spiritual condition, on the one single ground that they were children

of Abraham. He saw them, like many ignorant Christians of our own day, claiming to be God's children for no better reasons than this: that they were circumcised and belonged to the Jewish church. He lays down the broad principle that no man is a child of God who does not love God's only begotten Son. No man has a right to call God "Father" who does not love Christ. Well would it be for many Christians if they were to remember that this mighty principle applies to them as well as to the Jews. No love to Christ, then no sonship to God!

Hear once more what our Lord Jesus Christ said to the Apostle Peter after He rose from the dead. Three times He asked him the question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (Joh 21:15-17). The occasion was remarkable. He meant gently to remind His erring disciple of His thrice repeated fall. He desired to call forth from him a new confession of faith before publicly restoring to him his commission to feed the Church. And what was the question that He asked him? He might have said: "Believest thou? Art thou converted? Art thou ready to confess Me? Wilt thou obey Me?" He uses none of these expressions. He simply says, "Lovest thou me?" This is the point, He would have us know, on which a man's Christianity hinges. Simple as the question sounded, it was most searching. Plain and easy to be understood by the most unlearned poor man, it contains matter which tests the reality of the most advanced apostle. If a man truly loves Christ, all is right–if not, all is wrong.

Would you know the secret of this peculiar feeling towards Christ which distinguishes the true Christian? You have it in the words of John, "We love him because he first loved us" (1Jo 4:19). That text, no doubt, applies specially to God the Father. But it is no less true of God the Son.

A true Christian loves Christ for all He hasdone for him. He has suffered in his stead, and died for him on the cross. He has redeemed him from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin by His blood. He has called him by His Spirit to self-knowledge, repentance, faith, hope, and holiness. He has forgiven all his many sins and blotted them out. He has freed him from the captivity of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He has taken him from the brink of hell, placed him in the narrow way, and set his face toward heaven. He has given him light instead of darkness, peace of conscience instead of uneasiness, hope instead of uncertainty, life instead of death. Can you wonder that the true Christian loves Christ?

And he loves Him besides, for all that He isstilldoing. He feels that He is daily washing away his many shortcomings and infirmities, and pleading his soul's cause before God. He is daily supplying all the needs of his soul, and providing him with an hourly provision of mercy and grace. He is daily leading him by His Spirit to a city of habitation, bearing with him when he is weak and ignorant, raising him up when he stumbles and falls, protecting him against his many enemies, preparing an eternal home for him in heaven. Can you wonder that the true Christian loves Christ?

Does the debtor in jail love the friend who unexpectedly and undeservedly pays all his debts, supplies him with fresh capital, and takes him into partnership with himself? Does the prisoner in war love the man who at the risk of his own life breaks through the enemy's lines, rescues him, and sets him free? Does the drowning sailor love the man who plunges into the sea, dives after him, catches him by the hair of his head, and by a mighty effort saves him from a watery grave? A very child can answer such questions as these. Just in the same way, and upon the same principles, a true Christian loves Jesus Christ.

(a) This love to Christ is the inseparable companion of saving faith. A faith of devils, a mere intellectual faith, a man may have without love, but not that faith which saves. Love cannot usurp the office of faith. It cannot justify. It does not join the soul to Christ. It cannot bring peace to the conscience. But where there is real justifying faith in Christ, there will always be heart-love to Christ. He that is really forgiven is the man who will really love (Luk 7:47). If a man has no love to Christ, you may be sure he has no faith.

(b) Love to Christ is the mainspring of work for Christ. There is little done for His cause on earth from sense of duty, or from knowledge of what is right and proper. The heart must be interested before the hands will move and continue moving. Excitement may galvanize the Christian's hands into a fitful and spasmodic activity. But there will be no patient continuance in well-doing, no unwearied labour in missionary work at home or abroad, without love. The nurse in a hospital may do her duty properly and well, may give the sick man his medicine at the right time, may feed him, minister to him, and attend to all his wants. But there is a vast difference between that nurse and a wife tending the sick-bed of a beloved husband, or a mother watching over a dying child. The one acts from a sense of duty, the other from affection and love. The one does her duty because she is paid for it, the other is what she is because of her heart. It is just the same in the matter of the service of Christ. The great workers of the church, the men who have led forlorn hopes[7] in the mission-field and turned the world upside down, have all been eminently lovers of Christ.

Examine the characters of Owen and Baxter, of Rutherford and George Herbert, of Leighton and Hervey, of Whitefield and Wesley, of Henry Martyn and Judson, of Bickersteth and Simeon, of Hewitson and M'Cheyne, of Stowell and M'Neile. These men have left a mark on the world. And what was the common feature of their characters? They all loved Christ. They not only held a creed. They loved a person, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

(c) Love to Christ is the point which we ought specially to dwell upon in teaching religion to children. Election, imputed righteousness, original sin, justification, sanctification, and even faith itself, are matters which sometimes puzzle a child of tender years. But love to Jesus seems far more within reach of their understanding. That He loved

them even to His death, and that they ought to love Him in return, is a creed which meets the span of their minds. How true it is that "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise!" (Mat 21:16). There are myriads of Christians who know every article of the Athanasian, Nicene, and Apostolic Creeds, and yet know less of real Christianity than a little child who only knows that he loves Christ.

(d) Love to Christ is the common meeting-point of believers of every branch of Christ's Church on earth. Whether Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Baptist or Independent, Calvinist or Arminian, Methodist or Moravian, Lutheran or Reformed, Established or Free—here, at least, they are agreed. About forms and ceremonies, about church government and modes of worship, they often differ widely. But on one point, at any rate, they are united. They have all one common feeling towards Him on whom they build their hope of salvation. They "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" (Eph 6:24). Many of them, perhaps, are ignorant of systematic divinity and could argue but feebly in defense of their creed. But they all know what they feel toward Him who died for their sins. "I cannot speak much for Christ, sir," said an old, uneducated Christian woman to Dr. Chalmers, "but if I cannot speak for Him, I could die for Him!"

(e) Love to Christ will be the distinguishing mark of all saved souls in heaven. The multitude which no man can number will all be of one mind. Old differences will be merged in one common feeling. Old doctrinal peculiarities, fiercely wrangled for upon earth, will be covered over by one common sense of debt to Christ. Luther and Zwingle will no longer dispute. Wesley and Toplady will no longer waste time in controversy. Churchmen and Dissenters will no longer bite and devour one another. All will find themselves joining with one heart and voice in that hymn of praise, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sin in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev 1:5-6).

The words which John Bunyan puts in the mouth of Mr. Standfast as he stood in the River of Death are very beautiful. He said, "This river has been a terror to many; yea, the thoughts of it also have often frightened me. But now methinks I stand easy; my foot is fixed upon that on which the priests that bear the ark stood while Israel went over Jordan. The waters indeed are to the palate bitter, and to the stomach cold; yet the thoughts of what I am going to, and of the convoy that waits for me on the other side, lie as a glowing coal at my heart. I see myself now at the end of my journey; my toilsome days are ended. I am going to see that Head which was crowned with thorns, and that Face which was spit upon for me. I have formerly lived by hearing and faith, but now I go where I live by sight, and be with Him in whose company I delight myself. I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of; and wherever I have seen the print of His shoe in the earth, there I have coveted to set my foot too. His name has been to me a civet-box; yea, sweeter than all perfumes! His voice to me has been most sweet; and His countenance I have more desired than they that have desired the light of the sun!" Happy are they that know something of this experience! He that would be in tune for heaven must know something of love to Christ. He that dies ignorant of that love had better never have been born.

II. How Love to Christ Is Revealed

Let me show, in the second place, the peculiar marks by which love to Christ makes itself known.

The point is one of vast importance. If there is no salvation without love to Christ, if he that does not love Christ is in peril of eternal condemnation, it becomes us all to find out very distinctly what we know about this matter. Christ is in heaven, and we are upon earth. How can we discern the man that loves Him?

Happily the point is one which it is not very hard to settle. How do we know whether we love any person here upon earth? In what way and manner does love show itself between people in this world—between husband and wife, between parent and child, between brother and sister, between friend and friend? Let these questions be answered by common sense and observations, and I ask no more. Let these questions be honestly answered, and the knot before us is untied. How does affection show itself among ourselves?

(a) If we love a person, we liketo think about him. We do not need to be reminded of him. We do not forget his name, or his appearance, or his character, or his opinions, or his tastes, or his position, or his occupation. He comes up before our mind's eye many a time in the day. Though perhaps far distant, he is often present in our thoughts. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ! Christ "dwells in his heart," and is thought of more or less every day (Eph 3:17). The true Christian does not need to be reminded that he has a crucified Master. He often thinks of Him. He never forgets that He has a day, a cause, and a people, and that of His people he is one. Affection is the real secret of a good memory in religion. No worldly man can think much about Christ, unless Christ is pressed upon his notice, because he has no affection for Him. The true Christian has thoughts about Christ every day that he lives, for this one simple reason, that he loves Him.

(b) If we love a person, we like to hear about him. We find a pleasure in listening to those who speak of him. We feel an interest in any report which others make of him. We are all attention when others talk about him and describe his ways, his sayings, his doings, and his plans. Some may hear him mentioned with utter indifference, but our own hearts bound within us at the very sound of his name. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian delights to hear something about his Master. He likes those sermons best which are full of Christ. He enjoys that society most in which people talk of the things which are Christ's. I have read of an old Welsh believer who used to walk

several miles every Sunday to hear an English clergyman preach, though she did not understand a word of English. She was asked why she did so. She replied that this clergyman named the name of Christ so often in his sermons that it did her good. She loved even the name of her Saviour.

(c) If we love a person, we like to read about him. What intense pleasure a letter from an absent husband gives to a wife, or from an absent son to his mother. Others may see little worth notice in the letter. They can scarcely take the trouble to read it through. But those who love the writer see something in the letter which no one else can. They carry it about with them as a treasure. They read it over and over again. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian delights to read the Scriptures, because they tell him about his beloved Saviour. It is no wearisome task with him to read them. He rarely needs reminding to take his Bible with him when he goes a journey. He cannot be happy without it. And why is all this? It is because the Scriptures testify of Him whom his soul loves, even Christ.

(d) If we love a person, we like to please him. We are glad to consult his tastes and opinions, to act upon his advice, and do the things which he approves. We even deny ourselves to meet his wishes, abstain from things which we know he dislikes, and learn things to do to which we are not naturally inclined; because we think it will give him pleasure. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian studies to please Him, by being holy both in body and spirit. Show him anything in his daily practice that Christ hates, and he will give it up. Show him anything that Christ delights in, and he will follow after it. He does not murmur at Christ's requirements as being too strict and severe, as the children of the world do. To him Christ's commandments are not grievous and Christ's burden is light. And why is all this? Simply because he loves Him.

(e) If we love a person, we like his friends. We are favourably inclined to them, even before we know them. We are drawn to them by the common tie of common love to one and the same person. When we meet them we do not feel that we are altogether strangers. There is a bond of union between us. They love the person that we love, and that alone is an introduction. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian regards all Christ's friends as his friends, members of the same body, children of the same family, soldiers in the same army, travellers to the same home. When he meets them, he feels as if he had long known them. He is more at home with them in a few minutes than he is with many worldly people after an acquaintance of several years. And what is the secret of all this? It is simply affection to the same Saviour, and love to the same Lord.

(f) If we love a person, we are jealous about his name and honour. We do not like to hear him spoken against without speaking up for him and defending him. We feel bound to maintain his interests and his reputation. We regard the person who treats him ill with almost as much disfavour as if he had ill-treated us. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ. The true Christian regards with a godly jealousy all efforts to disparage his Master's word, or name, or Church, or day. He will confess Him before princes, if need be, and be sensitive of the least dishonour put upon Him. He will not hold his peace and suffer his Master's cause to be put to shame without testifying against it. And why is all this? Simply because he loves Him.

(g) If we love a person, we like to talk to him. We tell him all our thoughts, and pour out all our heart to him. We find no difficulty in discovering subjects of conversation. However reserved we may be to others, we find it easy to talk to a much-loved friend. However often we may meet, we are never at a loss for matter to talk about. We have always much to say, much to ask about, much to describe, much to communicate. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ! The true Christian finds no difficulty in speaking to his Saviour. Every day he has something to tell Him, and he is not happy unless he tells it. He speaks to Him in prayer every morning and night. He tells Him his wants and desires, his feelings and his fears. He asks counsel of Him in difficulty. He asks comfort of Him in trouble. He cannot help it. He must converse with his Saviour continually, or he would faint by the way. And why is this? Simply because he loves Him.

(h) Finally, if we love a person, we like to be always with him. Thinking, and hearing, and reading, and occasionally talking are all well in their way. But when we really love people we want something more. We long to be always in their company. We wish to be continually in their society, and to hold communion with them without interruption or farewell. Well, it is just so between the true Christian and Christ. The heart of a true Christian longs for that blessed day when he will see his Master face to face, and go out no more. He longs to have done with sinning and repenting, and believing, and to begin that endless life when he shall see as he has been seen, and sin no more. He has found it sweet to live by faith, and he feels it will be sweeter still to live by sight. He has found it pleasant to hear of Christ, and talk of Christ, and read of Christ. How much more pleasant will it be to see Christ with his own eyes, and never to leave Him any more! "Better," he feels, "is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire" (Ecc 6:9). And why is all this? Simply because he loves Him.

Such are the marks by which true love may be discovered. They are all plain, simple, and easy to be understood. There is nothing dark, abstruse, and mysterious about them. Use them honestly, and handle them fairly, and you cannot fail to get some light on the subject of this paper.

Perhaps you had a beloved son in the army at the time of a great war. Perhaps he was actively engaged in that war, and in the very midst of the struggle. Cannot you remember how strong and anxious your feelings were about that son? That was love!

Perhaps you have known what it is to have a beloved husband in the navy, often called from home by duty, often separated from you for many months and even years. Cannot you recollect your sorrowful feelings at that time of separation? That was love!

Perhaps you have at this moment a beloved brother in London, launched for the first time amidst the temptations of a great city, in order to make his way in business. How will he turn out? How will he get on? Will you ever see him again? Do you not know that you often think about that brother? That is affection!

Perhaps you are engaged to be married to a person every way suited to you. But prudence makes it necessary to defer the marriage to a distant period, and duty makes it necessary to be at a distance from the one you have promised to make your wife. Must you not confess that she is often in your thoughts? Must you not confess that you like to hear of her, and hear from her, and that you long to see her? That is affection!

I speak of things that are familiar to everyone. I need not dwell upon them any further. They are as old as the hills. They are understood all over the world. There is hardly a branch of Adam's family that does not know something of affection and love [between people]. Then let it never be said that we cannot find out whether a Christian really loves Christ. It can be known; it may be discovered; the proofs are all ready to your hand. You have heard them this very day. Love to the Lord Jesus Christ is no hidden, secret, impalpable thing. It is like the light, it will be seen. It is like sound, it will be heard. It is like heat, it will be felt. Where it exists it cannot be hid. Where it cannot be seen you may be sure there is none.

It is time for me to draw this paper to a conclusion. But I cannot end without an effort to press its subject home to the individual conscience of each into whose hands it has fallen. I do it in all love and affection. My heart's desire and prayer to God, in writing this, is to do good to souls.

(1) Let me ask you, for one thing, to look the question in the face which Christ asked of Peter, and try to answer itfor yourself. Look at it seriously. Examine it carefully. Weigh it well. After reading all that I have said about it, can you honestly say that you love Christ?

It is no answer to tell me that you believe the truth of Christianity and hold the articles of the Christian faith. Such religion as this will never save your soul. The devils believe in a certain way, and tremble (Jam 2:19). True, saving Christianity is not the mere believing a certain set of opinions, and holding a certain set of notions. Its essence is knowing, trusting, and loving a certain living Person who died for us—even Christ the Lord. The early Christians, like Phoebe, Persis, Tryphosa, Gaius, and Philemon, knew little, probably, of dogmatic theology. But they all had this grand leading feature in their religion: they loved Christ.

It is no answer to tell me that you disapprove of a religion of feelings. If you mean by that that you dislike a religion consisting of nothing but feelings, I agree with you entirely. But if you mean to shut out feelings altogether, you can know little of Christianity.

The Bible teaches us plainly that a man may have good feelings without any true religion. But it teaches us no less plainly that there can be no true religion without some feeling towards Christ.

It is vain to conceal that if you do not love Christ, your soul is in great danger. You can have no saving faith now while you live. You are unfit for heaven if you die. He that lives without love to Christ can be sensible of no obligation to Him. He that dies without love to Christ could never be happy in that heaven where Christ is all, and in all. Awake to know the peril of your position. Open your eyes. Consider your ways, and be wise. I can only warn you as a friend. But I do it with all my heart and soul. May God grant that this warning may not be in vain!

(2) In the next place, if you do not love Christ, let me tell you plainly what is the reason. You have no sense of debt to Him. You have no feeling of obligation to Him. You have no abiding recollection of having got anything from Him. This being the case it is not likely, it is not probable, it is not reasonable that you should love Him.

There is but one remedy for this state of things. That remedy is self-knowledge, and the teaching of the Holy Ghost. The eyes of your understanding must be opened. You must find out what you are by nature. You must discover that grand secret, your guilt and emptiness in God's sight.

Perhaps you never read your Bible at all, or only read an occasional chapter as a mere matter of form—without interest, understanding, or self-application. Take my advice this day and change your plan. Begin to read the Bible like a man in earnest, and never rest till you become familiar with it. Read what the law of God requires, as expounded by the Lord Jesus in the fifth of Matthew. Read how Paul describes human nature in the first two chapters of his Epistle to the Romans. Study such passages as these with prayer for the Spirit's teaching, and then say whether you are not a debtor to God and a debtor in mighty need of a Friend like Christ.

Perhaps you are one who has never known anything of real, hearty, business-like prayer. You have been used to regard religion as an affair of churches, chapels, forms, services, and Sundays, but not as a thing requiring the serious, heartfelt attention of the inward man. Take my advice this day and change your plan. Begin the habit of real, earnest pleading with God about your soul. Ask Him for light, teaching, and self-knowledge. Beseech Him to show you anything you need to know for the saving of your soul. Do this with all your heart and mind, and I have no doubt that before long, you will feel your need of Christ.

The advice I offer may seem simple and old-fashioned. Do not despise it on that account. It is the good old way in

which millions have walked already and found peace to their souls. Not to love Christ is to be in imminent danger of eternal ruin. To see your need of Christ and your amazing debt to Christ is the first step towards loving Him. To know yourself and find out your real condition before God is the only way to see your need. To search God's Book and ask God for light in prayer is the right course by which to attain saving knowledge. Do not be above taking the advice I offer. Take it, and be saved.

(3) In the last place, if you really know anything of love towards Christ, accept two parting words of comfort and counsel. The Lord grant they may do you good.

For one thing, if you love Christ in deed and truth, rejoice in the thought that you have good evidence about the state of your soul. Love, I tell you this day, is an evidence of grace. What though you are sometimes perplexed with doubts? What though you find it hard to say whether your faith is genuine and your grace real? What though your eyes are often so dimmed with tears that you cannot clearly see your calling and election of God? Still there is ground for hope and strong consolation if your heart can testify that you love Christ. Where there is true love, there is faith and grace. You would not love Him if He had not done something for you. Your very love is a token for good.

For another thing, if you love Christ, never be ashamed to let others see it and know it. Speak for Him. Witness for Him. Live for Him. Work for Him. If He has loved you and washed you from your sin in His own blood, you never need shrink from letting others know that you feel it, and love Him in return.

"Man," said a thoughtless, ungodly English traveller to a North American Indian convert, "Man, what is the reason that you make so much of Christ, and talk so much about Him? What has this Christ done for you, that you should make so much ado about Him?" The converted Indian did not answer him in words. He gathered together some dry leaves and moss and made a ring with them on the ground. He picked up a live worm and put it in the middle of the ring. He struck a light and set the moss and leaves on fire. The flame soon rose and the heat scorched the worm. It writhed in agony, and after trying in vain to escape on every side, curled itself up in the middle, as if about to die in despair. At that moment the Indian reached forth his hand, took up the worm gently and placed it on his bosom. "Stranger," he said to the Englishman, "Do you see that worm? I was that perishing creature. I was dying in my sins, hopeless, helpless, and on the brink of eternal fire. It was Jesus Christ who put forth the arm of His power. It was Jesus Christ who delivered me with the hand of His grace, and plucked me from everlasting burnings. It was Jesus Christ who placed me, a poor sinful worm, near the heart of His love. Stranger, that is the reason why I talk of Jesus Christ and make much of Him. I am not ashamed of it, because I love Him."

If we know anything of love to Christ, may we have the mind of this North American Indian! May we never think that we can love Christ too well, live to Him too thoroughly, confess Him too boldly, lay ourselves out for Him too hearty! Of all the things that will surprise us in the resurrection morning, this, I believe, will surprise us most: that we did not love Christ more before we died.

Chapter 16

“Without Christ”

“Ye were without Christ.”—Ephesians 2:12

THE text which heads this chapter describes the state of the Ephesians before they became Christians. But that is not all. It describes the state of every man and woman in the whole world who is not converted to God. A more miserable state cannot be conceived! It is bad enough to be without money, or without health, or without home, or without friends. But it is far worse to be “without Christ.”

Let us examine the text this day, and see what it contains. Who can tell but it may prove a message from God to some reader of this book?

I. When a Man Is “without Christ”

Let us consider, in the first place, when it can be said of a man that he is “without Christ.”

The expression “without Christ,” be it remembered, is not one of my own invention. The words were not first coined by me, but were written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. They were used by St. Paul when he was reminding the Ephesian Christians what their former condition was, before they heard the gospel and believed. Ignorant and dark no doubt, they had been buried in idolatry and heathenism, worshippers of the false goddess Diana. But all this he passes over completely. He seems to think that this would only partially describe their state. So he draws a picture, of which the very first feature is the expression before us: “At that time ye were without Christ” (Eph 2:12). Now what does the expression mean?

(a) A man is “without Christ” when he has no head-knowledge of Him. Millions, no doubt, are in this condition. They know not who Christ is, nor what He has done, nor what He taught, nor why He was crucified, nor where He is now, nor what He is to mankind. In short, they are entirely ignorant of Him. The heathen, of course, who never yet heard the gospel come first under this description. But unhappily they do not stand alone.

There are thousands of people living in England at this very day who have hardly any clearer ideas about Christ than the very heathen. Ask them what they know about Jesus Christ, and you will be astounded at the gross darkness which covers their minds. Visit them on their deathbeds and you will find that they can tell you no more about Christ than about Mahomet. Thousands are in this state in country parishes, and thousands in towns. And about all such persons but one account can be given. They are “without Christ.”

I am aware that some modern divines do not take the view which I have just stated. They tell us that all mankind have a part and interest in Christ, whether they know Him or not. They say that all men and women, however ignorant while they live, shall be taken by Christ’s mercy to heaven when they die! Such views, I firmly believe, cannot be reconciled with God’s Word. It is written, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3). It is one of the marks of the wicked, on whom God shall take vengeance at the last day, that they “know not God” (2Th 1:8). An unknown Christ is no Saviour. What shall be the state of the heathen after death? How shall the savage, who never heard the gospel, be judged? In what manner will God deal with the helplessly ignorant and uneducated?—all these are questions which we may safely let alone. We may rest assured that “the Judge of all the earth will do right” (Gen 18:25). But we must not fly in the face of Scripture. If Bible words mean anything, to be ignorant of Christ is to be “without Christ.”

(b) But this is not all. A man is “without Christ” when he has no heart faith in Him as his Saviour. It is quite possible to know all about Christ, and yet not to put our trust in Him. There are multitudes who know every article of belief, and can tell you glibly that Christ was “born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.” They learned it at school. They have it sticking fast in their memories. But they make no practical use of their knowledge. They put their trust in something which is not “Christ.” They hope to go to heaven because they are moral and well-conducted—because they say their prayers and go to church, because they have been baptized and go to the Lord’s Table. But as to a lively faith in God’s mercy through Christ, a real, intelligent confidence in Christ’s blood and righteousness and intercession, these are things of which they know nothing at all. And of all such persons I can see but one true account. They are “without Christ.”

I am aware that many do not admit the truth of what I have just said. Some tell us that all baptized people are members of Christ by virtue of their baptism. Others tell us that where there is a head-knowledge, we have no right to question a person’s interest in Christ. To these views I have only one plain answer. The Bible forbids us to say that any man is joined to Christ until he believes. Baptism is no proof that we are joined to Christ. Simon Magus was baptized, and yet was distinctly told that he had “no part or lot in this matter” (Act 8:21). Head-knowledge is no proof that we are joined to Christ. The devils know Christ well enough, but have no portion in Him. God knows, no doubt, who are His from

all eternity. But man knows nothing of anyone's justification until he believes. The grand question is, "Do we believe?" It is written, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." "He that believeth not shall be damned." (Joh 3:36; Mar 16:16.) If Bible words mean anything, to be without faith is to be "without Christ."

(c) But I have yet one thing more to say. A man is "without Christ" when the Holy Spirit's work cannot be seen in his life. Who can avoid seeing, if he uses his eyes, that myriads of professing Christians know nothing of inward conversion of heart? They will tell you that they believe the Christian religion; they go to their places of worship with tolerable regularity; they think it a proper thing to be married and buried with all the ceremonies of the church; they would be much offended if their Christianity were doubted. But where is the Holy Ghost to be seen in their lives? What are their hearts and affections set upon? Whose is the image and superscription that stands out in their tastes, and habits, and ways? Alas, there can only be one reply! They know nothing experimentally of the renewing, sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost. They are yet dead to God. And of all such, only one account can be given. They are "without Christ."

I am well aware, again, that few will admit this. The vast majority will tell you that it is extreme, wild, and extravagant to require so much in Christians, and to press on every one conversion. They will say that it is impossible to keep up the high standard which I have just referred to, without going out of the world; and that we may surely go to heaven without being such very great saints. To all this I can only reply, What saith the Scripture? What saith the Lord? It is written, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." "He that saith he abideth in Christ, ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Joh 3:3; Mat 18:3; 1Jo 2:6; Rom 8:9.) The Scripture cannot be broken. If Bible words mean anything, to be without the Spirit is to be "without Christ."

I commend the three propositions I have just laid down to your serious and prayerful consideration. Mark well what they come to. Examine them carefully on every side. In order to have a saving interest in Christ, knowledge, faith, and the grace of the Holy Ghost are absolutely needful. He that is without them is "without Christ."

How painfully ignorant are many! They know literally nothing about religion. Christ, and the Holy Ghost, and faith, and grace, and conversion, and sanctification are mere "words and names" to them. They could not explain what they mean, if it were to save their lives. And can such ignorance as this take anyone to heaven? Impossible! Without knowledge, "without Christ!"

How painfully self-righteous are many! They can talk complacently about having "done their duty," and being "kind to everybody," and having always "kept to their church," and having "never been so very bad" as some—and therefore they seem to think they must go to heaven! And as to deep sense of sin and simple faith in Christ's blood and sacrifice, these seem to have no place in their religion. Their talk is all of doing and never of believing. And will such self-righteousness as this land anyone in heaven? Never! Without faith, "without Christ!"

How painfully ungodly are many! They live in the habitual neglect of God's Sabbath, God's Bible, God's ordinances, and God's sacraments. They think nothing of doing things which God has flatly forbidden. They are constantly living in ways which are directly contrary to God's commandments. And can such ungodliness end in salvation? Impossible! Without the Holy Ghost, "without Christ!"

I know well that at first sight these statements seem hard, and sharp, and rough, and severe. But after all, are they not God's truth as revealed to us in Scripture? If truth, ought they not to be made known? If necessary to be known, ought they not to be plainly laid down? If I know anything of my own heart, I desire above all things to magnify the riches of God's love to sinners. I long to tell all mankind what a wealth of mercy and loving-kindness there is laid up in God's heart for all who will seek it. But I cannot find anywhere that ignorant, and unbelieving, and unconverted people have any part in Christ! If I am wrong, I shall be thankful to anyone who will show me a more excellent way. But till I am shown it, I must stand fast on the positions I have already laid down. I dare not forsake them, lest I be found guilty of handling God's Word deceitfully. I dare not be silent about them, lest the blood of souls be required at my hands. The man without knowledge, without faith, and without the Holy Ghost, is a man "without Christ"!

II. The Actual Condition of a Man "Without Christ"

Let me now turn to another point which I wish to consider. What is the actual condition of a man "without Christ"?

This is a branch of our present subject that demands very special attention. Thankful indeed should I be if I could exhibit it in its true colours. I can easily imagine some reader saying to himself, "Well, suppose I am without Christ, where is the mighty harm? I hope God will be merciful. I am no worse than many others. I trust all will be right at last." Listen to me and, by God's help, I will try to show that you are sadly deceived. "Without Christ" all will not be right, but all desperately wrong.

(a) For one thing, to be without Christ is to be without God. The Apostle Paul told the Ephesians as much as this in plain words. He ends the famous sentence which begins, "Ye were without Christ," by saying, "Ye were without God in the world." And who that thinks can wonder? That man can have very low ideas of God, who does not conceive Him a most pure, holy, glorious, and spiritual Being. That man must be very blind who does not see that human nature is corrupt, sinful, and defiled. How then can such a worm as man draw near to God with comfort? How can he look up to

Him with confidence and not feel afraid? How can he speak to Him, have dealings with Him, look forward to dwelling with Him, without dread and alarm? There must be a Mediator between God and man, and there is but One that can fill the office. That One is Christ.

Who art thou that talkest of God's mercy and God's love separate from and independent of Christ? There is no such love and mercy recorded in Scripture. Know this day that God out of Christ is a "consuming fire" (Heb 12:29). Merciful He is, beyond all question—rich in mercy, plenteous in mercy. But His mercy is inseparably connected with the mediation of His beloved Son Jesus Christ. It must flow through Him as the appointed channel, or it cannot flow at all. It is written, "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him;" "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (Joh 5:23; 14:6). "Without Christ" we are without God.

(b) For another thing, to be without Christ is to be without peace. Every man has a conscience within him, which must be satisfied before he can be truly happy. So long as this conscience is asleep or half dead, so long, no doubt, he gets along pretty well. But as soon as a man's conscience wakes up, and he begins to think of past sins, and present failings, and future judgment, at once he finds out that he needs something to give him inward rest. But what can do it? Repenting, praying, Bible-reading, church-going, sacrament-receiving, and self-mortification may be tried, and tried in vain. They never yet took off the burden from anyone's conscience. And yet peace must be had!

There is only one thing can give peace to the conscience, and that is the blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled on it. A clear understanding that Christ's death was an actual payment of our debt to God, and that the merit of that death is made over to man when he believes, is the grand secret of inward peace. It meets every craving of conscience. It answers every accusation. It calms every fear. It is written, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace." "He is our peace." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Joh 16:33; Eph 2:14; Rom 5:1.) We have peace through the blood of His cross: peace like a deep mine, peace like an everflowing stream. But "without Christ" we are without peace.

(c) For another thing, to be without Christ is to be without hope. Hope of some sort or other almost everyone thinks he possesses. Rare indeed will you find a man who will boldly tell you that he has no hope at all about his soul. But how few there are that can give "a reason of the hope that is in them!" (1Pe 3:15). How few can explain it, describe it, and show its foundations! How many a hope is nothing better than a vague, empty feeling, which the day of sickness and the hour of death will prove to be utterly useless—impotent alike to comfort or to save.

There is but one hope that has roots, life, strength and solidity, and that is the hope which is built on the great rock of Christ's work and office as man's Redeemer. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1Co 3:11). He that buildeth on this cornerstone, "shall not be confounded." About this hope there is reality. It will bear looking at and handling. It will meet every enquiry. Search it through and through, and you will find no flaw whatever in it. All other hopes besides this are worthless. Like summer-dried fountains, they fail man just when his need is the sorest (1Ki 17:3). They are like unsound ships, which look well so long as they lie quiet in harbour, but when the winds and the waves of the ocean begin to try them, their rotten condition is discovered, and they sink beneath the waters. There is no such thing as a good hope without Christ, and "without Christ" is to have "no hope" (Eph 2:12).

(d) For another thing, to be without Christ is to be without heaven. In saying this I do not merely mean that there is no entrance into heaven, but that "without Christ" there could be no happiness in being there. A man without a Saviour and Redeemer could never feel at home in heaven. He would feel that he had no lawful right or title to be there; boldness and confidence and ease of heart would be impossible. Amidst pure and holy angels, under the eyes of a pure and holy God, he could not hold up his head—he would feel confounded and ashamed. It is the very essence of all true views of heaven that Christ is there.

Who art thou that dreamest of a heaven in which Christ has no place? Awake to know thy folly. Know that in every description of heaven which the Bible contains, the presence of Christ is one essential feature. "In the midst of the throne," says John, "stood a Lamb as it had been slain." The very throne of heaven is called the "throne of God and of the Lamb." The Lamb is the light of heaven, and the temple of it. The saints who dwell in heaven are to be fed by the Lamb, and "led to living fountains of waters." The meeting of the saints in heaven is called, "the marriage supper of the Lamb." (Rev 5:6; 22:3; 21:22-23; 7:17; 19:9.) A heaven without Christ would not be the heaven of the Bible. To be "without Christ" is to be without heaven.

I might easily add to these things. I might tell you that to be without Christ is to be without life, without strength, without safety, without foundation, without a friend in heaven, without righteousness. None so badly off as those that are without Christ!

What the ark was to Noah, what the passover lamb was to Israel in Egypt, what the manna, the smitten rock, the brazen serpent, the pillar of cloud and fire, the scapegoat, were to the tribes in the wilderness, all this the Lord Jesus is meant to be to man's soul. None so destitute as those that are without Christ!

What the root is to the branches, what the air is to our lungs, what food and water are to our bodies, what the sun is to creation, all this and much more Christ is intended to be to us. None so helpless, none so pitiable as those that are without Christ!

I grant that, if there were no such things as sickness and death, if men and women never grew old and lived on this

earth for ever, the subject of this paper would be of no importance. But you must know that sickness, death, and the grave are sad realities.

If this life were all, and if there were no judgment, no heaven, no hell, no eternity, it would be mere waste of time to trouble yourself with such inquiries as this paper suggests. But you have got a conscience. You know well that there is a reckoning-day beyond the grave. There is a judgment yet to come.

Surely the subject of this paper is no light matter. It is not a small thing, and one that does not signify. It demands the attention of every sensible person. It lies at the very root of that all-important question, the salvation of our souls. To be "without Christ" is to be most miserable.

III. Are You "without Christ?"

(1) And now I ask every one who has read this paper through to examine himself and find out his own precise condition. Are you without Christ?

Do not allow life to pass away without some serious thoughts and self-inquiry. You cannot always go on as you do now. A day must come when eating, drinking, sleeping, dressing, making merry, and spending money will have an end. There will be a day when your place will be empty, and you will be only spoken of as one dead and gone. And where will you be then, if you have lived and died without thought about your soul, without God, and without Christ? Oh, remember, it is better a thousand times to be without money, health, friends, company, and good cheer, than to be without Christ!

(2) If you have lived without Christ hitherto, I invite you in all affection to change your course without delay. Seek the Lord Jesus while He may be found (Isa 55:6). Call upon Him while He is near. He is sitting at God's right hand, able to save to the uttermost everyone who comes to Him, however sinful and careless he may have been. He is sitting at God's right hand, willing to hear the prayer of every one who feels that his past life has been all wrong, and wants to be set right. Seek Christ, seek Christ without delay. Acquaint yourself with Him. Do not be ashamed to apply to Him. Only become one of Christ's friends this year, and you will say one day it was the happiest year that you ever had.

(3) If you have become one of Christ's friends already, I exhort you to be a thankful man. Awake to a deeper sense of the infinite mercy of having an Almighty Saviour, a title to heaven, a home that is eternal, a Friend that never dies! A few more years and all our family gatherings will be over. What a comfort to think that we have in Christ something that we can never lose!

Awake to a deeper sense of the sorrowful state of those who are "without Christ." We are often reminded of the many who are without food, clothing, school, or church. Let us pity them and help them, as far as we can. But let us never forget that there are people whose state is far more pitiable. Who are they? The people "without Christ!"

Have we relatives "without Christ"? Let us feel for them, pray for them, speak to the King about them, strive to recommend the gospel to them. Let us leave no stone unturned in our efforts to bring them to Christ. Have we neighbours "without Christ"? Let us labour in every way for their souls' salvation. The night cometh when none can work.

Happy is he who lives under the abiding conviction that to be "in Christ" is peace, safety, and happiness; and that to be " without Christ" is to be on the brink of destruction.

Chapter 17

Thirst Relieved

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."—John 7:37-38

THE text which heads this chapter contains one of those mighty sayings of Christ which deserve to be printed in letters of gold. All the stars in heaven are bright and beautiful; yet even a child can see that one star excelleth another in glory. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; but that heart must indeed be cold and dull which does not feel that some verses are peculiarly rich and full. Of such verses this text is one.

In order to see the whole force and beauty of the text, we must remember the place, the time, and the occasion when it comes in.

The place, then, was Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judaism, and the stronghold of priests and scribes, of Pharisees and Sadducees. The occasion was the Feast of Tabernacles, one of those great annual feasts when every Jew, if he could, went up to the temple, according to the law. The time was "the last day of the feast," when all the ceremonies were drawing to a close, when the water drawn from the fountain of Siloam, according to traditional custom, had been solemnly poured on the altar, and nothing remained for worshippers but to return home.

At this critical moment, our Lord Jesus Christ "stood" forward on a prominent place, and spoke to the assembled crowds. I doubt not He read their hearts. He saw them going away with aching consciences and unsatisfied minds, having got nothing from their blind teachers, the Pharisees and Sadducees, and carrying away nothing but a barren recollection of pompous forms. He saw and pitied them, and cried aloud, like a herald, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." That this was all our Lord said on this memorable occasion, I take leave to doubt. I suspect it is only the key-note of His address. But this, I imagine, was the first sentence that fell from His lips: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me." If anyone wants living, satisfying water, let him come unto ME.

Let me remind my readers, in passing, that no prophet or apostle ever took on himself to use such language as this. "Come with us," said Moses to Hobab (Num 10:29); "Come to the waters," says Isaiah (Isa 55:1); "Behold the Lamb," says John the Baptist (Joh 1:29); "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, says Paul (Act 16:31). But no one except Jesus of Nazareth ever said, "Come to ME." That fact is very significant. He that said, "Come to me," knew and felt, when He said it, that He was the eternal Son of God, the promised Messiah, the Saviour of the world.

There are three points in this great saying of our Lord to which I now propose to direct attention.

- I. You have a case supposed: " If any man thirst."
- II. You have a remedy proposed: "Let him come unto me, and drink."
- III. You have a promise held out: "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters."

Each of these points concerns all into whose hands this paper may fall. On each of them I have somewhat to say.

I. The Problem

In the first place, then, you have a case supposed. Our Lord says, "If any man thirst."

Bodily thirst is notoriously the most painful sensation to which the frame of mortal man is liable. Read the story of the miserable sufferers in the black hole at Calcutta. Ask anyone who has travelled over desert plains under a tropical sun. Hear what any old soldier will tell you is the chief want of the wounded on a battlefield. Remember what the crews of ships lost in mid-ocean, tossed for days in boats without water, go through. Mark the awful words of the rich man in the parable: "Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame" (Luk 16:24). The testimony is unvarying. There is nothing so terrible and hard to bear as thirst.

But if bodily thirst is so painful, how much more painful is thirst of soul? Physical suffering is not the worst part of eternal punishment. It is a light thing, even in this world, compared to the suffering of the mind and inward man. To see the value of our souls, and find out they are in danger of eternal ruin, to feel the burden of unforgiven sin, and not to know where to turn for relief, to have a conscience sick and ill at ease, and to be ignorant of the remedy, to discover that we are dying, dying daily, and yet unprepared to meet God, to have some clear view of our own guilt and wickedness, and yet to be in utter darkness about absolution—this is the highest degree of pain, the pain which drinks up soul and spirit, and pierces joints and marrow! And this no doubt is the thirst of which our Lord is speaking. It is thirst after pardon, forgiveness, absolution, and peace with God. It is the craving, of a really awakened conscience, wanting satisfaction

and not knowing where to find it, walking through dry places and unable to get rest.

This is the thirst which the Jews felt when Peter preached to them on the day of Pentecost. It is written that they were "pricked in their heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Act 2:37).

This is the thirst which the Philippian jailor felt, when he awoke to consciousness of his spiritual danger and felt the earthquake making the prison reel under his feet. It is written that he "came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, saying, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Act 16:29-30).

This is the thirst which many of the greatest servants of God seem to have felt when light first broke in on their minds. Augustine seeking rest among the Manichean heretics and finding none, Luther groping after truth among monks in Erfurt Monastery, John Bunyan agonizing amidst doubts and conflicts in his Elstow cottage, George Whitefield groaning under self-imposed austerities, for want of clear teaching, when an undergraduate at Oxford—all have left on record their experience. I believe they all knew what our Lord meant when He spoke of "thirst."

And surely it is not too much to say that all of us ought to know something of this thirst, if not as much as Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, or Whitefield. Living as we do in a dying world…

- knowing as we do, if we will confess it, that there is a world beyond the grave, and that after death comes the Judgment,
- feeling as we must do in our better moments, what poor, weak, unstable, defective creatures we all are, how unfit to meet God,
- conscious as we must be in our inmost heart of hearts, that on our use of time depends our place in eternity…
- we ought to feel and to realise something like "thirst" for a sense of peace with the living God.

But alas, nothing proves so conclusively the fallen nature of man as the general, common want of spiritual appetite! For money, for power, for pleasure, for rank, for honour, for distinction—for all these the vast majority are now intensely thirsting. To lead forlorn hopes, to dig for gold, to storm a breach, to try to hew a way through thick-ribbed ice to the North Pole, for all these objects there is no lack of adventurers and volunteers. Fierce and unceasing is the competition for these corruptible crowns! But few indeed, by comparison, are those who thirst after eternal life. No wonder that the natural man is called in Scripture "dead," and "sleeping," and blind, and deaf. No wonder that he is said to need a second birth and a new creation. There is no surer symptom of mortification in the body than the loss of all feeling. There is no more painful sign of an unhealthy state of soul than an utter absence of spiritual thirst. Woe to that man of whom the Saviour can say, "Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17).

But who is there among the readers of this paper that feels the burden of sin, and longs for peace with God? Who is there that really feels the words of our Prayer-book confession: "I have erred and strayed like a lost sheep; there is no health in me; I am a miserable offender?" Who is there that enters into the fullness of our communion service, and can say with truth, "The remembrance of my sins is grievous, and the burden of them is intolerable?" You are the man that ought to thank God. A sense of sin, guilt, and poverty of soul, is the first stone laid by the Holy Ghost when He builds a spiritual temple. He convinces of sin. Light was the first thing called into being in the material creation (Gen 1:3). Light about our own state is the first work in the new creation.

Thirsting soul, I say again, you are the person who ought to thank God. The kingdom of God is near you. It is not when we begin to feel good, but when we feel bad, that we take the first step towards heaven. Who taught thee that thou wast naked? Whence came this inward light? Who opened thine eyes and made thee see and feel? Know this day that flesh and blood hath not revealed these things unto thee, but our Father which is in heaven. Universities may confer degrees, and schools may impart knowledge of all mysteries, but they cannot make men feel sin. To realise our spiritual need, and feel true spiritual thirst, is the A-B-C in saving Christianity.

It is a great saying of Elihu, in the book of Job, "God looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from death, and his life shall see the light" (Job 33:27-28). Let him that knows anything of spiritual "thirst" not be ashamed. Rather let him lift up his head and begin to hope. Let him pray that God would carry on the work He has begun, and make him feel more.

II. The Remedy

I pass from the case supposed to the remedy proposed. "If any man thirst," says our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, "let him come unto me, and drink."

There is a grand simplicity about this little sentence which cannot be too much admired. There is not a word in it of which the literal meaning is not plain to a child. Yet, simple as it appears, it is rich in spiritual meaning. Like the Kohinoor diamond, which you may carry between finger and thumb, it is of unspeakable value.

It solves that mighty problem which all the philosophers of Greece and Rome could never solve, "How can man have peace with God?" Place it in your memory side by side with six other golden sayings of your Lord:

- “I am the Bread of life: he that cometh unto ME shall never hunger; and he that believeth on ME shall never thirst.”
- “I am the Light of the world: he that followeth ME shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”
- “I am the Door: by ME if any man enter in, he shall be saved.”
- “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by ME.”
- “Come unto ME, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
- “Him that cometh to ME, I will in no wise cast out.”

Add to these six texts the one before you today. Get the whole seven by heart. Rivet them down in your mind and never let them go. When your feet touch the cold river, on the bed of sickness and in the hour of death, you will find these seven texts above all price. (Joh 6:35, 8:12, 10:9, 14:6; Mat 11:28; Joh 6:37.)

For what is the sum and substance of these simple words? It is this: Christ is that Fountain of living water which God has graciously provided for thirsting souls. From Him, as out of the rock smitten by Moses, there flows an abundant stream for all who travel through the wilderness of this world. In Him, as our Redeemer and Substitute, crucified for our sins and raised again for our justification, there is an endless supply of all that men can need—pardon, absolution, mercy, grace, peace, rest, relief, comfort, and hope.

This rich provision Christ has bought for us at the price of His own precious blood. To open this wondrous fountain, He suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, and bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. (1Pe 2:24, 3:18; 2Co 5:21.) And now He is sealed and appointed to be the Reliever of all who are labouring and heavy laden, and the Giver of living water to all who thirst. It is His office to receive sinners. It is His pleasure to give them pardon, life, and peace. And the words of the text are a proclamation He makes to all mankind, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”

Caution and Advice

The efficacy of a medicine depends in great measure on the manner in which it is used. The best prescription of the best physician is useless if we refuse to follow the directions which accompany it. Suffer the word of exhortation, while I offer some caution and advice about the Fountain of living water.

(a) He that thirsts and wants relief must come to Christ Himself. He must not be content with coming to His church and His ordinances, or to the assemblies of His people for prayer and praise.

He must not stop short even at His holy table, or rest satisfied with privately opening his heart to His ordained ministers. Oh, no! he that is content with only drinking these waters “shall thirst again” (Joh 4:13). He must go higher, further, much further than this. He must have personal dealings with Christ Himself; all else in religion is worthless without Him. The King’s palace, the attendant servants, the richly furnished banqueting house, the very banquet itself—all are nothing unless we speak with the King. His hand alone can take the burden off our backs and make us feel free. The hand of man may take the stone from the grave and show the dead; but none but Jesus can say to the dead, “Come forth and live” (Joh 11:41-43). We must deal directly with Christ.

(b) Again, he that thirsts and wants relief from Christ must actually cometoHim. It is not enough to wish, talk, mean, intend, resolve, and hope. Hell, that awful reality, is truly said to be paved with good intentions. Thousands are yearly lost in this fashion, and perish miserably just outside the harbour. Meaning and intending they live; meaning and intending they die. Oh, no! we must “arise and come!” If the prodigal son had been content with saying, “How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I hope some day to return home,” he might have remained for ever among the swine. It was when he arose and came to his father that his father ran to meet him, and said, “Bring forth the best robe and put it on him. Let us eat and be merry” (Luk 15:20-23). Like him, we must not only “come to ourselves” and think, but we must actually come to the High Priest, to Christ. We must come to the Physician.

(c) Once again, he that thirsts and wants to come to Christ must remember that simple faith is the one thing required. By all means let him come with a penitent, a broken and contrite heart; but let him not dream of resting on that for acceptance. Faith is the only hand that can carry the living water to our lips. Faith is the hinge on which all turns in the matter of our justification. It is written again and again that “whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have eternal life” (Joh 3:15-16). “To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:5). Happy is he that can lay hold on the principle laid down in that matchless hymn…

> “Just as I am! without one plea
>
> But that Thy blood was shed for me,
>
> And that Thou bidst me come to Thee
>
> O Lamb of God, I come!”

How simple this remedy for thirst appears! But oh, how hard it is to persuade some persons to receive it! Tell them to do some great thing, to mortify their bodies, to go on pilgrimage, to give all their goods to feed the poor, and so to merit salvation, and they will try to do as they are bid. Tell them to throw overboard all idea of merit, working, or doing, and to come to Christ as empty sinners, with nothing in their hands, and, like Naaman, they are ready to turn away in disdain (2Ki 5:12). Human nature is always the same in every age. There are still some people just like the Jews, and some like the Greeks. To the Jews Christ crucified is still a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. Their succession, at any rate, has never ceased! Never did our Lord say a truer word than that which He spoke to the proud scribes in the Sanhedrin, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life" (Joh 5:40).

But, simple as this remedy for thirst appears, it is the only cure for man's spiritual disease, and the only bridge from earth to heaven. Kings and their subjects, preachers and hearers, masters and servants, high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all must alike drink of this water of life, and drink in the same way. For eighteen centuries men have laboured to find some other medicine for weary consciences, but they have laboured in vain. Thousands, after blistering their hands, and growing grey in hewing out "broken cisterns which can hold no water" (Jer 2:13), have been obliged to come back at last to the old Fountain, and have confessed in their latest moments that here, in Christ alone, is true peace.

And simple as the old remedy for thirst may appear, it is the root of the inward life of all God's greatest servants in all ages. What have the saints and martyrs been in every era of Church history, but men who came to Christ daily by faith, and found "His flesh meat indeed and his blood drink indeed" (Joh 6:55)? What have they all been but men who lived the life of faith in the Son of God, and drank daily out of the fulness there is in Him (Gal 2:20)? Here, at all events, the truest and best Christians, who have made a mark on the world, have been of one mind. Holy Fathers and Reformers, holy Anglican divines and Puritans, holy Episcopalians and Nonconformists, have all in their best moments borne uniform testimony to the value of the Fountain of life. Separated and contentious as they may sometimes have been in their lives, in their deaths they have not been divided. In their last struggle with the king of terrors they have simply clung to the cross of Christ, and gloried in nothing but the "precious blood," and the Fountain open for all sin and uncleanness.

How thankful we ought to be that we live in a land where the great remedy for spiritual thirst is known—in a land of opened Bibles, with the preached gospel, and abundant means of grace—in a land where the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice is still proclaimed, with more or less fulness, in 20,000 pulpits every Sunday! We do not realise the value of our privileges. The very familiarity of the manna makes us think little of it, just as Israel loathed "the light bread" in the wilderness (Num 21:5). But turn to the pages of a heathen philosopher like the incomparable Plato, and see how he groped after light like one blindfolded, and wearied himself to find the door. The humblest peasant who grasps the four "comfortable words" of the beautiful Communion in the Prayer-book knows more of the way of peace with God than the Athenian sage. Turn to the accounts which trustworthy travellers and missionaries give of the state of the heathen who have never heard the gospel. Read of the human sacrifices in Africa, and the ghastly, self-imposed tortures of the devotees of Hindostan, and remember they are all the result of an unquenched "thirst," and a blind and unsatisfied desire to get near to God. And then learn to be thankful that your lot is cast in a land like your own. Alas, I fear God has a controversy with us for our unthankfullness! Cold indeed, and dead, must that heart be which can study the condition of Africa, China, and Hindostan, and not thank God that he lives in a Christian country.

III. The Promise

I turn, in the last place, to the promise held out to all who come to Christ. "He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

The subject of Scripture promises is a vast and most interesting one. I doubt whether it receives the attention which it deserves in the present day. Clarke's Scripture Promises is an old book which is far less studied now, I suspect, than it was in the days of our fathers. Few Christians realize the number, length, breadth, depth, height, and variety of the precious "shalls" and "wills" laid up in the Bible for the special benefit and encouragement of all who will use them.

Yet promise lies at the bottom of nearly all the transactions of man with man in the affairs of this life. The vast majority of Adam's children in every civilized country are acting every day on the faith of promises. The labourer on the land works hard from Monday morning to Saturday night, because he believes that at the end of the week he shall receive his promised wages. The soldier enlists in the army, and the sailor enters his name on the ship's books in the navy, in the full confidence that those under whom they serve will at some future time give them their promised pay. The humblest maid-servant in a family works on from day to day at her appointed duties, in the belief that her mistress will give her the promised wages. In the business of great cities, among merchants, bankers, and tradesmen, nothing could be done without incessant faith in promises. Every man of sense knows that cheques and bills, and promissory notes, are the only means by which the immense majority of mercantile affairs can possibly be carried on. Men of business are compelled to act by faith and not by sight. They believe promises, and expect to be believed themselves. In fact, promises, and faith in promises, and actions springing from faith in promises, are the back-bone of

nine-tenths of all the dealings of man with his fellow-men throughout Christendom.

Now promises, in like manner, in the religion of the Bible, are one grand means by which God is pleased to approach the soul of man. The careful student of Scripture cannot fail to observe that God is continually holding out inducements to man to listen to Him, obey Him, and serve Him, and undertaking to do great things, if man will only attend and believe. In short, as Peter says, "There are given to us exceeding great and precious promises"(2Pe 1:4). He who has mercifully caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning has shown His perfect knowledge of human nature, by spreading over the Book a perfect wealth of promises, suitable to every kind of experience and every condition of life. He seems to say, "Would you know what I undertake to do for you? Do you want to hear my terms? Take up the Bible and read."

But there is one grand difference between the promises of Adam's children and the promises of God, which ought never to be forgotten. The promises of man are not sure to be fulfilled. With the best wishes and intentions, he cannot always keep his word. Disease and death may step in like an armed man, and take away from this world him that promises. War, pestilence, famine, failure of crops, or hurricanes, may strip him of his property, and make it impossible for him to fulfil his engagements.

The promises of God, on the contrary, are certain to be kept. He is Almighty: nothing can prevent His doing what He has said. He never changes: He is always "of one mind"; and with Him there is "no variableness or shadow of turning" (Job 23:13; Jam 1:17). He will always keep His word. There is one thing which, as a little girl once told her teacher, to her surprise, God cannot do: "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb 6:18). The most unlikely and improbable things, when God has once said He will do them, have always come to pass. The destruction of the old world by a flood, and the preservation of Noah in the ark, the birth of Isaac, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the raising of David to the throne of Saul, the miraculous birth of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the scattering of the Jews all over the earth, and their continued preservation as a distinct people—who could imagine events more unlikely and improbable than these? Yet God said they should be, and in due time they all came to pass. In truth, with God it is just as easy to do a thing as to say it. Whatever He promises, He is certain to perform.

Concerning the variety and riches of Scripture promises, far more might be said than it is possible to say in a short paper like this. Their number is legion. The subject is almost inexhaustible. There is hardly a step in man's life, from childhood to old age, hardly any position in which man can be placed, for which the Bible has not held out encouragement to everyone who desires to do right in the sight of God. There are "shalls" and "wills" in God's treasury for every condition. About God's infinite mercy and compassion, about His readiness to receive all who repent and believe, about His willingness to forgive, pardon, and absolve the chief of sinners, about His power to change hearts and alter our corrupt nature, about the encouragements to pray, and hear the gospel, and draw near to the throne of grace, about strength for duty, comfort in trouble, guidance in perplexity, help in sickness, consolation in death, support under bereavement, happiness beyond the grave, reward in glory—about all these things there is an abundant supply of promises in the Word. No one can form an idea of its abundance unless he carefully searches the Scriptures, keeping the subject steadily in view. If anyone doubts it, I can only say, "Come and see." Like the Queen of Sheba at Solomon's court, you will soon say, "The half was not told me" (1Ki 10:7).

The promise of our Lord Jesus Christ which heads this paper is somewhat peculiar. It is singularly rich in encouragement to all who feel spiritual thirst, and come to Him for relief, and therefore it deserves peculiar attention. Most of our Lord's promises refer specially to the benefit of the person to whom they are addressed. The promise before us takes a far wider range: it seems to refer to many others beside those to whom He spoke. For what says He? "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said" (and everywhere teaches), "out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive." Figurative undoubtedly are these words—figurative, like the earlier words of the sentence—figurative, like "thirst" and "drinking." But all the figures of Scripture contain great truth; and what the figure before us was meant to convey I will now try to show.

Spiritual Thirst

(1) For one thing, then, I believe our Lord meant that he who comes to Him by faith shall receive an abundant supply of everything that he can desire for the relief of his own soul's wants. The Spirit shall convey to him such an abiding sense of pardon, peace and hope, that it shall be in his inward man like a well-spring, never dry. He shall feel so satisfied with "the things of Christ," which the Spirit shall show him (Joh 16:15), that he shall rest from spiritual anxiety about death, judgment, and eternity. He may have his seasons of darkness and doubt, through his own infirmities or the temptations of the devil. But, speaking generally, when he has once come to Christ by faith, he shall find in his heart of hearts an unfailing fountain of consolation. This, let us understand, is the first thing which the promise before us contains. "Only come to Me, poor anxious soul," our Lord seems to say, "Only come to Me, and thy spiritual anxiety shall be relieved. I will place in thy heart, by the power of the Holy Spirit, such a sense of pardon and peace, through My atonement and intercession, that thou shalt never completely thirst again. Thou mayest have thy doubts, and fears, and conflicts, while thou art in the body. But once having come to Me, and taken Me for thy Saviour, thou shalt never feel

thyself entirely hopeless. The condition of thine inward man shall be so thoroughly changed that thou shalt feel as if there were within thee an ever-flowing spring of water."

What shall we say to these things? I declare my own belief that whenever a man or woman really comes to Christ by faith, he finds this promise fulfilled. He may possibly be weak in grace, and have many misgivings about his own condition. He may possibly not dare to say that he is converted, justified, sanctified, and meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. But, for all that, I am bold to say, the humblest and feeblest believer in Christ has got something within him which he would not part with, though he may not yet fully understand it. And what is that "something?" It is just that "river of living water" which begins to run in the heart of every child of Adam as soon as he comes to Christ and drinks. In this sense I believe this wonderful promise of Christ is always fulfilled.

(2) But is this all that is contained in the promise which heads this paper? By no means. There yet remains much behind. There is more to follow. I believe our Lord meant us to understand that he who comes to Him by faith shall not only have an abundant supply of everything which he needs for his own soul, but shall also become a source of blessing to the souls of others. The Spirit who dwells in him shall make him a fountain of good to his fellow-men, so that at the last day there shall be found to have flowed from him "rivers of living water."

This is a most important part of our Lord's promise, and opens up a subject which is seldom realized and grasped by many Christians. But it is one of deep interest, and deserves far more attention than it receives. I believe it to be a truth of God. I believe that just as "no man liveth unto himself" (Rom 14:7), so also no man is converted only for himself; and that the conversion of one man or woman always leads on, in God's wonderful providence, to the conversion of others. I do not say for a moment that all believers know it. I think it far more likely that many live and die in the faith, who are not aware that they have done good to any soul. But I believe the resurrection morning and the judgment day, when the secret history of all Christians is revealed, will prove that the full meaning of the promise before us has never failed. I doubt if there will be a believer who will not have been to some one or other a "river of living water," a channel through whom the Spirit has conveyed saving grace. Even the penitent thief, short as his time was after he repented, has been a source of blessing to thousands of souls!

(a) Some believers are "rivers of living water" while they live. Their words, their conversation, their preaching, their teaching, are all means by which the water of life has flowed into the hearts of their fellow-men. Such, for example, were the apostles who wrote no Epistles, and only preached the Word. Such were Luther, Whitefield, Wesley, Berridge, Rowlands, and thousands of others, of whom I cannot now speak particularly.

(b) Some believers are "rivers of living water" when they die. Their courage in facing the king of terrors, their boldness in the most painful sufferings, their unswerving faithfulness to Christ's truth even at the stake, their manifest peace on the edge of the grave—all this has set thousands thinking, and led hundreds to repent and believe. Such, for example, were the primitive martyrs whom the Roman emperors persecuted. Such were John Huss and Jerome of Prague. Such were Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, Hooper, and the rest of the noble army of martyrs. The work that they did at their deaths, like Samson, was far greater than the work done in their lives.

(c) Some believers are "rivers of living water" long after they die. They do good by their books and writings in every part of the world, long after the hands which held the pen are mouldering in the dust. Such men were Bunyan, Baxter, Owen, George Herbert, and Robert M'Cheyne. These blessed servants of God do more good probably by their books at this moment, than they did by their tongues when they were alive. "Being dead they yet speak" (Heb 11:4).

(d) Finally, there are some believers who are "rivers of living water" by the beauty of their daily conduct and behaviour. There are many quiet, gentle, consistent Christians who make no show and no noise in the world, and yet insensibly exercise a deep influence for good on all around them. They "win without the word" (1Pe 3:1). Their love, their kindness, their sweet temper, their patience, their unselfishness, tell silently on a wide circle, and sow seeds of thought and self-inquiry in many minds. It was a fine testimony of an old lady who died in great peace, saying that under God she owed her salvation to Mr. Whitefield: "It was not any sermon that he preached; it was not anything that he ever said to me. It was the beautiful consistency and kindness of his daily life, in the house where he was staying, when I was a little girl. I said to myself, if I ever have any religion, Mr. Whitefield's God shall be my God."

Let us all lay hold on this view of our Lord's promise, and never forget it. Think not for a moment that your own soul is the only soul that will be saved if you come to Christ by faith and follow Him. Think of the blessedness of being a "river of living water" to others. Who can tell that you may not be the means of bringing many others to Christ? Live, act, speak, pray, and work, keeping this continually in view. I knew a family, consisting of a father, mother, and ten children, in which true religion began with one of the daughters; and when it began she stood alone, and all the rest of the family were in the world. And yet, before she died, she saw both her parents and all her brothers and sisters converted to God, and all this, humanly speaking, began from her influence! Surely, in the face of this, we need not doubt that a believer may be to others a "river of living water." Conversions may not be in your time, and you may die without seeing them. But never doubt that conversion generally leads to conversions, and that few go to heaven alone. When Grimshaw of Haworth, the apostle of the north, died, he left his son graceless and godless. Afterwards the son was converted, never having forgotten his father's advice and example. And his last words were, "What will my old father

say when he sees me in heaven?" Let us take courage and hope on, believing Christ's promise.

Practical Applications

(1) And now, before I close this paper, let me ask you a plain question. Do you know anything of spiritual thirst? Have you ever felt anything of genuine deep concern about your soul? I fear that many know nothing about it. I have learned, by the painful experience of a third of a century, that people may go on for years attending God's house and yet never feel their sins, or desire to be saved. The cares of this world, the love of pleasure, the "lust of other things," choke the good seed every Sunday and make it unfruitful. They come to church with hearts as cold as the stone pavement on which they walk. They go away as thoughtless and unmoved as the old marble busts which look down on them from the monuments on the walls. Well, it may be so; but I do not despair of anyone, so long as he is alive. That old bell in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, which has struck the hours for so many years, is seldom heard by many during the business hours of the day. The roar and din of traffic in the streets have a strange power to deaden its sound, and prevent men hearing it.

But when the daily work is over, and desks are locked, and doors are closed, and books are put away, and quiet reins in the great city, the case is altered. As the old bell at night strikes eleven, and twelve, and one, and two, and three, thousands hear it who never heard it during the day. And so I hope it will be with many an one in the matter of his soul. Now, in the plenitude of health and strength, in the hurry and whirl of business, I fear the voice of your conscience is often stifled, and you cannot hear it. But the day may come when the great bell of conscience will make itself heard, whether you like it or not. The time may come when, laid aside in quietness, and obliged by illness to sit still, you may be forced to look within, and consider your soul's concerns. And then, when the great bell of awakened conscience is sounding in your ears, I trust that many a man who reads this paper may fear the voice of God and repent, may learn to thirst, and learn to come to Christ for relief. Yes, I pray God you may be taught to feel before it be too late!

(2) But do you feel anything at this very moment? Is your conscience awake and working? Are you sensible of spiritual thirst, and longing for relief? Then hear the invitation which I bring you in my Master's name this day: "If any man," no matter who he may be, if any man, high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, " if any man thirst, let him come to Christ and drink." Hear and accept that invitation without delay. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Who can tell that you may not wait for " a convenient season" till it be too late? The hand of a living Redeemer is now held out from heaven; but it may be withdrawn. The Fountain is open now; but it may soon be closed forever. "If any man thirst, let him come and drink" without delay. Though you have been a great sinner, and have resisted warnings, counsel, and sermons, yet come. Though you have sinned against light and knowledge, against a father's advice, and a mother's tears, though you have lived for years without a Sabbath, and without prayer, yet come. Say not that you know not how to come, that you do not understand what it is to believe, that you must wait for more light. Will a tired man say that he is too tired to lie down? or a drowning man, that he knows not how to lay hold on the hand stretched out to help him? or the shipwrecked sailor, with a life-boat alongside the stranded hulk, that he knows not how to jump in? Oh, cast away these vain excuses! Arise, and come! The door is not shut. The fountain is not yet closed. The Lord Jesus invites you. It is enough that you feel thirsting, and desire to be saved. Come: come to Christ without delay. Who ever came to the fountain for sin and found it dry? Who ever went unsatisfied away?

(3) But have you come to Christ already, and found relief? Then come nearer, nearer still. The closer your communion with Christ, the more comfort you will feel. The more you daily live by the side of the Fountain, the more you shall feel in yourself "a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (Joh 4:14). You shall not only be blessed yourself, but be a source of blessing to others.

In this evil world you may not perhaps feel all the sensible comfort you could desire. But remember you cannot have two heavens. Perfect happiness is yet to come. The devil is not yet bound. There is "a good time coming" for all who feel their sins and come to Christ, and commit their thirsting souls to His keeping. When He comes again they will be completely satisfied. They will remember all the way by which they were led, and see the need-be of everything that befell them. Above all, they will wonder that they could ever live so long without Christ, and hesitate about coming to Him.

There is a pass in Scotland called Glencroe, which supplies a beautiful illustration of what heaven will be to the souls who come to Christ. The road through Glencroe carries the traveller up a long and steep ascent, with many a little turn and winding in its course. But when the top of the pass is reached, a stone is seen by the wayside with these simple words inscribed upon it: "Rest, and be thankful." Those words describe the feelings with which every thirsting one who comes to Christ will enter heaven. The summit of the narrow way will at length be ours. We shall cease from our weary journeyings, and sit down in the kingdom of God. We shall look back on all the way of our lives with thankfulness, and see the perfect wisdom of every step in the steep ascent by which we were led. We shall forget the toil of the upward journey in the glorious rest. Here, in this world, our sense of rest in Christ at best is feeble and partial: we hardly seem at times to taste fully "the living water." But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is imperfect shall be done away. "When we awake up after his likeness we shall be satisfied" (Psa 17:15). We shall drink out of the river of His

pleasures and thirst no more.

NOTE

THERE is a passage from the old Puritan writer Robert Traill, which throws so much light on some points mentioned in this paper, that I make no excuse for giving it to the reader in its entirety. It comes from a work which is little known and less read. It has done me good, and I think it may do good to others.

"When a man is awakened, and brought to that that all must be brought to, or to worse, 'What shall I do to be saved?' (Act 16:30-31), we have the apostolic answer to it: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.' This answer is so old that with many it seems out of date. But it is still and will ever be fresh, and new, and savoury, and the only resolution of this grand case of conscience, as long as conscience and the world lasts. No wit or art of man will ever find a crack or flaw in it, or devise another or a better answer; nor can any but this alone heal rightly the wound of an awakened conscience.

"Let us set this man to seek resolution and relief in this case of some masters in our Israel. According to their principles they must say to him, 'Repent, and mourn for your known sins, and leave them and loath them; and God will have mercy on you.' 'Alas!' (saith the poor man), 'my heart is hard, and I cannot repent aright: yea, I find my heart more hard and vile than when I was secure in sin.' If you speak to this man of qualifications for Christ, he knows nothing of them; if of sincere obedience, his answer is native and ready: 'Obedience is the work of a living man, and sincerity is only in a renewed soul.' Sincere obedience is, therefore, as impossible to a dead unrenewed sinner as perfect obedience is. Why should not the right answer be given to the awakened sinner: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved?' Tell him what Christ is; what He hath done and suffered to obtain eternal redemption for sinners, and that according to the will of God and His Father. Give him a plain downright narrative of the gospel salvation wrought out by the Son of God; tell him the history and mystery of the gospel plainly. It may be the Holy Ghost will work faith thereby, as He did in those first fruits of the Gentiles (Act 10:44).

"If he ask, What warrant he hath to believe on Jesus Christ? tell him that he hath utter indispensable necessity for it; for without believing on Him, he must perish eternally. Tell him that he hath God's gracious offer of Christ and all His redemption; with a promise, that upon accepting the offer by faith, Christ and salvation with Him is his. Tell him that he hath God's express commandment to believe on Christ's name (1Jo 3:23); and that he should make conscience of obeying it, as well as any command in the moral law. Tell him of Christ's ability and good-will to save; that no man was ever rejected by Him that cast himself upon Him; that desperate cases are the glorious triumphs of His art of saving. Tell him that there is no midst (or medium) between faith and unbelief; that there is no excuse for neglecting the one and continuing in the other; that believing on the Lord Jesus for salvation is more pleasing to God than all obedience to His law; and that unbelief is the most provoking to God, and the most damning to man, of all sins. Against the greatness of his sins, the curse of the law, and the severity of God as judge, there is no relief to be held forth to him, but the free and boundless grace of God in the merit of Christ's satisfaction by the sacrifice of Himself.

"If he should say, What is it to believe on Jesus Christ? As to this, I find no such question in the Word; but that all did some way understand the notion of it: the Jews that did not believe on Him (Joh 6:28-30); the chief priests and Pharisees (Joh 7:48); the blind man (Joh 9:35). When Christ asked him [the blind man], 'Believest thou on the Son of God?' he answered, 'Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?' Immediately, when Christ had told him (verse 37), he saith not, 'What is it to believe on him?' but, 'Lord, I believe; and worshipped him': and so both professed and acted faith in Him. So the father of the lunatic (Mar 9:23-24) and the eunuch (Act 8:37). They all, both Christ's enemies and His disciples, knew that faith in Him was a believing that the Man Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, the Messiah, and Saviour of the world, so as to receive and look for salvation in His name (Act 4:12). This was the common report, published by Christ and His apostles and disciples, and known by all that heard it.

"If he yet ask, What he is to believe? you tell him, that he is not called to believe that he is in Christ, and that his sins are pardoned, and he a justified man; but that he is to believe God's record concerning Christ (1Jo 5:10-12). And this record is, that God giveth (that is, offereth) to us eternal Life in His Son Jesus Christ; and that all that with the heart believe this report, and rest their souls on these glad tidings, shall be saved (Rom 10:9-11). And thus he is to believe, that he may be justified (Gal 2:16).

"If he still say that this believing is hard, this is a good doubt, but easily resolved. It bespeaks a man deeply humbled. Anybody may see his own impotence to obey the law of God fully; but few find the difficulty of believing. For his relief and resolution ask him, What it is he finds makes believing difficult to him? Is it unwillingness to be justified and saved? Is it unwillingness to be so saved by Jesus Christ, to the praise of God's grace in Him, and to the voiding of all boasting in himself? This he will surely deny. Is it a distrust of the truth of the Gospel record? This he dare not own. Is it a doubt of Christ's ability or good-will to save? This is to contradict the testimony of God in the Gospels. Is it because he doubts of an interest in Christ and His redemption? You tell him that believing on Christ makes up the interest in Him.

"If he say that he cannot believe on Jesus Christ because of the difficulty of the acting this faith, and that a Divine

power is needful to draw it forth, which he finds not, you must tell him that believing in Jesus Christ is no work, but a resting on Jesus Christ. You must tell him that this pretence is as unreasonable as if a man, wearied with a journey and not able to go one step further, should argue, 'I am so tired, that I am not able to lie down,' when indeed he can neither stand nor go. The poor wearied sinner can never believe on Jesus Christ till he finds he can do nothing for himself; and in his first believing doth always apply himself to Christ for salvation, as a man hopeless and helpless in himself. And by such reasonings with him from the gospel, the Lord will (as He hath often done) convey faith, joy, and peace by believing."

–Robert Traill's Works, 1696. Vol. I, pp. 266-269.

Chapter 18

“Unsearchable Riches”

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”—Ephesians 3:8

IF we heard that sentence read for the first time, I think we should all feel it was a very remarkable one, even though we did not know by whom it was written. It is remarkable on account of the bold and striking figures of speech which it contains. “Less than the least of all saints,” “unsearchable riches of Christ”—these are indeed “thoughts that breathe and words that burn.”

But the sentence is doubly remarkable when we consider the man who wrote it. The writer was none other than the great apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul—the leader of that noble little Jewish army which went forth from Palestine nineteen centuries ago, and turned the world upside down. He was that good soldier of Christ who left a deeper mark on mankind than any born of woman, except his sinless Master, a mark which abides to this very day. Surely such a sentence from the pen of such a man demands peculiar attention.

Let us fix our eyes steadily on this text, and notice in it three things:

- I. First, what Paul says of himself. He says, “I am less than the least of all saints.”
- II. Secondly, what Paul says of his ministerial office. He says, “Grace is given unto me to preach.”
- III. Thirdly, what Paul says of the great subject of his preaching. He calls it “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

I trust that a few words on each of these three points may help to fasten down the whole text in memories, consciences, hearts, and minds.

I. What Paul Says of Himself.

In the first place, let us notice what Paul says of himself. The language he uses is singularly strong. The founder of famous churches, the writer of fourteen inspired epistles, the man who was “not behind the very chiefest apostles,” “in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft,” the man who “spent and was spent” for souls, and “counted all things but loss for Christ,” the man who could truly say, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”—what do we find him saying of himself? He employs an emphatic comparative and superlative. He says, “I am less than the least of all saints.” What a poor creature is the least saint! Yet Paul says, “I am less than that man.”

Such language as this, I suspect, is almost unintelligible to many who profess and call themselves Christians. Ignorant alike of the Bible and their own hearts, they cannot understand what a saint means when he speaks so humbly of himself and his attainments. “It is a mere fashion of speaking,” they will tell you; “it can only mean what Paul used to be, when he was a novice, and first began to serve Christ.” So true it is that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (1Co 2:14). The prayers, praises, conflicts, fears, hopes, joys, the sorrows of the true Christian, and the whole experience of the seventh of Romans—all are “foolishness” to the man of the world. Just as the blind man is no judge of a Reynolds or a Gainsborough, and the deaf cannot appreciate Handel’s Messiah, so the unconverted man cannot fully understand an apostle’s lowly estimate of himself.

But we may rest assured that what Paul wrote with his pen, he really felt in his heart. The language of our text does not stand alone. It is even exceeded in other places. To the Philippians he says, “I have not attained, nor am I already perfect: I follow after.” To the Corinthians he says, “I am the least of the apostles, which am not meet to be called an apostle.” To Timothy he says, “I am chief of sinners.” To the Romans he cries, “Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Phi 3:12; 1Co 15:9; 1Ti 1:15; Rom 7:24.) The plain truth is that Paul saw in his own heart of hearts far more defects and infirmities than he saw in anyone else. The eyes of his understanding were so fully opened by the Holy Spirit of God that he detected a hundred things wrong in himself which the dull eyes of other men never observed at all. In short, possessing great spiritual light, he had great insight into his own natural corruption, and was clothed from head to foot with humility (1Pe 5:5).

Now let us clearly understand that humility like Paul’s was not a peculiar characteristic of the great apostle of the Gentiles. On the contrary, it is one leading mark of all the most eminent saints of God in every age. The more real grace men have in their hearts, the deeper is their sense of sin. The more light the Holy Ghost pours into their souls, the more do they discern their own infirmities, defilements, and darkness. The dead soul feels and sees nothing; with life comes clear vision, a tender conscience and spiritual sensibility. Observe what lowly expressions Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, and John the Baptist used about themselves. Study the biographies of modern saints like Bradford, Hooker,

George Herbert, Beveridge, Baxter, and M'Cheyne. Mark how one common feature of character belongs to them all—a very deep sense of sin.

Superficial and shallow professors in the warmth of their first love may talk, if they will, of perfection. The great saints, in every era of Church history, from Paul down to this day, have always been "clothed with humility."

He that desires to be saved, among the readers of this paper, let him know this day that the first steps towards heaven are a deep sense of sin and a lowly estimate of ourselves. Let him cast away that weak and silly tradition that the beginning of religion is to feel ourselves "good." Let him rather grasp that grand scriptural principle, that we must begin by feeling "bad"; and that until we really feel "bad," we know nothing of true goodness or saving Christianity. Happy is he who has learned to draw near to God with the prayer of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luk 18:13).

Let us all seek humility. No grace suits man so well. What are we that we should be proud? Of all creatures born into the world, none is so dependent as the child of Adam. Physically looked at, what body requires such care and attention, and is such a daily debtor to half creation for food and clothing, as the body of man? Mentally looked at, how little do the wisest men know (and they are but few), and how ignorant the vast majority of mankind are, and what misery do they create by their own folly! "We are but of yesterday;'" says the book of Job, "and know nothing" (Job 8:9). Surely there is no created being on earth or in heaven that ought to be so humble as man.

Let us seekhumility. There is no grace which so befits an English churchman. The matchless Church of England's Prayer-book, from first to last, puts the humblest language into the mouths of all who use it. The sentences at the beginning of morning and evening prayer, the General Confession, the Litany, the Communion Service—all are replete with lowly-minded and self-abasing expressions. All, with one harmonious voice, supply Church of England worshippers with clear teaching about our right position in the sight of God.

Let us all seekmorehumility, if we know anything of it now; the more we have of it, the more Christ-like we shall be. It is written of our blessed Master (though in Him there was no sin) that "being in the form of God He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phi 2:6-8). And let us remember the words which precede that passage, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Depend on it, the nearer men draw to heaven, the more humble do they become. In the hour of death, with one foot in the grave, with something of the light of heaven shining down upon them, hundreds of great saints and church dignitaries—such men as Selden, Bishop Butler, Archbishop Longley—have left on record their confession, that never till that hour did they see their sins so clearly and feel so deeply their debt to mercy and grace. Heaven alone, I suppose, will fully teach us how humble we ought to be. Then only, when we stand within the veil, and look back on all the way of life by which we were led, then only shall we completely understand the need and beauty of humility. Strong language like Paul's will not appear to us too strong in that day. No indeed! We shall cast our crowns before the throne, and realize what a great divine meant when he said, "The anthem in heaven will be, What hath God wrought."

II. Paul's Ministerial Office

In the second place, let us notice what Paul says of his ministerial office. There is a grand simplicity in the apostle's words about this subject. He says, "Grace is given unto me that I should preach."

The meaning of the sentence is plain: "To me is granted the privilege of being a messenger of good news. I have been commissioned to be a herald of glad tidings." Of course we cannot doubt that Paul's conception of the minister's office included the administration of the sacraments, and the doing of all other things needful for the edifying of the body of Christ. But here, as in other places, it is evident that the leading idea continually before his mind was that the chief business of a minister of the New Testament is to be a preacher, an evangelist, God's ambassador, God's messenger, and the proclaimer of God's good news to a fallen world. He says in another place, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1Co 1:17).

I fail to see that Paul ever supports the favourite theory that there was intended to be a sacerdotal ministry, a sacrificingpriesthood in the church of Christ.[8] There is not a word in the Acts or in his Epistles to the churches to warrant such a notion. It is nowhere written, "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, then priests" (1Co 12:28). There is a conspicuous absence of the theory in the Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, where, if anywhere, we might have expected to find it.

On the contrary, in these very Epistles, we read such expressions as these, "God hath manifested His Word through preaching." "I am appointed a preacher." "I am ordained a preacher." "That by me the preaching might be fully known." (Tit 1:3; 1Ti 2:7; 2Ti 1:11; 2Ti 4:17.) And, to crown all, one of his last injunctions to his friend Timothy, when he leaves him in charge of an organized church, is this pithy sentence, "Preach the Word" (2Ti 4:2). In short, I believe Paul would have us understand that, however various the works for which the Christian minister is set apart, his first, foremost, and principal work is to be the preacher and proclaimer of God's Word.

But, while we refuse to allow that a sacrificing priesthood has any warrant of Scripture, let us beware in these days that we do not rush into the extreme of undervaluing the office which the minister of Christ holds. There is some danger in this direction. Let us grasp firmly certain fixed principles about the Christian ministry, and, however strong our dislike of priesthood and aversion to Romanism, let nothing tempt us to let these principles slip out of our hands. Surely there is solid middle ground between a grovelling idolatry of sacerdotalism on one hand, and a disorderly anarchy on the other. Surely it does not follow, because we will not be papists in this matter of the ministry, that we must needs be Quakers or Plymouth Brethren.[9] This, at any rate, was not in the mind of Paul.

(a) For one thing, let us settle it firmly in our minds that the ministerial office is a scripturalinstitution. I need not weary you with quotations to prove this point. I will simply advise you to read the Epistles to Timothy and Titus and judge for yourselves. If these Epistles do not authorize a ministry, there is, to my mind, no meaning in words. Take a jury of the first twelve intelligent, honest, disinterested, unprejudiced men you can find, and set them down with a New Testament to examine this question by themselves: "Is the Christian ministry a scriptural thing or not?" I have no doubt what their verdict would be.

(b) For another thing, let us settle it in our minds that the ministerial office is a most wise and useful provision of God. It secures the regular maintenance of all Christ's ordinances and means of grace. It provides an undying machinery for promoting the awakening of sinners and the edification of saints. All experience proves that everybody's business soon becomes nobody's business; and if this is true in other matters, it is no less true in the matter of religion. Our God is a God of order, and a God who works by means, and we have no right to expect His cause to be kept up by constant miraculous interpositions, while His servants stand idle. For the uninterrupted preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments, no better plan can be devised than the appointment of a regular order of men who shall give themselves wholly to Christ's business.

(c) For another thing, let us settle it firmly in our minds that the ministerial office is an honourable privilege. It is an honour to be the ambassador of a king; the very person of such an officer of state is respected, and called legally sacred. It is an honour to bear the tidings of a victory such as Trafalgar and Waterloo; before the invention of telegraphs it was a highly coveted distinction. But how much greater honour is it to be the ambassador of the King of kings, and to proclaim the good news of the conquest achieved on Calvary! To serve directly such a Master, to carry such a message, to know that the results of our work, if God shall bless it, are eternal, this is indeed a privilege. Other labourers may work for a corruptible crown, but the minister of Christ for an incorruptible.

Never is a land in worse condition than when the ministers of religion have caused their office to be ridiculed and despised. It is a tremendous word in Malachi: "I have made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways" (Mal 2:9). But, whether men will hear or forbear, the office of a faithful ambassador is honourable. It was a fine saying of an old missionary on his death-bed, who died at the age of ninety-six, "The very best thing that a man can do is to preach the gospel."

Let me leave this branch of my subject with an earnest request that all who pray will never forget to make supplications and prayers and intercession for the ministers of Christ, that there never may be wanting a due supply of them at home and in the mission field, that they may be kept sound in the faith and holy in their lives, and that they may take heed to themselves as well as to their doctrine (1Ti 4:16).

Oh, remember that while our office is honourable, useful, and scriptural, it is also one of deep and painful responsibility! We watch for souls "as those who must give account" at the Judgment Day (Heb 13:17). If souls are lost through unfaithfulness, their blood will be required at our hands. If we had only to read services and administer sacraments, to wear a peculiar dress and go through a round of ceremonies, bodily exercises, gestures, and postures, our position would be comparatively light. But this is not all. We have got to deliver our Master's message, to keep back nothing that is profitable and to declare all the counsel of God. If we tell our congregations less than the truth or more than the truth, we may ruin forever immortal souls. Life and death are in the power of the preacher's tongue. "Woe is unto us if we preach not the gospel!" (1Co 9:16).

Once more I say, pray for us. Who is sufficient for these things? Remember the old saying of the Church Fathers, "None are in more spiritual danger than ministers." It is easy to criticise and find fault with us. We have a treasure in earthen vessels. We are men of like passions with yourselves, and not infallible. Pray for us in these trying, tempting, controversial days, that our church may never lack bishops and deacons who are sound in the faith, bold as lions, "wise as serpents, and yet harmless as doves" (Mat 10:16). The very man who said, "Grace is given me to preach," is the same man who said, in another place, "Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith" (2Th 3:1-2).

III. Christ: The Subject of Paul's Preaching

Let us now notice, in the last place, what Paul says of the great subject of his preaching. He calls it "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

That the converted man of Tarsus should preach "Christ," is no more than we might expect from his antecedents.

Having found peace through the blood of the cross himself, we may be sure he would always tell the story of the cross to others. He never wasted precious time in exalting a mere rootless morality, in descanting on vague abstractions and empty platitudes—such as "the true," "the noble," "the earnest," "the beautiful," "the germs of goodness in human nature," and the like. He always went to the root of the matter, and showed men their great family disease, their desperate state as sinners, and the Great Physician needed by a sin-sick world.

That he should preach Christ among "the Gentiles," again, is in keeping with all we know of his line of action in all places and among all people. Wherever he travelled and stood up to preach—at Antioch, Lystra, Philippi, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus; among Greeks or Romans, among learned or unlearned, among Stoics and Epicureans; before rich or poor, barbarians, Scythians, bond, or free—Jesus and His vicarious death, Jesus and His resurrection, was the keynote of his sermons. Varying his mode of address according to his audience, as he wisely did, the pith and heart of his preaching was Christ crucified.

But in the text before us, you will observe, he uses a very peculiar expression, an expression which unquestionably stands alone in his writings, "the unsearchable riches of Christ." It is the strong, burning language of one who always remembered his debt to Christ's mercy and grace, and loved to show how intensely he felt it by his words. Paul was not a man to act or speak by halves (Quicquid fecit valde fecit). He never forgot the road to Damascus, the house of Judas in the street called Strait, the visit of good Ananias, the scales falling from his eyes, and his own marvellous passage from death to life. These things are always fresh and green before his mind; and so he is not content to say, "Grace is given me to preach Christ." No: he amplifies his subject. He calls it "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

But what did the apostle mean when he spoke of "unsearchable riches?" This is a hard question to answer. No doubt he saw in Christ such a boundless provision for all the wants of man's soul that he knew no other phrase to convey his meaning. From whatever standpoint he beheld Jesus, he saw in Him far more than mind could conceive, or tongue could tell. What he precisely intended must necessarily be matter of conjecture. But it may be useful to set down in detail some of the things which most probably were in his mind. It may, it must, it ought to be useful. For after all, let us remember, these "riches of Christ" are riches which you and I need in this day just as much as Paul; and, best of all, these "riches" are treasured up in Christ for you and me as much as they were 1900 years ago. They are still there. They are still offered freely to all who are willing to have them. They are still the property of everyone who repents and believes. Let us glance briefly at some of them.

(a) Set down, first and foremost, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in Christ's person. That miraculous union of perfect Man and perfect God in our Lord Jesus Christ is a great mystery, no doubt, which we have no line to fathom. It is a high thing, and we cannot attain to it. But, mysterious as that union may be, it is a mine of comfort and consolation to all who can rightly regard it. Infinite power and infinite sympathy are met together and combined in our Saviour. If He had been only Man He could not have saved us. If He had been only God (I speak with reverence) He could not have been "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," nor "suffered Himself being tempted" (Heb 2:18; 4:15). As God, He is mighty to save; and as Man, He is exactly suited to be our Head, Representative, and Friend. Let those who never think deeply, taunt us, if they will, with squabbling about creeds and dogmatic theology. But let thoughtful Christians never be ashamed to believe and hold fast the neglected doctrine of the Incarnation, and the union of two natures in our Saviour. It is a rich and precious truth that our Lord Jesus Christ is both "God and Man."

(b) Set down, next, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the work which Christ accomplished for us, when He lived on earth, died, and rose again. Truly and indeed, He finished the work which His Father gave Him to do (Joh 17:4)—the work of atonement for sin, the work of reconciliation, the work of redemption, the work of satisfaction, the work of substitution as "the just for the unjust." It pleases some men, I know, to call these short phrases "man-made theological terms, human dogmas," and the like. But they will find it hard to prove that each of these much abused phrases does not honestly contain the substance of plain texts of Scripture; which, for convenience sake, like the word Trinity, divines have packed into a single word. And each phrase is very rich.

(c) Set down, next, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the offices which Christ at this moment fills, as He lives for us at the right hand of God. He is at once our Mediator, our Advocate, our Priest, our Intercessor, our Shepherd, our Bishop, our Physician, our Captain, our King, our Master, our Head, our Forerunner, our Elder Brother, the Bridegroom of our souls. No doubt these offices are worthless to those who know nothing of vital religion. But to those who live the life of faith, and seek first the kingdom of God, each office is precious as gold.

(d) Set down, next, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the names and titles which are applied to Christ in the Scriptures. Their number is very great, every careful Bible-reader knows, and I cannot of course pretend to do more than select a few of them. Think for a moment of such titles as the Lamb of God, the Bread of life, the Fountain of living waters, the Light of the world, the Door, the Way, the Vine, the Rock, the Cornerstone, the Christian's Robe and the Christian's Altar. Think of all these names, I say, and consider how much they contain. To the careless, worldly man they are mere "words," and nothing more; but to the true Christian each title, if beaten out and developed, will be found to have within its bosom a wealth of blessed truth.

(e) Set down, lastly, in your minds that there are unsearchable riches in the characteristic qualities, attributes, dispositions, and intentions of Christ's mind towards man, as we find them revealed in the New Testament. In Him there

are…

- riches of mercy, love, and compassion for sinners,
- riches of power to cleanse, pardon, forgive, and to save to the uttermost,
- riches of willingness to receive all who come to Him repenting and believing,
- riches of ability to change by His Spirit the hardest hearts and worst characters,
- riches of tender patience to bear with the weakest believer,
- riches of strength to help His people to the end, notwithstanding every foe without and within,
- riches of sympathy for all who are cast down and bring their troubles to Him, and last, but not least,
- riches of glory to reward, when He comes again to raise the dead and gather His people to be with Him in His kingdom.

Who can estimate these riches? The children of this world may regard them with indifference, or turn away from them with disdain, but those who feel the value of their souls know better. They will say with one voice, "There are no riches like those which are laid up in Christ for His people."

For, best of all, these riches are unsearchable. They are a mine which, however long it may be worked, is never exhausted. They are a fountain which, however many draw its waters, never runs dry. The sun in heaven has been shining for thousands of years, and giving light, and life, and warmth, and fertility to the whole surface of the globe. There is not a tree or a flower in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America which is not a debtor to the sun. And still the sun shines on for generation after generation, and season after season, rising and setting with unbroken regularity, giving to all, taking from none, and to all ordinary eyes the same in light and heat that it was in the day of creation, the great common benefactor of mankind. Just so it is, if any illustration can approach the reality, just so it is with Christ. He is still "the Sun of righteousness" to all mankind (Mal 4:2). Millions have drawn from Him in days gone by, and looking to Him have lived with comfort, and with comfort died. Myriads at this moment are drawing from Him daily supplies of mercy, grace, peace, strength, and help, and find "all fulness" dwelling in Him. And yet the half of the riches laid up in Him for mankind, I doubt not, is utterly unknown! Surely the apostle might well use that phrase, "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

Practical Application

Let me now conclude this paper with three words of practical application. For convenience sake I shall put them in the form of questions, and I invite each reader of this volume to examine them quietly and try to give them an answer.

(1) First, then, let me ask you what you think of yourself? What Paul thought of himself you have seen and heard. Now, what are your thoughts about yourself? Have you found out that grand foundation-truth that you are a sinner, a guilty sinner in the sight of God?

The cry for more education in this day is loud and incessant. Ignorance is universally deplored. But, you may depend, there is no ignorance so common and so mischievous as ignorance of ourselves. Yes, men may know all arts, sciences, languages, political economy, and state-craft, and yet be miserably ignorant of their own hearts and their own state before God.

Be very sure that self-knowledge is the first step towards heaven. To know God's unspeakable perfection, and our own immense imperfection—to see our own unspeakable defectiveness and corruption, is the A-B-C in saving religion. The more real inward light we have, the more humble and lowly-minded we shall be, and the more we shall understand the value of that despised thing, the gospel of Christ. He that thinks worst of himself and his own doings is perhaps the best Christian before God. Well would it be for many if they would pray, night and day, this simple prayer, "Lord, show me myself."

(2) Secondly, what do you think of the ministers of Christ? Strange as that question may seem, I verily believe that the kind of answer a man would give to it, if he speaks honestly, is very often a fair test of the state of his heart.

Observe, I am not asking what you think of an idle, worldly, inconsistent clergyman, a sleeping watchman and faithless shepherd. No! I ask what you think of the faithful minister of Christ, who honestly exposes sin, and pricks your conscience. Mind how you answer that question. Too many, nowadays, like only those ministers who prophesy smooth things and let their sins alone, who flatter their pride and amuse their intellectual taste, but who never sound an alarm, and never tell them of a wrath to come. When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1Ki 21:20). When Micaiah was named to Ahab, he cried, "I hate him because he doth not prophesy good of me, but evil" (1Ki 22:8). Alas, there are many like Ahab in this century! They like a ministry which does not make them uncomfortable, and send them home ill at ease. How is it with you? Oh, believe me, he is the best friend who tells you the most truth! It is an evil sign in the church when Christ's witnesses are silenced, or persecuted, and men hate him who reproveth (Isaiah 29:21). It was a solemn saying of the prophet to Amaziah: "Now I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and not hearkened to my counsel" (2Ch 25:16).

(3) Last of all, what do you think of Christ Himself? Is He great or little in your eyes? Does He come first or second in

your estimation? Is He before or behind His church, His ministers, His sacraments, His ordinances? Where is He in your heart and your mind's eye?

After all, this is the question of questions! Pardon, peace, rest of conscience, hope in death, heaven itself—all hinge upon your answer. To know Christ is life eternal. To be without Christ is to be without God. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1Jo 5:12). The friends of purely secular education, the enthusiastic advocates of reform and progress, the worshippers of reason, intellect, mind, and science, may say what they please, and do all they can to mend the world. But they will find their labour in vain if they do not make allowance for the Fall of man, and if there is no place for Christ in their schemes.

There is a sore disease at the heart of mankind, which will baffle all their efforts, and defeat all their plans, and that disease is sin. Oh, that people would only see and recognize the corruption of human nature, and the uselessness of all efforts to improve man which are not based on the remedial system of the gospel! Yes, the plague of sin is in the world, and no waters will ever heal that plague except those which flow from the fountain for all sin—the crucified Christ.

But, to wind up all, where is boasting? As a great divine said on his death-bed, "We are all of us only half awake." The best Christian among us knows but little of his glorious Saviour, even after he had learned to believe. We see through a glass darkly. We do not realize the "unsearchable riches" there are in Him. When we wake up after His likeness in another world, we shall be amazed that we knew Him so imperfectly, and loved Him so little. Let us seek to know Him better now, and live in closer communion with Him. So living, we shall feel no need of human priests and earthly confessionals. We shall feel "I have all and abound; I want nothing more. Christ dying for me on the cross, Christ ever interceding for me at God's right hand, Christ dwelling in my heart by faith, Christ soon coming again to gather me and all His people together to part no more! Christ is enough for me. Having Christ, I have 'unsearchable riches.'"

The good I have is from His stores supplied,
The ill is only what He deems the best;
He for my Friend, I'm rich with nought beside,
And poor without Him, though of all possess'd:
Changes may come, I take or I resign,
Content while I am His, and He is mine.

While here, alas! I know but half His love,
But half discern Him, and but half adore;
But when I meet Him in the realms above,
I hope to love Him better, praise Him more;
And feel, and tell, amid the choir divine,
How fully I am His, and He is mine.

Chapter 19

Wants of the Times

"Men that had understanding of the times."–1 Chronicles 12:32

THESE words were written about the tribe of Issachar, in the days when David first began to reign over Israel. It seems that after Saul's unhappy death, some of the tribes of Israel were undecided what to do. "Under which king?" was the question of the day in Palestine. Men doubted whether they should cling to the family of Saul, or accept David as their king. Some hung back, and would not commit themselves; others came forward boldly, and declared for David. Among these last were many of the children of Issachar; and the Holy Ghost gives them a special word of praise. He says, "They were men that had understanding of the times."

I cannot doubt that this sentence, like every sentence in Scripture, was written for our learning. These men of Issachar are set before us as a pattern to be imitated and an example to be followed; for it is a most important thing to understand the times in which we live, and to know what those times require. The wise men in the court of Ahasuerus "knew the times" (Est 1:13). Our Lord Jesus Christ blames the Jews because they "knew not the time of their visitation," and did not "discern the signs of the times" (Mat 16:3; Luk 19:44). Let us take heed lest we fall into the same sin. The man who is content to sit ignorantly by his own fireside, wrapped up in his own private affairs, and has no public eye for what is going on in the church and the world, is a miserable patriot, and a poor style of Christian. Next to our Bibles and our own hearts, our Lord would have us study our own times.

Now I propose in this paper to consider what our own times require at our hands. All ages have their own peculiar dangers for professing Christians, and all consequently demand special attention to peculiar duties. I ask my readers to give me their minds for a few minutes while I try to show them what the times require of Christians, and particularly of English churchmen. There are five points which I propose to bring before you, and I shall speak of them plainly and without reserve. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1Co 14:8).

I. Truth of Christianity and the Divine Authority of the Bible

First and foremost, the times require of us a bold and unflinching maintenance of the entire truth of Christianity, and the divine authority of the Bible.

Our lot is cast in an age of abounding unbelief, skepticism, and, I fear I must add, infidelity. Never, perhaps, since the days of Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian, was the truth of revealed religion so openly and unblushingly assailed, and never was the assault so speciously[10] and plausibly conducted. The words which Bishop Butler wrote in 1736 are curiously applicable to our own days: "It is come to be taken for granted by many persons, that Christianity is not even a subject of inquiry; but that it is now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if, in the present age, this was an agreed point among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule, as it were by way of reprisals for its having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world" (Butler's Analogy, Introduction). I often wonder what the good bishop would have now said, if he had lived in the present day.

In reviews, magazines, newspapers, lectures, essays, and sometimes even in sermons, scores of clever writers are incessantly waging war against the very foundations of Christianity. Reason, science, geology, anthropology, modern discoveries, free thought, are all boldly asserted to be on their side. No educated person, we are constantly told nowadays, can really believe supernatural religion, or the plenary [every word] inspiration of the Bible, or the possibility of miracles. Such ancient doctrines as the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the atonement, the obligation of the Sabbath, the necessity and efficacy of prayer, the existence of the devil, and the reality of futurepunishment, are quietly put on the shelf as useless old Almanacs, or contemptuously thrown overboard as lumber! And all this is done so cleverly, and with such an appearance of candour and liberality, and with such compliments to the capacity and nobility of human nature, that multitudes of unstable Christians are carried away as by a flood, and become partially unsettled, if they do not make complete shipwreck of faith.

The existence of this plague of unbelief must not surprise us for a moment. It is only an old enemy in a new dress, an old disease in a new form. Since the day when Adam and Eve fell, the devil has never ceased to tempt men not to believe God, and has said, directly or indirectly, "Ye shall not die even if you do not believe." In the latter days especially we have warrant of Scripture for expecting an abundant crop of unbelief: "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse." "There shall come in the last days scoffers." (Luk 18:8; 2Ti 3:13; 2Pe 3:3.)

Here in England skepticism is that natural rebound from semi-popery and superstition, which many wise men have long predicted and expected. It is precisely that swing of the pendulum which far-sighted students of human nature

looked for; and it has come.

But as I tell you not to be surprised at the widespread skepticism of the times, so also I must urge you not to be shakenin mind by it, or moved from your steadfastness. There is no real cause for alarm. The ark of God is not in danger, though the oxen seem to shake it. Christianity has survived the attacks of Hume and Hobbes and Tindal, of Collins and Woolston and Bolingbroke and Chubb, of Voltaire and Payne and Holyoake. These men made a great noise in their day, and frightened weak people; but they produced no more effect than idle travellers produce by scratching their names on the great pyramid of Egypt. Depend on it, Christianity in like manner will survive the attacks of the clever writers of these times. The startling novelty of many modern objections to revelation, no doubt, makes them seem more weighty than they really are. It does not follow, however, that hard knots cannot be untied because our fingers cannot untie them, or formidable difficulties cannot be explained because our eyes cannot see through or explain them. When you cannot answer a skeptic, be content to wait for more light; but never forsake a great principle. In religion, as in many scientific questions, said Faraday, "the highest philosophy is often a judicious suspense of judgment." He that believeth shall not make haste; he can afford to wait.

When skeptics and infidels have said all they can, we must not forget that there are three great broad facts which they have never explained away; and I am convinced they never can, and never will. Let me tell you briefly what they are. They are very simple facts, and any plain man can understand them.

(a) The first fact is Jesus Christ Himself. If Christianity is a mere invention of man, and the Bible is not from God, how can infidels explain Jesus Christ? His existence in history, they cannot deny. How is it that without force or bribery, without arms or money, He has made such an immensely deep mark on the world, as He certainly has? Who was He? What was He? Where did He come from? How is it that there never has been one like Him, neither before nor after, since the beginning of historical times? They cannot explain it. Nothing can explain it but the great foundation principle of revealed religion, that Jesus Christ is God, and His gospel is all true.

(b) The second fact is the Bible itself. If Christianity is a mere invention of man, and the Bible is of no more authority than any other uninspired volume, how is it that the Book is what it is? How is it that a Book written by a few Jews in a remote corner of the earth, written at distant periods without consort or collusion among the writers, written by members of a nation which, compared to Greeks and Romans, did nothing for literature—how is it that this Book stands entirely alone, and there is nothing that even approaches it, for high views of God, for true views of man, for solemnity of thought, for grandeur of doctrine, and for purity of morality? What account can the infidel give of this Book, so deep, so simple, so wise, so free from defects? He cannot explain its existence and its nature on his principles. We only can do that who hold that the Book is supernatural and of God.

(c) The third fact is the effect which Christianity has produced on the world. If Christianity is a mere invention of man, and not a supernatural, divine revelation, how is it that it has wrought such a complete alteration in the state of mankind? Any well-read man knows that the moral difference between the condition of the world before Christianity was planted and since Christianity took root, is the difference between night and day, the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the devil. At this very moment, I defy anyone to look at the map of the world, and compare the countries where men are Christians with those where men are not Christians, and to deny that these countries are as different as light and darkness, black and white. How can any infidel explain this on his principles? He cannot do it. We only can who believe that Christianity came down from God, and is the only Divine religion in the world.

Whenever you are tempted to be alarmed at the progress of infidelity, look at the three facts I have just mentioned, and cast your fears away. Take up your position boldly behind the ramparts of these three facts, and you may safely defy the utmost efforts of modern skeptics. They may often ask you a hundred questions you cannot answer, and start ingenious problems about various readings, or inspiration, or geology, or the origin of man, or the age of the world, which you cannot solve. They may vex and irritate you with wild speculations and theories, of which at the time you cannot prove the fallacy, though you feel it. But be calm and fear not. Remember the three great facts I have named, and boldly challenge skeptics to explain them away. The difficulties of Christianity no doubt are great; but, depend on it, they are nothing compared to the difficulties of infidelity.

II. Christian Doctrine

In the second place, the times require at our hands distinct and decided views of Christian doctrine.

I cannot withhold my conviction that the professing church of the nineteenth century is as much damaged by laxity and indistinctness about matters of doctrine within, as it is by skeptics and unbelievers without. Myriads of professing Christians nowadays seem utterly unable to distinguish things that differ. Like people afflicted with colour-blindness, they are incapable of discerning what is true and what is false, what is sound and what is unsound. If a preacher of religion is only clever and eloquent and earnest, they appear to think he is all right, however strange and heterogeneous his sermons may be. They are destitute of spiritual sense, apparently, and cannot detect error. Popery or Protestantism, an atonement or no atonement, a personal Holy Ghost or no Holy Ghost, future punishment or no future punishment, 'high church' or 'low church' or 'broad church,' Trinitarianism, Arianism, or Unitarianism—nothing

comes amiss to them; they can swallow it all, even if they cannot digest it! Carried away by a fancied liberality and charity, they seem to think everybody is right and nobody is wrong, every clergyman is sound and none are unsound, everybody is going to be saved and nobody going to be lost. Their religion is made of negatives; and the only positive thing about them is that they dislike distinctness and think all extreme and decided and positive views are very naughty and very wrong!

These people live in a kind of mist or fog. They see nothing clearly, and do not know what they believe. They have not made up their minds about any great point in the gospel, and seem content to be honorary members of all schools of thought. For their lives they could not tell you what they think is truth about justification, regeneration, sanctification, the Lord's Supper, baptism, faith, conversion, inspiration, or the future state. They are eaten up with a morbid dread of controversy and an ignorant dislike of party spirit; and yet they really cannot define what they mean by these phrases. The only point you can make out is that they admire earnestness and cleverness and charity, and cannot believe that any clever, earnest, charitable man can ever be in the wrong! And so they live on undecided; and too often undecided they drift down to the grave, without comfort in their religion, and, I am afraid, often without hope.

The explanation of this boneless, nerveless, jelly-fish condition of soul is not difficult to find. To begin with, the heart of man is naturally in the dark about religion (has no intuitive sense of truth), and really needs instruction and illumination. Besides this, the natural heart in most men hates exertion in religion, and cordially dislikes patient, painstaking inquiry. Above all, the natural heart generally likes the praise of others, shrinks from collision, and loves to be thought charitable and liberal. The whole result is that a kind of broad religious "agnosticism" just suits an immense number of people, and specially suits young persons. They are content to shovel aside all disputed points as rubbish, and if you charge them with indecision, they will tell you: "I do not pretend to understand controversy; I decline to examine controverted points. I daresay it is all the same in the long run." Who does not know that such people swarm and abound everywhere?

Now I do beseech all who read this paper to beware of this undecided state of mind in religion. It is a pestilence which walketh in darkness, and a destruction that killeth in noonday. It is a lazy, idle frame of soul which, doubtless, saves men the trouble of thought and investigation; but it is a frame of soul for which there is no warrant in the Bible, nor yet in the Articles or Prayer-book of the Church of England. For your own soul's sake, dare to make up your mind what you believe, and dare to have positive, distinct views of truth and error. Never, never be afraid to hold decided doctrinal opinions; and let no fear of man and no morbid dread of being thought party-spirited, narrow, or controversial, make you rest contented with a bloodless, boneless, tasteless, colourless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity.

Mark what I say. If you want to dogood in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal religion. If you believe little, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology; by telling men roundly of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice; by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross, and His precious blood; by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Saviour; by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit; by lifting up the brazen serpent, by telling men to look and live—to believe, repent, and be converted. This is the only teaching which for eighteen centuries God has honoured with success, and is honouring at the present day both at home and abroad. Let the clever advocates of a broad and undogmatic theology—the preachers of the gospel of earnestness, and sincerity and cold morality—let them, I say, show us at this day any English village, parish, city, town, or district, which has been evangelized without "dogma" by their principles. They cannot do it, and they never will.

Christianity without distinct doctrine is a powerless thing. It may be beautiful to some minds, but it is childless and barren. There is no getting over facts. The good that is done in the earth may be comparatively small. Evil may abound, and ignorant impatience may murmur and cry out that Christianity has failed. But, depend on it, if we want to "do good" and shake the world, we must fight with the old apostolic weapons, and stick to "dogma." No dogma, no fruits! No positive evangelical doctrine, no evangelization!

Mark once more what I say. The men who have done most for the Church, and made the deepest mark on their day and generation, have always been men of most decided and distinct doctrinal views. It is the bold, decided, outspoken man, like Capel Molyneux, or our grand old Protestant champion Hugh McNeile, who makes a deep impression, and sets people thinking, and "turns the world upside down." It was "dogma" in the apostolic ages which emptied the heathen temples and shook Greece and Rome. It was "dogma" which awoke Christendom from its slumbers at the time of the Reformation and spoiled the pope of one third of his subjects. It was "dogma" which 100 years ago revived the Church in the days of Whitefield, Wesley, Venn, and Romaine, and blew up our dying Christianity into a burning flame. It is "dogma" at this moment which gives power to every successful mission, whether at home or abroad. It is doctrine—clear, ringing doctrine—which, like the ram's horns at Jericho, casts down the opposition of the devil and sin. Let us cling to decided doctrinal views, whatever some may lease to say in these times, and we shall do well for ourselves, well for others, well for the Church of England, and well for Christ's cause in the world.

III. The Unscriptural Character of Romanism

In the third place, the times require of us an awakened and livelier sense of the unscriptural and soul-ruining character of Romanism. This is a painful subject; but it imperatively demands some plain speaking.

(1) The facts of the case are very simple. No intelligent observer can fail to see that the tone of public feeling in England about Romanism has undergone a great change in the last forty years. Father Oakley, the well-known erroneous priest, an ally of Cardinal Newman, asserts this triumphantly in a recent number of the Contemporary Review. And I am sorry to say that, in my judgment, he speaks the truth. There is no longer that general dislike, dread, and aversion to popery, which was once almost universal in this realm. The edge of the old British feeling about Protestantism seems blunted and dull. Some profess to be tired of all religious controversy, and are ready to sacrifice God's truth for the sake of peace. Some look on Romanism as simply one among many English forms of religion, and neither worse nor better than others. Some try to persuade us that Romanism is changed, and not nearly so bad as it used to be. Some boldly point to the faults of Protestants, and loudly cry that Romanists are quite as good as ourselves. Some think it fine and liberal to maintain that we have no right to think anyone wrong who is in earnest about his creed. And yet the two great historical facts, (a) that ignorance, immorality, and superstition reigned supreme in England 400 years ago under popery, (b) that the Reformation was the greatest blessing God ever gave to this land—both these are facts which no one but a papist ever thought of disputing fifty years ago! In the present day, alas, it is convenient and fashionable to forget them! In short, at the rate we are going, I shall not be surprised if it is soon proposed to repeal the Act of Settlement and to allow the Crown of England to be worn by a papist.

(2) The causes of this melancholy change of feeling are not hard to discover.

(a) It arises partly from the untiring zeal of the Romish Church herself. Her agents never slumber or sleep. They compass sea and land to make one proselyte. They creep in everywhere, like the Egyptian frogs, and leave no stone unturned, in the palace or the workhouse, to promote their cause.

(b) It has been furthered immensely by the proceedings of the ritualistic party in the Church of England. That energetic and active body has been vilifying the Reformation and sneering at Protestantism for many years, with only too much success. It has corrupted, leavened, blinded, and poisoned the minds of many churchmen by incessant misrepresentation. It has gradually familiarized people with every distinctive doctrine and practice of Romanism: the real presence, the mass, auricular confession and priestly absolution, the sacerdotal character of the ministry, the monastic system, and a histrionic, sensuous, showy style of public worship—and the natural result is, that many simple people see no mighty harm in downright genuine popery!

(c) Last, but not least, the spurious liberality of the day we live in helps on the Romeward tendency. It is fashionable now to say that all sects should be equal, that the state should have nothing to do with religion, that all creeds should be regarded with equal favour and respect, and that there is a substratum of common truth at the bottom of all kinds of religion, whether Buddhism, Mohammedanism, or Christianity! The consequence is that myriads of ignorant folk begin to think there is nothing peculiarly dangerous in the tenets of papists any more than in the tenets of Methodists, Independents, Presbyterians, or Baptists—and that we ought to let Romanism alone and never expose its unscriptural and Christ-dishonouring character.

(3) The consequences of this changed tone of feeling, I am bold to say, will be most disastrous and mischievous, unless it can be checked. Once let popery get her foot again on the neck of England and there will be an end of all our national greatness. God will forsake us and we shall sink to the level of Portugal and Spain. With Bible-reading discouraged, with private judgment forbidden, with the way to Christ's cross narrowed or blocked up, with priest-craft re-established, with auricular confession set up in every parish, with monasteries and nunneries dotted over the land, with women everywhere kneeling like serfs and slaves at the feet of clergymen, with men casting off all faith, and becoming skeptics, with schools and colleges made seminaries of Jesuitism, with free thought denounced and anathematized—with all these things, the distinctive manliness and independence of the British character will gradually dwindle, wither, pine away, and be destroyed; and England will be ruined. And all these things, I firmly believe, will come unless the old feeling about the value of Protestantism can be revived.

(4) I warn all who read this paper, and I warn my fellow-churchmen in particular, that the times require you to awake and be on your guard. Beware of Romanism and beware of any religious teaching which, wittingly or unwittingly, paves the way to it. I beseech you to realize the painful fact that the Protestantism of this country is gradually ebbing away. And I entreat you, as Christians and patriots to resist the growing tendency to forget the blessings of the English Reformation.

For Christ's sake, for the sake of the Church, for the sake of our country, for the sake of our children, let us not drift back to Romish ignorance, superstition, priestcraft, and immorality. Our fathers tried popery long ago, for centuries, and threw it off at last with disgust and indignation. Let us not put the clock back and return to Egypt. Let us have no peace with Rome till Rome adjures[11] her errors and is at peace with Christ. Till Rome does that, the vaunted re-union of Western churches, which some talk of, and press upon our notice, is an insult to Christianity.

Read your Bibles and store your minds with scriptural arguments. A Bible-reading laity is a nation's surest defense against error. I have no fear for English Protestantism if the English laity will only do their duty. Read your Thirty-nine Articles and Jewell's Apology, and see how those neglected documents speak of Romish doctrines. We clergymen, I

fear, are often sadly to blame. We break the first Canon, which bids us preach four times every year against the pope's supremacy! Too often we behave as if "giant pope" was dead and buried, and never name him. Too often, for fear of giving offense, we neglect to show our people the real nature and evil of popery.

I entreat my readers, beside the Bible and Articles, to read history and see what Rome did in days gone by. Read how she trampled on your country's liberties, plundered your forefathers' pockets, and kept the whole nation ignorant, superstitious, and immoral. Read how Archbishop Laud ruined church and state, and brought himself and King Charles to the scaffold by his foolish, obstinate, and God-displeasing effort to unprotestantize the Church of England. Read how the last popish King of England, James the Second, lost his crown by his daring attempt to put down protestantism and reintroduce popery. And do not forget that Rome never changes. It is her boast and glory that she is infallible, and always the same.

Read facts, standing out at this minute on the face of the globe, if you will not read history. What has made Italy and Sicily what they were till very lately? Popery. What has made the South American states what they are? Popery. What has made Spain and Portugal what they are? Popery. What has made Ireland what she is in Munster, Leinster, and Connaught? Popery. What makes Scotland, the United States, and our own beloved England the powerful prosperous countries they are, and I pray God they may long continue? I answer, unhesitatingly, Protestantism—a free Bible and the principles of the Reformation. Oh, think twice before you cast aside the principles of the Reformation! Think twice before you give way to the prevailing tendency to favour popery and go back to Rome.

The Reformation…

- found Englishmen steeped in ignorance, and left them in possession of knowledge,
- found them without Bibles, and placed a Bible in every parish,
- found them in darkness, and left them in comparative light,
- found them priest-ridden, and left them enjoying the liberty which Christ bestows,
- found them strangers to the blood of atonement, to faith and grace and real holiness, and left them with the key to these things in their hands,
- found them blind, and left them seeing,
- found them slaves, and left them free.

For ever let us thank God for the Reformation! It lighted a candle which we ought never to allow to be extinguished or to burn dim. Surely I have a right to say that the times require of us a renewed sense of the evils of Romanism, and of the enormous value of the Protestant Reformation!

IV. Personal Holiness and Practical Religion in Daily Life

In the fourth place, the times require of us a higher standard of personal holiness, and an increased attention to practical religion in life.

I must honestly declare my conviction that, since the days of the Reformation, there never has been so much profession of religion without practice, so much talking about God without walking with Him, so much hearing God's words without doing them, as there is in England at this present date. Never were there so many empty tubs and tinkling cymbals! Never was there so much formality and so little reality. The whole tone of men's minds on what constitutes practical Christianity seems lowered. The old golden standard of the behaviour which becomes a Christian man or woman appears debased and degenerated. You may see scores of religious people (so-called) continually doing things which in days gone by would have been thought utterly inconsistent with vital religion. They see no harm in such things as card-playing, theatre-going, dancing, incessant novel-reading, and Sunday-travelling, and they cannot in the least understand what you mean by objecting to them! The ancient tenderness of conscience about such things seems dying away and becoming extinct, like the dodo. When you venture to remonstrate with young communicants who indulge in them, they only stare at you as an old-fashioned, narrow-minded, fossilized person and say, "Where is the harm?" In short, laxity of ideas among young men, and "fastness"[12] and levity among young women, are only too common characteristics of the rising generation of Christian professors.

Now in saying all this I would not be mistaken. I disclaim the slightest wish to recommend an ascetic religion. Monasteries, nunneries, complete retirement from the world, and refusal to do our duty in it, all these I hold to be unscriptural and mischievous nostrums.[13] Nor can I ever see my way clear to urging on men an ideal standard of perfection for which I find no warrant in God's Word, a standard which is unattainable in this life, and hands over the management of the affairs of society to the devil and the wicked. No; I always wish to promote a genial, cheerful, manly religion, such as men may carry everywhere and yet glorify Christ.

The pathway to a higher standard of holiness which I commend to the attention of my readers is a very simple one, so simple that I can fancy many smiling at it with disdain. But, simple as it is, it is a path sadly neglected and overgrown with weeds, and it is high time to direct men into it.

(a) We need then to examine more closely our good old friends the TenCommandments. Beaten out, and properly developed as they were by Bishop Andrews and the Puritans, the two tables of God's law are a perfect mine of practical religion. I think it an evil sign of our day that many clergymen neglect to have the commandments put up in their new, or restored, churches, and coolly tell you "they are not wanted now!" I believe they never were wanted so much!

(b) We need to examine more closely such portions of our Lord Jesus Christ's teaching as the Sermon on the Mount. How rich is that wonderful discourse in food for thought! What a striking sentence that is, "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mat 5:20). Alas, that text is rarely used!

(c) Last, but not least, we need to study more closely the latter part of nearly all of Paul's Epistles to the churches. They are far too much slurred over and neglected. Scores of Bible readers, I am afraid, are well acquainted with the first eleven chapters of the Epistle to the Romans, but know comparatively little of the five last. When Thomas Scott expounded the Epistle to the Ephesians at the old Lock Chapel, he remarked that the congregations became much smaller when he reached the practical part of that blessed book!

Once more I say, you may think my recommendations very simple. I do not hesitate to affirm that attention to them would by God's blessing be most useful to Christ's cause. I believe it would raise the standard of English Christianity about such matters as home religion, separation from the world, diligence in the discharge of relative duties, unselfishness, good temper, and general spiritual-mindedness, to a pitch which it seldom attains now.

There is a common complaint in these latter days that there is a want of power in modern Christianity, and that Christ's true Church, the body of which He is the Head, does not shake the world in this century as it used to do in former years. Shall I tell you in plain words what is the reason? It is the low tone of life which is so sadly prevalent among professing believers. We want more men and women who walk with God and before God, like Enoch and Abraham. Though our numbers at this date far exceed those of our evangelical forefathers, I believe we fall far short of them in our standard of Christian practice. Where is the self-denial, the redemption of time, the absence of luxury and self-indulgence, the unmistakable separation from earthly things, the manifest air of being always about our Master's business, the singleness of eye, the simplicity of home life, the high tone of conversation in society, the patience, the humility, the universal courtesy which marked so many of our forerunners seventy or eighty years ago?

Yes; where is it indeed? We have inherited their principles and we wear their armour, but I fear we have not inherited their practice. The Holy Ghost sees it, and is grieved; and the world sees it, and despises us. The world sees it, and cares little for our testimony. It is life—a heavenly, godly, Christ-like life—depend on it, which influences the world. Let us resolve, by God's blessing, to shake off this reproach. Let us awake to a clear view of what the times require of us in this matter. Let us aim at a much higher standard of practice. Let the time past suffice us to have been content with a half-and-half holiness. For the time to come, let us endeavour to walk with God, to be "thorough" and unmistakable in our daily life, and to silence, if we cannot convert, a sneering world.

V. Perseverance in the Old Ways

In the fifth and last place, the times require of us more regular and steady perseverance in the old ways of getting good for our souls.

Public Religion

I think no intelligent Englishman can fail to see that there has been of late years an immense increase of what I must call, for want of a better phrase, public religion in the land. Services of all sorts are strangely multiplied. Places of worship are thrown open for prayer and preaching and administration of the Lord's Supper, at least ten times as much as they were fifty years ago. Services in cathedral naves, meetings in large public rooms like the Agricultural Hall and Mildmay Conference Building, mission services carried on day after day and evening after evening—all these have become common and familiar things. They are, in fact, established institutions of the day, and the crowds who attend them supply plain proof that they are popular. In short, we find ourselves face to face with the undeniable fact that the last quarter of the nineteenth century is an age of an immense amount of public religion.

Now I am not going to find fault with this. Let no one suppose that for a moment. On the contrary, I thank God for the revival of the old apostolic plan of "aggressiveness" in religion, and the evident spread of a desire "by all means to save some" (1Co 9:22). I thank God for shortened services, home missions, and evangelistic movements like that of Moody and Sankey. Anything is better than torpor, apathy, and inaction. "If Christ is preached I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phi 1:18). Prophets and righteous men in England once desired to see those things, and never saw them. If Whitefield and Wesley had been told in their day that a time would come when English Archbishops and Bishops would not only sanction mission services but take an active part in them, I can hardly think they would have believed it. Rather, I suspect, they would have been tempted to say, like the Samaritan nobleman in Elisha's time, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (2Ki 7:2).

But while we are thankful for the increase of public religion, we must never forget that, unless it is accompanied by private religion, it is of no real solid value, and may even produce most mischievous effects. Incessant running after sensational preachers, incessant attendance at hot, crowded meetings, protracted to late hours, incessant craving after fresh excitement and highly-spiced pulpit novelties—all this kind of thing is calculated to produce a very unhealthy style of Christianity; and, in many cases, I am afraid, the end is utter ruin of soul. For, unhappily, those who make public religion everything, are often led away by mere temporary emotions, after some grand display of ecclesiastical oratory, into professing far more than they really feel. After this, they can only be kept up to the mark, which they imagine they have reached, by a constant succession of religious excitements. By and by, as with opium-eaters and dram-drinkers, there comes a time when their dose loses its power, and a feeling of exhaustion and discontent begins to creep over their minds. Too often, I fear, the conclusion of the whole matter is a relapse into utter deadness and unbelief and a complete return to the world. And all results from having nothing but a public religion! Oh, that people would remember that it was not the wind, or the fire, or the earthquake, which showed Elijah the presence of God, but "the still, small voice" (1Ki 19:12).

Private Religion

Now I desire to lift up a warning voice on this subject. I want to see no decrease of public religion, remember; but I do want to promote an increase of that religion which is private—private between each man and his God. The root of a plant or tree makes no show above ground. If you dig down to it and examine it, it is a poor, dirty, coarse-looking thing, and not nearly so beautiful to the eye as the fruit, or leaf, or flower. But that despised root, nevertheless, is the true source of all the life, health, vigour, and fertility which your eyes see, and without it the plant or tree would soon die. Now private religion is the root of all vital Christianity. Without it, we may make a brave show in the meeting or on the platform, and sing loud, and shed many tears, and have a name to live and the praise of man. But without it we have no wedding garment, and are "dead before God." I tell my readers plainly that the times require of us all more attention to our private religion.

(a) Let us pray more heartily in private, and throw our whole souls more into our prayers. There are live prayers and there are dead prayers—prayers that cost us nothing and prayers which often cost us strong crying and tears. What are yours? When great professors backslide in public, and the church is surprised and shocked, the truth is that they had long ago backslidden on their knees. They had neglected the throne of grace.

(b) Let us read our Bibles in private more, and with more pains and diligence. Ignorance of Scripture is the root of all error and makes a man helpless in the hand of the devil. There is less private Bible-reading, I suspect, than there was fifty years ago. I never can believe that so many English men and women would have been "tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine," some falling into skepticism, some rushing into the wildest and narrowest fanaticism, and some going over to Rome, if there had not grown up a habit of lazy, superficial, careless, perfunctory reading of God's Word. "Ye do err not knowing the scriptures" (Mat 22:29). The Bible in the pulpit must never supersede the Bible at home.

(c) Let us cultivate the habit of keeping up more private meditation and communion with Christ. Let us resolutely make time for getting alone occasionally, for talking with our own souls like David, for pouring out our hearts to our Great High Priest, Advocate, and Confessor at the right hand of God. We want more auricular confession, but not to man. The confessional we want is not a box in the vestry, but the throne of grace. I see some professing Christians always running about after spiritual food, always in public, and always out of breath and in a hurry, and never allowing themselves leisure to sit down quietly to digest, and take stock of their spiritual condition. I am never surprised if such Christians have a dwarfish, stunted religion and do not grow, and if, like Pharaoh's lean kine, they look no better for their public religious feasting, but rather worse. Spiritual prosperity depends immensely on our private religion, and private religion cannot flourish unless we determine that by God's help we will make time, whatever trouble it may cost us, for thought, for prayer, for the Bible, and for private communion with Christ. Alas! That saying of our Master is sadly overlooked, "Enter into thy closet and shut the door" (Mat 6:6).

Our evangelical forefathers had far fewer means and opportunities than we have. Full religious meetings and crowds, except occasionally at a church or in a field when such men as Whitefield, Wesley, or Rowlands preached, these were things of which they knew nothing. Their proceedings were neither fashionable nor popular, and often brought on them more persecution and abuse than praise. But the few weapons they used, they used well. With less noise and applause from man they made, we believe, a far deeper mark for God on their generation than we do, with all our conferences, meetings, mission rooms, halls, and multiplied religious appliances. Their converts, I suspect, like the old-fashioned cloths and linens, wore better, lasted longer, faded less, kept colour better, and were more stable, rooted, and grounded than many of the new-born babes of this day. And what was the reason of all this? Simply, I believe, because they gave more attention to privatereligion than we generally do. They walked closely with God and honoured Him in private, and so He honoured them in public. Oh, let us follow them as they followed Christ! Let us go and do likewise.

Practical Application

Let me now conclude with a few words of practical application.

(1) First of all, would you understand what the times require of you in reference to your own soul? Listen, and I will tell you. You live in times of peculiar spiritual danger. Never perhaps were there more traps and pitfalls in the way to heaven; never certainly were those traps so skillfully baited and those pitfalls so ingeniously made. Mind what you are about. Look well to your goings. Ponder the paths of your feet. Take heed lest you come to eternal grief and ruin your own soul. Beware of practical infidelity under the specious name of free thought. Beware of a helpless state of indecision about doctrinal truth under the plausible idea of not being party spirited, and under the baneful influence of so-called liberality and charity. Beware of frittering away life in wishing, and meaning, and hoping for the day of decision, until the door is shut and you are given over to a dead conscience and die without hope. Awake to a sense of your danger. Arise and give diligence to make yourcalling and election sure, whatever else you leave uncertain. The kingdom of God is very nigh. Christ the Almighty Saviour, Christ the sinner's Friend, Christ and eternal life, are ready for you if you will only come to Christ. Arise and cast away excuses; this very day Christ calleth you. Wait not for company if you cannot have it; wait for nobody. The times, I repeat, are desperately dangerous. If only few are in the narrow way of life, resolve that by God's help you at any rate will be among the few.

(2) In the next place, would you understand what the times require of all Christians in reference to the souls of others? Listen, and I will tell you. You live in times of great liberty and abounding opportunities of doing good. Never were there so many open doors of usefulness, so many fields white to the harvest. Mind that you use those open doors, and try to reap those fields. Try to do a little good before you die. Strive to be useful. Determine that, by God's help, you will leave the world a better world in the day of your burial than it was in the day you were born. Remember the souls of relatives, friends and companions; remember that God often works by weak instruments, and try with holy ingenuity to lead them to Christ. The time is short: the sand is running out of the glass of this old world; then redeem the time, and endeavour not to go to heaven alone. No doubt you cannot command success. It is not certain that your efforts to do good will always do good to others; but it is quite certain that they will always do good to yourself. Exercise is one grand secret of health, both for body and soul. "He that watereth shall be watered himself" (Pro 11:25). It is a deep and golden saying of our Master's, but seldom understood in its meaning, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Act 20:35).

(3) In the last place, would you understand what the times require of you in reference to the Church of England? Listen to me, and I will tell you. No doubt you live in days when our time-honoured church is in a very perilous, distressing, and critical position. Her rowers have brought her into troubled waters. Her very existence is endangered by papists, infidels, and liberationists without. Her life-blood is drained away by the behaviour of traitors, false friends, and timid officers within. Nevertheless, so long as the Church of England sticks firmly to the Bible, the Articles, and the principles of the Protestant Reformation, so long I advise you strongly to stick to the church. When the Articles are thrown overboard and the old flag is hauled down, then, and not till then, it will be time for you and me to launch the boats and quit the wreck. At present, let us stick to the old ship.

Why should we leave her now, like cowards, because she is in difficulties and the truth cannot be maintained within her pale without trouble? How can we better ourselves? To whom can we go? Where shall we find better prayers? In what communion shall we find so much good being done, in spite of the existence of much evil? No doubt there is much to sadden us; but there is not a single visible church on earth at this day doing better. There is not a single communion where there are no clouds, and all is serene. "The evils everywhere are mingled with the good;" the wheat never grows without tares. But for all that, there is much to gladden us: more evangelical preaching than there ever was before in the land, more work done both at home and abroad. If old William Romaine, of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, who stood alone with some half-a-dozen others in London last century, had lived to see what our eyes see, he would have sharply rebuked our faint-heartedness and unthankfulness. No! the battle of the reformed Church of England is not yet lost, in spite of semi-popery and skepticism, whatever jealous onlookers without and melancholy grumblers within may please to say. As Napoleon said at four o'clock on the battlefield of Marengo, "there is yet time to win a victory." If the really loyal members of the church will only stand by her boldly, and not look coolly at one another, and refuse to work the same fire-engine, or man the same lifeboat, and if they will not squabble and quarrel and "fall out by the way," the Church of England will live and not die, and be a blessing to our children's children. Then let us set our feet down firmly and stand fast in our position. Let us not be in a hurry to quit the ship because of a few leaks; let us rather man the pumps, and try to keep the good ship afloat. Let us work on, and fight on, and pray on, and stick to the Church of England. The churchman who walks in these lines, I believe, is the churchman who "understands the times."

Chapter 20

“Christ Is All”

“Christ is all.”–Colossians 3:11

THE words of our text are few, short, and soon spoken; but they contain great things. Like those golden sayings, “To me to live is Christ,” “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”–they are singularly rich and suggestive (Phi 1:21; Gal 2:20).

These three words are the essence and substance of Christianity. If our hearts can really go along with them, it is well with our souls. If not, we may be sure we have yet much to learn.

Let me try to set before my readers in what sense “Christ is all;” and let me ask them, as they read, to judge themselves honestly, that they may not make shipwreck in the judgment of the last day.

I purposely close this volume with a paper on this remarkable text. Christ is the mainspring both of doctrinal and practical Christianity. A right knowledge of Christ is essential to a right knowledge of sanctification as well as justification. He that follows after holiness will make no progress unless he gives to Christ His rightful place. I began the volume with a plain statement about sin. Let me end it with an equally plain statement about Christ.

I. “Christ Is All” as Concerning Man

First of all, let us understand that Christ is all, in all the counsels of God concerning man.

(a) There was a time when this earth had no being. Solid as the mountains look, boundless as the sea appears, high as the stars in heaven look–they once did not exist. And man, with all the high thoughts he now has of himself, was a creature unknown.

And where was Christ then? Even then Christ was “with God” and “was God,” and was “equal with God” (Joh 1:1; Phi 2:6). Even then He was the beloved Son of the Father. “Thou lovedst me,” He says, “before the foundation of the world.” “I had glory with thee before the world began.” “I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.” (Joh 17:5, 24; Pro 8:23.) Even then He was the Saviour “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1Pe 1:20), and believers were “chosen in him” (Eph 1:4).

(b) There came a time when this earth was created in its present order. Sun, moon and stars, sea, land and all their inhabitants, were called into being and made out of chaos and confusion. And, last of all, man was formed out of the dust of the ground.

And where was Christ then? Hear what the Scripture says: “All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (Joh 1:3). “By him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth” (Col 1:16). “And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” (Heb 1:10). “When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: when he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the foundations of the deep: when he gave to the sea his decree, that the water should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him” (Pro 8:27-30). Can we wonder that the Lord Jesus, in His preaching, should continually draw lessons from the book of nature? When He spoke of the sheep, the fish, the ravens, the corn, the lilies, the fig tree, the vine, He spoke of things which He Himself had made.

(c) There came a day when sin entered the world. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and fell. They lost that holy nature in which they were first formed. They forfeited the friendship and favour of God and became guilty, corrupt, helpless, hopeless sinners. Sin came as a barrier between themselves and their holy Father in heaven. Had He dealt with them according to their deserts, there had been nothing before them but death, hell, and everlasting ruin.

And where was Christ then? In that very day He was revealed to our trembling parents, as the only hope of salvation. The very day they fell, they were told that “the seed of the woman should yet bruise the serpent’s head,” and that a Saviour born of a woman should overcome the devil and win for sinful man an entrance to eternal life (Gen 3:15). Christ was held up as the true light of the world in the very day of the fall; and never has any name been made known from that day by which souls could be saved, excepting His. By Him all saved souls have entered heaven, from Adam downwards, and without Him none have ever escaped hell.

(d) There came a time when the world seemed sunk and buried in ignorance of God. After 4,000 years the nations of the earth appeared to have clean forgotten the God that made them. Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires had done nothing but spread superstition and idolatry. Poets, historians, philosophers had proved that, with all their intellectual powers, they had no right knowledge of God; and that man, left to himself, was utterly corrupt. “The world, by wisdom, knew not God” (1Co 1:21). Excepting a few despised Jews in a corner of the earth, the whole world was dead in ignorance and sin.

And what did Christ do then? He left the glory He had had from all eternity with the Father, and came down into the

world to provide a salvation. He took our nature upon Him, and was born as a man. As a man He did the will of God perfectly, which we all had left undone; as a man He suffered on the cross the wrath of God which we ought to have suffered. He brought in everlasting righteousness for us. He redeemed us from the curse of a broken law. He opened a fountain for all uncleaness. He died for our sins; He rose again for our justification. He ascended to God's right hand and sat down, waiting till His enemies should be made His footstool. And there He sits now, offering salvation to all who will come, interceding for all who believe in Him, and managing by God's appointment all that concerns the salvation of souls.

(e) There is a time coming when sin shall be cast out from this world. Wickedness shall not always flourish unpunished; Satan shall not always reign; creation shall not always groan, being burdened. There shall be a time of restitution of all things. There shall be a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. (Rom 8:22; Act 3:21; 2Pe 3:13; Isa 11:9.)

And where shall Christ be then? And what shall He do? Christ Himself shall be King. He shall return to this earth and make all things new. He shall come in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and the kingdoms of the world shall become His. The heathen shall be given to Him for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. To Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord. His dominion shall be an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Mat 24:30; Rev 11:15; Psa 2:8; Phi 2:10-11; Dan 7:14.)

(f) There is a day coming when all men shall be judged. The sea shall give up the dead which are in it, and death and hell shall deliver up the dead which are in them. All that sleep in the grave shall awake and come forth, and all shall be judged according to their works. (Rev 20:13; Dan 12:2.)

And where will Christ be then? Christ Himself will be the Judge. "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son." "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered ALL nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats." "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ: that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (Joh 5:22; Mat 25:32; 2Co 5:10.)

Now if any reader of this paper thinks little of Christ, let him know this day that he is very unlike God! You are of one mind, and God is of another. You think it enough to give Christ a little honour, a little reverence, a little respect. But in all the eternal counsels of God the Father, in creation, redemption, restitution, and judgment—in all these, Christ is "all."

Surely we shall do well to consider these things. Surely it is not written in vain, "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him" (Joh 5:23).

II. "Christ Is All" in the Bible

In the second place, let us understand that "Christ is all" in the inspired books which make up the Bible.

In every part of both Testaments, Christ is to be found: dimly and indistinctly at the beginning, more clearly and plainly in the middle, fully and completely at the end—but really and substantially everywhere.

Christ's sacrifice and death for sinners, and Christ's kingdom and future glory, are the light we must bring to bear on any book of Scripture we read. Christ's cross and Christ's crown are the clue we must hold fast if we would find our way through Scripture difficulties. Christ is the only key that will unlock many of the dark places of the Word. Some people complain that they do not understand the Bible. And the reason is very simple. They do not use the key. To them the Bible is like the hieroglyphics in Egypt. It is a mystery, just because they do not know and employ the key.

(a) It was Christ crucified who was set forth in every Old Testament sacrifice. Every animal offered on an altar was a practical confession that a Saviour was looked for who would die for sinners—a Saviour who should take away man's sin, by suffering, as his Substitute and Sin-bearer, in his stead (1Pe 3:18). It is absurd to suppose that an unmeaning slaughter of innocent beasts, without a distinct object in view, could please the eternal God!

(b) It was Christ to whom Abel looked when he offered a better sacrifice than Cain. Not only was the heart of Abel better than that of his brother, but he showed his knowledge of vicarious sacrifice and his faith in an atonement. He offered the firstlings of his flock, with the blood thereof, and in so doing declared his belief that without shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb 11:4).

(c) It was Christ of whom Enoch prophesied in the days of abounding wickedness before the flood. "Behold," he said, "the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all" (Jude :14-15).

(d) It was Christ to whom Abraham looked when he dwelt in tents in the land of promise. He believed that in his seed, in one born of his family, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. By faith he saw Christ's day, and was glad (Joh 8:56).

(e) It was Christ of whom Jacob spoke to his sons, as he lay dying. He marked out the tribe out of which He would be born, and foretold that "gathering together" unto Him which is yet to be accomplished. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen 49:10).

(f) It was Christ who was the substance of the ceremonial law which God gave to Israel by the hand of Moses. The morning and evening sacrifice, the continual shedding of blood, the altar, the mercy-seat, the high priest, the passover, the day of atonement, the scapegoat—all these were so many pictures, types, and emblems of Christ and His work. God had compassion upon the weakness of His people. He taught them "Christ" line upon line, and by similitudes, just as we teach little children. It was in this sense especially that "the law was a schoolmaster to lead" the Jews "unto Christ" (Gal 3:24).

(g) It was Christ to whom God directed the attention of Israel by all the daily miracles which were done before their eyes in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud and fire which guided them, the manna from heaven which every morning fed them, the water from the smitten rock which followed them—all and each were figures of Christ. The brazen serpent, on that memorable occasion when the plague of fiery serpents was sent upon them, was an emblem of Christ. (1Co 10:4; Joh 3:14.)

(h) It was Christ of whom all the judges were types. Joshua, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and all the rest whom God raised up to deliver Israel from captivity—all were emblems of Christ. Weak and unstable and faulty as some of them were, they were set for example of better things in the distant future. All were meant to remind the tribes of that far higher Deliverer who was yet to come.

(i) It was Christ of whom David the king was a type. Anointed and chosen when few gave him honour, despised and rejected by Saul and all the tribes of Israel, persecuted and obliged to flee for his life, a man of sorrow all his life, and yet at length a conqueror—in all these things David represented Christ.

(j) It was Christ of whom all the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi spoke. They saw through a glass darkly. They sometimes dwelt on His sufferings, and sometimes on His glory that should follow (1Pe 1:11). They did not always mark out for us the distinction between Christ's first coming and second coming. Like two candles in a straight line, one behind the other, they sometimes saw both the advents at the same time, and spoke of them in one breath. They were sometimes moved by the Holy Ghost to write of the times of Christ crucified, and sometimes of His kingdom in the latter days. But Jesus dying, or Jesus reigning, was the thought you will ever find uppermost in their minds.

(k) It is Christ, I need hardly say, of whom the whole New Testament is full. The Gospels are Christ living, speaking, and moving among men. The Acts are Christ preached, published, and proclaimed. The Epistles are Christ written of, explained, and exalted. But all through, from first to last, there is one name above every other, and that is the name of Christ.

I charge every reader of this paper to ask himself frequently what the Bible is to him. Is it a Bible in which you have found nothing more than good moral precepts and sound advice? Or is it a Bible in which you have found Christ? Is it a Bible in which "Christ is all?" If not, I tell you plainly, you have hitherto used your Bible to very little purpose. You are like a man who studies the solar system and leaves out in his studies the sun, which is the centre of all. It is no wonder if you find your Bible a dull book!

III. "Christ Is All" Is the Religion of All True Christians

In the third place, let us understand that "Christ is all" is the religion of all true Christians on earth.

In saying this, I wish to guard myself against being misunderstood. I hold the absolute necessity of the election of God the Father, and the sanctification of God the Spirit, in order to effect the salvation of everyone that is saved. I hold that there is a perfect harmony and unison in the action of the three Persons of the Trinity, in bringing any man to glory, and that all three co-operate and work a joint work in his deliverance from sin and hell. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father is merciful, the Son is merciful, the Holy Ghost is merciful. The same three who said at the beginning, "Let us create," said also, "Let us redeem and save." I hold that everyone who reaches heaven will ascribe all the glory of his salvation to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—three Persons in one God.

But, at the same time, I see clear proof in Scripture that it is the mind of the blessed Trinity, that Christ should be prominently and distinctly exalted in the matter of saving souls. Christ is set forth as the "Word" through whom God's love to sinners is made known. Christ's incarnation and atoning death on the cross are the great cornerstone on which the whole plan of salvation rests. Christ is the way and door, by which alone approaches to God are to be made. Christ is the root into which all elect sinners must be grafted. Christ is the only meeting-place between God and man, between heaven and earth, between the Holy Trinity and the poor sinful child of Adam. It is Christ whom God the Father has "sealed" and appointed to convey life to a dead world (John 6:27). It is Christ to whom the Father has given a people to be brought to glory. It is Christ of whom the Spirit testifies, and to whom He always leads a soul for pardon and peace. In short, it has "pleased the Father that in Christ all fulness should dwell" (Col 1:19). What the sun is in the firmament of heaven, Christ is in true Christianity.

I say these things by way of explanation. I want my readers clearly to understand that in saying "Christ is all," I do not mean to shut out the work of the Father and of the Spirit. Now let me show what I do mean.

(a) Christ is all in a sinner's justification before God.

Through Him alone we can have peace with a Holy God. By Him alone we can have admission into the presence

of the Most High, and stand there without fear. “We have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” In him alone can God be just, and justify the ungodly. (Eph 3:12; Rom 3:26.)

Wherewith can any mortal man come before God? What can we bring as a plea for acquittal before that Glorious Being, in whose eyes the very heavens are not clean? Shall we say that we have done our duty to God? Shall we say that we have done our duty to our neighbour? Shall we bring forward our prayers? our regularity? our morality? our amendments? our church-going? Shall we ask to be accepted because of any of these?

Which of these things will stand the searching inspection of God’s eye. Which of them will actually justify us? Which of them will carry us clear through judgment, and land us safe in glory?

None, none, none! Take any commandment of the ten, and let us examine ourselves by it. We have broken it repeatedly. We cannot answer God one of a thousand. Take any of us and look narrowly into our ways, and we are nothing but sinners. There is but one verdict: we are all guilty, all deserve hell, and all ought to die. Wherewith can we come before God?

We must come in the name of Jesus, standing on no other ground, pleading no other plea than this, “Christ died on the cross for the ungodly, and I trust in Him. Christ died for me, and I believe on Him.”

The garment of our Elder Brother, the righteousness of Christ, this is the only robe which can cover us and enable us to stand in the light of heaven without shame.

The name of Jesus is the only name by which we shall obtain an entrance through the gate of eternal glory. If we come to that gate in our own names, we are lost, we shall not be admitted, we shall knock in vain. If we come in the name of Jesus, it is a passport and Shibboleth, and we shall enter and live.

The markof the blood of Christ is the only mark that can save us from destruction. When the angels are separating the children of Adam in the last day, if we are not found marked with that atoning blood, we had better never have been born.

Oh, let us never forget that Christ must be “all” to that soul who would be justified! We must be content to go to heaven as beggars—saved by free grace, simply as believers in Jesus—or we shall never be saved at all.

Is there a thoughtless, worldly soul among the readers of this book? Is there one who thinks to reach heaven by saying hastily at the last, “Lord have mercy on me” without Christ? Friend, you are sowing misery for yourself, and unless you alter, you will awake to endless woe.

Is there a proud, formal soul among my readers? Is there anyone thinking to make himself fit for heaven and good enough to pass muster by his own doings? Brother, you are building a Babel, and you will never reach heaven in your present state.

But is there a labouring, heavy-laden one among the readers of this book? Is there one who wants to be saved, and feels a vile sinner? I say to such an one, “Come to Christ, and He shall save you. Come to Christ, and cast the burden of your soul on Him. Fear not; only believe.”

Do you fear wrath? Christ can deliver you from the wrath to come. Do you feel the curse of a broken law? Christ can redeem you from the curse of the law. Do you feel far away? Christ has suffered, to bring you nigh to God. Do you feel unclean? Christ’s blood can cleanse all sin away. Do you feel imperfect? You shall be complete in Christ. Do you feel as if you were nothing? Christ shall be “all in all” to our soul. Never did saint reach heaven with any tale but this, “I was washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14).

(b) But again, Christ is not only all in the justification of a true Christian, but He is also all in his sanctification.

I would not have anyone misunderstand me. I do not mean for a moment to undervalue the work of the Spirit. But this I say, that no man is ever holy till he comes to Christ and is united to Him. Till then his works are dead works; he has no holiness at all. First you must be joined to Christ, and then you shall be holy. Without Him, separate from Him, you can do nothing (Joh 15:5).

And no man can grow in holiness except he abides in Christ. Christ is the great root from which every believer must draw his strength to go forward. The Spirit is His special gift, His purchased gift for His people. A believer must not only “receive Christ Jesus the Lord” but walk in Him, and be rooted and built up in Him (Col 2:6-7).

Would you be holy? Then Christ is the manna you must daily eat, like Israel in the wilderness of old. Would you be holy? Then Christ must be the rock from which you must daily drink the living water. Would you be holy? Then you must be ever looking unto Jesus—looking at His cross, and learning fresh motives for a closer walk with God—looking at His example, and taking Him for your pattern. Looking at Him, you would become like Him. Looking at Him, your face would shine without your knowing it. Look less at yourself and more at Christ, and you will find besetting sins dropping off and leaving you, and your eyes enlightened more and more every day. (Heb 12:2; 2Co 3:18.)

The true secret of coming up out of the wilderness is to come up “leaning on the Beloved” (Song 8:5). The true way to be strong is to realize our weakness and to feel that Christ must be all. The true way to grow in grace is to take of Christ as a fountain for every minute’s necessities. We ought to employ Him as the prophet’s wife employed the oil—not only to pay our debts, but to live on also. We should strive to be able to say, “The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (2Ki 4:7; Gal 2:20.)

I pity those who try to be holy without Christ! Your labour is all in vain. You are putting money in a bag with holes.

You are pouring water into a sieve. You are rolling a huge round stone uphill. You are building up a wall with untempered mortar. Believe me, you are beginning at the wrong end. You must come to Christ first, and He shall give you His sanctifying Spirit. You must learn to say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi 4:13).

(c) But again, Christ is not only all in the sanctification of a true Christian, but all in his comfort in time present.

A saved soul has many sorrows. He has a body like other men—weak and frail. He has a heart like other men, and often a more sensitive one, too. He has trials and losses to bear like others and often more. He has his share of bereavements, deaths, disappointments, crosses. He has: the world to oppose, a place in life to fill blamelessly, unconverted relatives to bear with patiently, persecutions to endure, and a death to die. And who is sufficient for these things? What shall enable a believer to bear all this? Nothing but "the consolation there is in Christ" (Phi 2:1).

Jesus is indeed the Brother born for adversity. He is the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother, and He alone can comfort His people. He can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, for He suffered Himself (Heb 4:15). He knows what sorrow is, for He was a Man of sorrows. He knows what an aching body is, for His body was racked with pain. He cried, "All my bones are out of joint" (Psa 22:14). He knows what poverty and weariness are, for He was often wearied and had not where to lay His head. He knows what family unkindness is, for even His brethren did not believe Him. He had no honour in His own house.

And Jesus knows exactly how to comfort His afflicted people. He knows how to pour oil and wine into the wounds of the spirit, how to fill up gaps in empty hearts, how to speak a word in season to the weary, how to heal the broken heart, how to make all our bed in sickness, how to draw nigh when we are faint, and say, "Fear not; I am thy salvation" (Lam 3:57).

We talk of sympathy being pleasant. There is no sympathy like that of Christ. In all our afflictions He is afflicted. He knows our sorrows. In all our pain He is pained, and like the good physician, He will not measure out to us one drop of sorrow too much. David once said, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Thy comforts delight my soul" (Psa 94:19). Many a believer, I am sure, could say as much, "If the Lord Himself had not stood by me, 'the proud waters would have gone over my soul'" (Psa 124:5).

How a believer gets through all his troubles appears wonderful. How he is carried through the fire and water he passes through seems past comprehension. But the true account of it is just this, that Christ is not only justification and sanctification, but consolation also.

Oh, you who want unfailing comfort, I commend you to Christ! In Him alone there is no failure. Rich men are disappointed in their treasures. Learned men are disappointed in their books. Husbands are disappointed in their wives. Wives are disappointed in their husbands. Parents are disappointed in their children. Statesmen are disappointed when, after many a struggle, they attain place and power. They find out, to their cost, that it is more pain than pleasure and that it is disappointment, annoyance, incessant trouble, worry, vanity, and vexation of spirit. But no man was ever disappointed in Christ.

(d) But as Christ is all in the comforts of a true Christian in time present, so Christ is all in his hopes for time to come.

Few men and women, I suppose, are to be found who do not indulge in hopes of some kind about their souls. But the hopes of the vast majority are nothing but vain fancies. They are built on no solid foundation. No living man but the real child of God, the sincere, thoroughgoing Christian, can give a reasonable account of the hope that is in him. No hope is reasonable which is not scriptural.

A true Christian has a good hope when he looks forward; the worldly man has none. A true Christian sees light in the distance; the worldly man sees nothing but darkness. And what is the hope of a true Christian? It is just this: that Jesus Christ is coming again, coming without sin, coming with all His people, coming to wipe away every tear, coming to raise His sleeping saints from the grave, coming to gather together all His family, that they may be for ever with Him.

Why is a believer patient? because he looks for the coming of the Lord. He can bear hard things without murmuring. He knows the time is short. He waits quietly for the King.

Why is he moderate in all things? Because he expects his Lord soon to return. His treasure is in heaven, his good things are yet to come. The world is not his rest, but an inn; and an inn is not home. He knows that "He that shall come will soon come, and will not tarry." Christ is coming, and that is enough (Heb 10:37).

This is indeed a "blessed hope!" (Tit 2:13). Now is the school-time, then the eternal holiday. Now is the tossing on the waves of a troublesome world, then the quiet harbour. Now is the scattering, then the gathering. Now is the time of sowing, then the harvest. Now is the working season, then the wages. Now is the cross, then the crown. People talk of their "expectations" and hopes from this world. None have such solid expectations as a saved soul. He can say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him" (Psa 62:5).

In all true saving religion "Christ is all:" all in justification, all in comfort and all in hope. Blessed is that mother's child that knows it, and far more blessed is he that feels it too. Oh that men would prove themselves, and see what they know of it for their own souls!

IV. Christ Will Be All in Heaven

One thing more I will add, and then I am done. Let us understand that Christ will be all in heaven.

I cannot dwell long on this point. I have not power, if I had space and room. I can ill describe things unseen and a world unknown. But this I know, that all men and women who reach heaven will find that even there also "Christ is all."

Like the altar in Solomon's temple, Christ crucified will be the grand object in heaven. That altar struck the eye of every one who entered the temple gates. It was a great brazen altar, twenty cubits broad, as broad as the front of the temple itself (2Ch 3:4; 4:1). So in like manner will Jesus fill the eyes of all who enter glory. In the midst of the throne and surrounded by adoring angels and saints, there will be "the Lamb that was slain;" and "the Lamb shall be the light" of the place (Rev 5:6; 21:23).

The praise of the Lord Jesus will be the eternal song of all the inhabitants of heaven. They will say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain. Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever" (Rev 5:12-13).

The service of the Lord Jesus will be one eternal occupation of all the inhabitants of heaven. We shall "serve him day and night in his temple" (Rev 7:15). Blessed is the thought that we shall at length attend on Him without distraction, and work for Him without weariness.

The presence of Christ Himself shall be one everlasting enjoyment of the inhabitants of heaven. We shall "see his face," and hear His voice, and speak with Him as friend with friend (Rev 22:4). Sweet is the thought that whosoever may be wanting at the marriage supper, the Master Himself will be there. His presence will satisfy all our wants (Psa 17:15).

What a sweet and glorious home heaven will be to those who have loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! Here we live by faith in Him, and find peace, though we see Him not. There we shall see Him face to face, and find He is altogether lovely. "Better" indeed will be the "sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire!" (Ecc 6:9).

But alas, how little fit for heaven are many who talk of "going to heaven" when they die, while they manifestly have no saving faith, and no real acquaintance with Christ. You give Christ no honour here. You have no communion with Him. You do not love Him. Alas! what could you do in heaven? It would be no place for you. Its joys would be no joys for you. Its happiness would be a happiness into which you could not enter. Its employments would be a weariness and a burden to your heart. Oh, repent and change before it be too late!

I trust I have shown how deep are the foundations of that little expression, "Christ is all."

Other Ways "Christ Is All"

I might easily add to the things I have said, if space permitted. The subject is not exhausted. I have barely walked over the surface of it. There are mines of precious truth connected with it which I have left unopened.

I might show how Christ ought to be all in a visible church. Splendid religious buildings, numerous religious services, gorgeous ceremonies, troops of ordained men—all are nothing in the sight of God, if the Lord Jesus Himself in all His offices is not honoured, magnified, and exalted. That church is but a dead carcass in which Christ is not "all."

I might show how Christ ought to be all in a ministry. The great work which ordained men are intended to do, is to lift up Christ. We are to be like the pole on which the brazen serpent was hung. We are useful so long as we exalt the great object of faith, but useful no further. We are to be ambassadors to carry tidings to a rebellious world about the King's Son, and if we teach men to think more about us and our office than about Him, we are not fit for our place. The Spirit will never honour that minister who does not testify of Christ—who does not make Christ "all."

I might show how language seems exhausted in the Bible, in describing Christ's various offices. I might describe how figures seem endless which are employed in unfolding Christ's fulness. The High Priest, the Mediator, the Redeemer, the Saviour, the Advocate; the Shepherd, the Physician, the Bridegroom, the Head, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Way, the Door, the Vine, the Rock, the Fountain, the Sun of Righteousness, the Forerunner, the Surety, the Captain, the Prince of Life, the Amen, the Almighty, the Author and Finisher of Faith, the Lamb of God, the King of Saints, the Wonderful, the Mighty God, the Counselor, the Bishop of Souls—all these, and many more, are names given to Christ in Scripture. Each is a fountain of instruction and comfort for everyone who is willing to drink of it. Each supplies matter for useful meditation.

Practical Conclusions

But I trust I have said enough to throw light on the point I want to impress on the minds of all who read this paper. I trust I have said enough to show the immense importance of the practical conclusions with which I now desire to finish the subject.

(1) Utter Uselessness of a Christless Religion

Is Christ all? Then let us learn the utter uselessness of a Christless religion. There are only too many baptized men and women who practically know nothing at all about Christ. Their religion consists in a few vague notions and empty expressions. "They trust they are no worse than others. They keep to their church. They try to do their duty. They do

nobody any harm. They hope God will be merciful to them. They trust the Almighty will pardon their sins, and take them to heaven when they die." This is about the whole of their religion!

But what do these people know practically about Christ? Nothing, nothing at all! What experimental acquaintance have they with His offices and work, His blood, His righteousness, His mediation, His priesthood, His intercession? None, none at all! Ask them about a saving faith, ask them about being born again of the Spirit, and ask them about being sanctified in Christ Jesus. What answer will you get? You are a barbarian to them. You have asked them simple Bible questions. But they know no more about them experimentally than a Buddhist or a Turk. And yet this is the religion of hundreds and thousands of people who are called Christians, all over the world!

If any reader of this paper is a man of this kind, I warn him plainly that such Christianity will never take him to heaven. It may do very well in the eye of man. It may pass muster very decently at the vestry-meeting, in the place of business, in the House of Commons, or in the streets. But it will never comfort you. It will never satisfy your conscience. It will never save your soul.

I warn you plainly that all notions and theories about God being merciful without Christ, and excepting through Christ, are baseless delusions and empty fancies. Such theories are as purely an idol of man's invention as the idol of Juggernaut. They are all of the earth, earthy. They never came down from heaven. The God of heaven has sealed and appointed Christ as the one only Saviour and way of life, and all who would be saved must be content to be saved by Him, or they will never be saved at all.

Let every reader take notice. I give you fair warning this day. A religion without Christ will never save your soul.

(2) Christ and Salvation

Let me say another thing. Is Christ all? Then learn the enormous folly of joining anything with Christ in the matter of salvation. There are multitudes of baptized men and women who profess to honour Christ, but in reality do Him great dishonour. They give Christ a certain place in their system of religion, but not the place which God intended Him to fill. Christ alone is not "all in all" to their souls. No!

It is either Christ and the church, or Christ and the sacraments, or Christ and His ordained ministers, or Christ and their own repentance, or Christ and their own goodness, or Christ and their own prayers, or Christ and their own sincerity and charity, on which they practically rest their souls.

If any reader of this paper is a Christian of this kind, I warn him also plainly, that his religion is an offense to God. You are changing God's plan of salvation into a plan of your own devising. You are in effect deposing Christ from His throne, by giving the glory due to Him to another.

I care not who it is that teaches such religion and on whose word you build. Whether he be a pope or cardinal, archbishop or bishop, dean or archdeacon, presbyter or deacon, Episcopalian or Presbyterian, Baptist or Independent, Wesleyan or Plymouth brother—whosoever adds anything to Christ teaches you wrong.

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

Take heed what you are doing. Beware of giving to Christ's servants the honor due to none but Christ. Beware of giving the Lord's ordinances the honor due unto the Lord. Beware of resting the burden of your soul on anything but Christ, and Christ alone.

(3) Christ as Lord and Savior

Let me say another thing. Is Christ all? Then let all who want to be saved, apply direct to Christ. There are many who hear of Christ with the ear and believe all they are told about Him. They allow that there is no salvation excepting in Christ. They acknowledge that Jesus alone can deliver them from hell and present them faultless before God.

But they seem never to get beyond this general acknowledgment. They never fairly lay hold on Christ for their own souls. They stick fast in a state of wishing, and wanting, and feeling, and intending—and never get any further. They see what we mean; they know it is all true. They hope one day to get full benefit of it; but at present they get no benefit whatever. The world is their "all." Politics are their "all." Pleasure is their "all." Business is their "all." But Christ is not their all.

If any reader of this paper is a man of this kind, I warn him also plainly, he is in a bad state of soul. You are as truly in the way to hell in your present condition, as Judas Iscariot, or Ahab, or Cain. Believe me, there must be actual faith in Christ, or else Christ died in vain so far as you are concerned. It is not looking at the bread that feeds the hungry man, but the actual eating of it. It is not gazing on the lifeboat that saves the shipwrecked sailor, but actually getting into it. It is not knowing and believing that Christ is a Saviour that can save your soul, unless there are actual transactions between you and Christ. You must be able to say, "Christ is my Saviour, because I have come to Him by faith, and taken Him for my own." "Much of religion," said Luther, "turns on being able to use possessive pronouns. Take from me the word 'my,' and you take from me God!"

Hear the advice I give you this day, and act upon it at once. Stand still no longer waiting for some imaginary feelings which will never come. Hesitate no longer under the ideas you must first of all obtain the Spirit and then come to Christ. Arise and come to Christ just as you are. He waits for you, and is as willing to save as He is mighty. He is the appointed Physician for sin-sick souls. Deal with Him as you would with your doctor about the cure of a disease of your body. Make a direct application to Him and tell Him all your wants. Take with you words this day, and cry mightily to the Lord Jesus for pardon and peace, as the thief did on the cross. Do as that man did: cry "Lord, remember me" (Luk 23:42). Tell Him you have heard that He receives sinners, and that you are such. Tell Him you want to be saved, and ask Him to save you. Rest not till you have actually tasted for yourself that the Lord is gracious. Do this and you shall find, sooner or later, if you are really in earnest, that "Christ is all."

(4) Trust Christ Far More

One more thing let me add. Is Christ all? Then let all His converted people deal with Him as if they really believed it. Let them lean on Him and trust Him far more than they have ever done yet. Alas, there are many of the Lord's people who live far below their privileges! There are many true Christian souls who rob themselves of their own peace, and forsake their own mercies. There are many who insensibly join their own faith, or the work of the Spirit in their own hearts, to Christ, and so miss the fullness of Gospel peace. There are many who make little progress in their pursuit of holiness, and shine with a very dim light. And why is all this? Simply because in nineteen cases out of twenty men do not make Christ all in all.

Now I call on every person who is a believer, I beseech him for his own sake, to make sure that Christ is really and thoroughly his all in all. Beware of allowing yourself to mingle anything of your own with Christ (see Mat 16:24, Luk 14:33). [14]

Have you faith? It is a priceless blessing. Happy indeed are they who are willing and ready to trust Jesus. But take heed you do not make a Christ of your faith. Rest not on your own faith, but on Christ.

Is the work of the Spirit in your soul? Thank God for it. It is a work that shall never be overthrown. But oh, beware, lest, unaware to yourself, you make a Christ of the work of the Spirit! Rest not on the work of the Spirit, but on Christ.

Have you any inward feelings of religion and experience of grace. Thank God for it. Thousands have no more religious feeling than a cat or dog. But oh, beware lest you make a Christ of your feelings and sensations! They are poor, uncertain things and sadly dependent on our bodies and outward circumstances. Rest only on Christ.

Learn, I entreat you, to look more and more at the great object of faith, Jesus Christ, and to keep your mind dwelling on Him. So doing you would find that faith, and all the other graces, grows, though the growth at the time might be imperceptible to yourself. He that would prove a skillful archer must not look at the arrow, but at the mark.

Alas, I fear there is a great piece of pride and unbelief still sticking in the hearts of many believers! Few seem to realize how much they need a Saviour. Few seem to understand how thoroughly they are indebted to Him. Few seem to comprehend how much they need Him everyday. Few seem to feel how simply and like a child they ought to hang their souls on Him. Few seem to be aware how full of love He is to His poor, weak people, and how ready to help them! And few therefore seem to know the peace, and joy, and strength, and power to live a godly life, which is to be had in Christ.

Change your plan, reader, if your conscience tells you that you are guilty: change your plan, and learn to trust Christ more. Physicians love to see patients coming to consult them; it is their office to receive the sickly and, if possible, to effect cures. The advocate loves to be employed; it is his calling. The husband loves his wife to trust him and lean upon him; it is his delight to cherish her and promote her comfort. And Christ loves His people to lean on Him, to rest in Him, to call on Him, to abide in Him.

Let us all learn and strive to do so more and more. Let us live on Christ. Let us live in Christ. Let us live with Christ. Let us live to Christ. So doing, we shall prove that we fully realize that "Christ is all." So doing, we shall feel great peace, and attain more of that holiness, "without which no man shall see the Lord"—Hebrews 12:14.

Chapter 21

Extracts from Old Writers

THE passages I append from Traill and Brooks on the subject of holiness appear to me so valuable that I make no apology for introducing them. They are the product of an age when, I am obliged to say, experimental religion was more deeply studied and far better understood than it is now.

1. Reverend Robert Traill

sometime Minister of Cranbrook, Kent, 1696.

Concerning sanctification, there are three things to consider.

I. What sanctification is.

II. Wherein it agrees with justification.

III. Wherein it differs from justification.

I. What is sanctification?

It is a great deal better to feel it than to express it. Sanctification is the same with regeneration; the same with the renovation of the whole man. Sanctification is the forming and the framing of the new creature; it is the implanting and engraving the image of Christ upon the poor soul. It is what the apostle breathed after, "That Christ might be formed in them" (Gal 4:19); That they might "bear the image of the heavenly" (1Co 15:49).

There are but two men only that all the world is like; and so will it fare with them, as they are like the one, or like the other: the first Adam, and the second Adam. Every man by nature is like the first Adam and like the devil: for the devil and the first fallen Adam were like one another. "Ye are of your father the devil," saith our Lord (Joh 8:44.), and he was "a murderer from the beginning." All the children of the first Adam are the devil's children; there is no difference here. And all the children of the other sort are like to Jesus Christ, the second Adam; and when His image shall be perfected in them, then they shall be perfectly happy. "As we have also borne the image of the earthly, so shall we also bear the image of the heavenly" (1Co 15:49). Pray observe; we bear the image of the earthly by being born in sin and misery; we bear the image of the earthly by living in sin and misery; and we bear the image of the earthly by dying in sin and misery; and we bear the image of the earthly in the rottenness of the grave; and we bear the image of the heavenly Adam when we are sanctified by His Spirit. This image increases in us according to our growth in sanctification: and we perfectly bear the image of the heavenly Adam when we are just like the Man Christ, both in soul and body, perfectly happy, and perfectly holy; when we have overcome death by His grace, as He overcame it by His own strength. It will never be known how like believers are to Jesus Christ, till they are risen again: when they shall arise from their graves, like so many little suns shining in glory and brightness. Oh, how like will they be to Jesus Christ! though His personal transcendent glory will be His property to all eternity.

II. Wherein are justification and sanctification alike?

I answer, in many things.

1st. They are like one another as they are the same in their author; it is God that justifieth, and it is God that sanctifies. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Rom 8:33). "I am the Lord that doth sanctify you," is a common word in the Old Testament (Exo 31:13; Lev 20:8).

2ndly. They are alike and the same in their rise, being both of free grace; justification is an act of free grace, and sanctification is the same. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, He saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit 3:5). They are both of grace.

3rdly. They are alike in that they are both towards the same persons. Never a man is justified but he is also sanctified; and never a man is sanctified but he is also justified; all the elect of God, all the redeemed, have both these blessings passing upon them.

4thly. They are alike as to the time, they are the same in time. It is a hard matter for us to talk or think of time when we are speaking of the works of God: these saving works of His are always done at the same time; man is not justified

before he is sanctified, though it may be conceived so in order of nature, yet at the same time the same grace works both. “Such were some of you,” saith the Apostle, “but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1Co 6:11).

5thly. They are the same as to the operation of them by the same means, that is, by the Word of God: we are justified by the Word, sentencing us to eternal life by the promise; and we are also sanctified by the power of the same Word. “Now ye are clean,” saith our Lord, “through the word that I have spoken unto you” (Joh 15:3). “That he might sanctify and cleanse his Church,” saith the apostle, “with the washing of water by the word” (Eph 5:26).

6th and lastly. They are the same as to their equal necessity to eternal life. I do not say as to their equal order, but as to their equal necessity: that is, as it is determined that no man who is not justified shall be saved, so it is determined that no man who is not sanctified shall be saved; no unjustified man can be saved, and no unsanctified man can be saved. They are of equal necessity in order to the possessing of eternal life.

III. Wherein do justification and sanctification differ?

This is a matter of great concernment for people’s practice and daily exercise; wherein they differ. They agree in many things, as has just now been declared, but they likewise differ vastly.

1st. Justification is an act of God about the state of a man’s person; but sanctification is the work of God about the nature of a man: and these two are very different, as I shall illustrate by a similitude. Justification is an act of God as a judge about a delinquent, absolving him from a sentence of death; but sanctification is an act of God about us, as a physician, in curing us of a mortal disease. There is a criminal that comes to the bar, and is arraigned for high treason; the same criminal has a mortal disease, that he may die of, though there was no judge on the bench to pass the sentence of death upon him for his crime. It is an act of grace which absolves the man from the sentence of the law, that he shall not suffer death for his treason—that saves the man’s life. But notwithstanding this, unless his disease be cured, he may die quickly after, for all the judge’s pardon. Therefore, I say, justification is an act of God as a gracious judge, sanctification is a work of God as a merciful Physician; David joins them both together (Psa 103:3), “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases.” It is promised, “That iniquity shall not be your ruin” (Eze 18:30), in the guilt of it; that is justification: and it shall not be your ruin, in the power of it; there lies sanctification.

2ndly. Justification is an act of God’s grace upon the account of the righteousness of another, but sanctification is a work of God, infusing a righteousness into us. Now there is a great difference between these: for one is by imputation, the other by infusion.

In justification, the sentence of God proceeds this way: the righteousness that Christ wrought out by His life and death, and the obedience that He paid to the law of God, is reckoned to the guilty sinner for his absolution; so that when a sinner comes to stand at God’s bar, when the question is asked, Hath not this man broken the law of God? Yes, saith God; yes, saith the conscience of the poor sinner, I have broken it in innumerable ways. And doth not the law condemn thee to die for thy transgression? Yes, saith the man; yes, saith the law of God. The law knows nothing more but this; “the soul that sinneth must die.” Well, then, but is there no hope in this case? Yes, and gospel grace reveals this hope. There is One that took sin on Him, and died for our sins, and His righteousness is reckoned for the poor sinner’s justification; and thus we are absolved. We are absolved in justification by God’s reckoning on our account, on our behalf, and for our advantage, what Christ hath done and suffered for us.

In sanctification the Spirit of God infuses a holiness into the soul. I do not say He infuses a righteousness; for I would fain have these words, righteousness and holiness, better distinguished than generally they are. Righteousness and holiness are, in this case, to be kept vastly asunder. Our righteousness is without us; our holiness is within us, it is our own; the apostle plainly makes that distinction. “Not having mine own righteousness” (Phi 3:9). It is our own, not originally, but our own inherently; not our own so as to be of our own working, but our own because it is indwelling in us. But our righteousness is neither our own originally nor inherently; it is neither wrought out by us, nor doth it dwell in us; but it is wrought out by Jesus Christ, and it eternally dwells in Him, and is only to be pleaded by faith, by a poor creature. But our holiness, though it be not our own originally, yet it is our own inherently, it dwells in us: this is the distinction that the apostle makes. “That I may be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phi 3:9).

3rdly. Justification is perfect, but sanctification is imperfect; and here lies a great difference between them. Justification, I say, is perfect, and admits of no degrees; admits of no decays, admits of no intermission, nor of any interruption: but sanctification admits of all these. When I say justification is perfect, I mean, that every justified man is equally and perfectly justified. The poorest believer that is this day in the world, is justified as much as ever the Apostle Paul was; and every true believer is as much justified now as he will be a thousand years hence. Justification is perfect in all them that are partakers of it, and to all eternity; it admits of no degrees. And the plain reason of it is this—the ground of it is the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, and the entitling us to it is by an act of God the gracious judge, and that act stands for ever. And if God justifies, who is he that shall condemn (Rom 8:33)? But sanctification is an imperfect, incomplete, changeable thing. One believer is more sanctified than another. I am apt to believe that the Apostle Paul

was more sanctified the first hour of his conversion, than any man this day in the world.

Sanctification differs greatly as to the persons that are partakers of it; and it differs greatly too as to the same man; for a true believer, a truly sanctified man, may be more holy and sanctified at one time than at another. There is a work required of us, to be perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2Co 7:1). But we are nowhere required to be perfecting righteousness in the sight of God; for God hath brought in a perfect righteousness, in which we stand; but we are to take care, and to give diligence to perfect holiness in the fear of God. A saint in glory is more sanctified than ever he was, for he is perfectly so; but he is not more justified than he was. Nay, a saint in heaven is not more justified than a believer on earth is: only they know it better, and the glory of that light in which they see it, discovers it more brightly and more clearly to them.

From Traill's Sermons, upon 1 Peter 1:1-3, vol. 4, p. 71. Edinburgh edition of Traill's Works, 1810.

2. Rev. Thomas Brooks

Rector of St. Margaret, Fish Street Hill, London, 1662.

Consider the necessity of holiness. It is impossible that ever you should be happy, except you are holy. No holiness here, no happiness hereafter. The Scripture speaks of three bodily inhabitants of heaven–Enoch, before the law; Elijah, under the law; and Jesus Christ, under the gospel: all three eminent in holiness, to teach us, that even in an ordinary course there is no going to heaven without holiness. There are many thousand thousands now in heaven, but not one unholy one among them all; there is not one sinner among all those saints; not one goat among all those sheep; not one weed among all those flowers; not one thorn or prickle among all those roses; not one pebble among all those glistering diamonds. There is not one Cain among all those Abels; nor one Ishmael among all those Isaacs; nor one Esau among all those Jacobs in heaven. There is not one Ham among all the patriarchs; not one Saul among all the prophets; nor one Judas among all the apostles; nor one Demas among all the preachers; nor one Simon Magus among all the professors.

Heaven is only for the holy man, and the holy man is only for heaven: heaven is a garment of glory, that is only suited to him that is holy. God, who is truth itself, and cannot lie, hath said it, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Mark that word 'no man.' Without holiness the rich man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the poor man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the nobleman shall not see the Lord; without holiness the mean man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the prince shall not see the Lord; without holiness the peasant shall not see the Lord; without holiness the ruler shall not see the Lord; without holiness the ruled shall not see the Lord; without holiness the learned man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the ignorant man shall not see the Lord; without holiness the husband shall not see the Lord; without holiness the wife shall not see the Lord; without holiness the father shall not see the Lord; without holiness the child shall not see the Lord; without holiness the master shall not see the Lord; without holiness the servant shall not see the Lord. For faithful and strong is the Lord of hosts that hath spoken it (Jos 23:14).

In this day some cry up one form, some another; some cry up one "church state," some another; some cry up one way, some another; but certainly the way of holiness is the good old way (Jer 6:16); it is the King of the kings' highway to heaven and happiness: "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" (Isa 35:8). Some men say, "Lo, here is the way"; other men say, "Lo, there is the way"; but certainly the way of holiness is the surest, the safest, the easiest, the noblest, and the shortest way to happiness.

Among the heathen, no man could enter into the temple of honour, but must first enter the temple of virtue. There is no entering the temple of happiness, except you enter into the temple of holiness. Holiness must first enter into you, before you can enter into God's holy hill. As Samson cried out, "Give me water, or I die"; or as Rachel cried out, "Give me children, or I die"; so all unsanctified souls may well cry out, Lord, give me holiness, or I die: give me holiness or I eternally die. If the angels, those princes of glory, fall once from their holiness, they shall be for ever excluded from everlasting happiness and blessedness. If Adam in paradise fall from his purity, he shall quickly be driven out from the presence of Divine glory. Augustine would not be a wicked man, an unholy man, one hour for all the world, because he did not know but that he might die that hour; and should he die in an unholy estate, he knew he should be for ever separated from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.

O, Sirs, do not deceive your own souls; holiness is of absolute necessity; without it you shall "never see the Lord" (2Th 1:8-10). It is not absolutely necessary that you should be great or rich in the world; but it is absolutely necessary that you should be holy: it is not absolutely necessary that you should enjoy health, strength, friends, liberty, life; but it is absolutely necessary that you should be holy. A man may see the Lord without worldly prosperity, but he can never see the Lord except he be holy. A man may get to heaven without honour or worldly glory, but he can never get to heaven without holiness. Without holiness here, no heaven hereafter. "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth" (Rev 21:27). God will at last shut the gates of glory against every person that is without heart-purity.

Holiness is a flower that grows not in Nature's garden. Men are not born with holiness in their hearts, as they are born with tongues in their mouths: holiness is of a Divine offspring: it is a pearl of price, that is to be found in no nature but a renewed nature. There is not the least beam or spark of holiness in any natural man in the world. "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). "How can man be clean that is born of a woman?" (Job 25:4). The interrogation carries in it a strong negation, "How can man be clean?" that is, man cannot be clean that is born of a woman: a man that is born of a woman is born in sin, and born both under wrath and under the curse. "And who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Job 14:4; Isa 64:6). "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom 3:10-11). Every man by nature is a stranger, yea, an enemy to holiness (Rom 8:7). Every man that comes into this world comes with his face towards sin and hell, and with his back upon God and holiness.

Such is the corruption of our nature, that, propound any Divine good to it, it is entertained as fire by water, or wet wood, with hissing. Propound any evil, then it is like fire to straw; it is like the foolish satyr that made haste to kiss the fire; it is like that unctuous matter which, the naturalists say, sucks and snatches the fire to it, with which it is consumed. All men are born sinners, and there is nothing but an infinite power that can make them saints. All men would be happy, and yet they naturally loathe to be holy. By all which you may clearly see that food is not more necessary for the preservation of natural life, than holiness is necessary for the preservation and salvation of the soul. If a man had the wisdom of Solomon, the strength of Samson, the courage of Joshua, the policy of Ahithophel, the dignities of Haman, the power of Ahasuerus, and the eloquence of Apollos, yet all those without holiness would never save him. The days and times wherein we live call aloud for holiness. If you look upon them as days and times of grace, what greater and higher engagements to holiness were ever put upon a people, than those that God hath put upon us, who enjoy so many ways, means, and helps to make us holy? Oh, the pains, the care, the cost, the charge, that God hath been at, and that God is daily at, to make us holy! Hath He not sent, and doth He not still send His messengers, rising up early, and going to bed late, and all to provoke you to be holy? Have not many of them spent their time, and spent their strength, and spent their spirits, and spent their lives to make you holy?

O, Sirs, what do holy ordinances call for, but holy hearts and holy lives? What do days of light call for, but walking in the light, and casting off the deeds of darkness? What is the voice of all the means of grace, but this, Oh, labour to be gracious? And what is the voice of the Holy Spirit, but this, Oh, labour to be holy? And what is the voice of all the miracles of mercy that God hath wrought in the midst of you, but this, "Be ye holy, be ye holy"? O, Sirs, what could the Lord have done that He hath not done to make you holy? Hath He not lifted you up to heaven in respect of holy helps? Hath He not to this very day followed you close with holy offers, and holy entreaties, and holy counsels, and holy encouragements, and all to make you holy? And will you be loose still, and proud still, and worldly still, and malicious still, and envious still and contentious still, and unholy still?

Oh, what is this, but to provoke the Lord to put out all the lights of heaven, to drive your teachers into corners, to remove your candlesticks, and to send His everlasting Gospel, that hath stood long a tip-toe, among a people that may more highly prize it, and dearly love it, and stoutly defend it, and conscientiously practise it, than you have done to this very day? (Rev 2:4-5; Isa 42:25). I suppose there is nothing more evident than that the times and seasons wherein we live call aloud upon every one to look after holiness, and to labour for holiness. Never complain of the times, but cease to do evil, and labour to do well, and all will be well; get but better hearts and better lives, and you will quickly see better times (Isa 1:16-19). g

From Brooks' Crown and Glory of Christianity
(or, Holiness–The Only Way to Happiness)
Brooks' Works, Vol. 4, pp. 151-153, 187-188; Grosart's edition, 1866.

Are You Born Again?

J. C. Ryle

This is one of life's most important questions. Jesus Christ said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Joh 3:3). It is not enough to reply, "I belong to the church; I suppose I'm a Christian." Thousands of nominal Christians show none of the signs of being born again which the Scriptures have given us—many listed in the First Epistle of John.

No Habitual Sinning

First of all, John wrote: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1Jo 3:9). "Whosoever is born of God sinneth not" (5:18).

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

If he said that he had no sin, he would be lying (1Jo 1:8). But he can say that he hates sin and that the great desire of his soul is not to commit sin at all. He cannot prevent bad thoughts from entering his mind, or shortcomings, omissions, and defects from appearing in both his words and his actions. He knows that "in many things we offend all" (Jam 3:2). But he can truly say, in the sight of God, that these things cause him grief and sorrow and that his whole nature does not consent to them.

What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?

Believing in Christ

Second, John wrote: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1Jo 5:1). A man who is born again, or regenerated, believes that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour who can pardon his soul, that He is the divine person appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, and beside Him there is no Saviour at all. In himself he sees nothing but unworthiness. But he has full confidence in Christ, and trusting in Him, he believes that his sins are all forgiven. He believes that, through faith in Christ's finished work and death on the cross, he is reckoned righteous in God's sight, and he may look forward to death and judgment without alarm.

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

What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?

Practicing Righteousness

Third, John wrote: "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him" (1Jo 2:29). The man who is born again, or regenerated, is a holy man. He endeavors to live according to God's will, to do the things that please God and to avoid the things that God hates. He wishes to continually look to Christ as his example as well as his Saviour and to prove himself to be Christ's friend by doing whatever He commands. He knows he is not perfect. He is painfully aware of his indwelling corruption. He finds an evil principle within himself that is constantly warring against grace and trying to draw him away from God. But he does not consent to it, though he cannot prevent its presence.

Though he may sometimes feel so low that he questions whether or not he is a Christian at all, he will be able to say with John Newton, "I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am."

What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?

Loving Other Christians

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

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

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

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

Overcoming the World

Fifth, John wrote: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1Jo 5:4). A man who is born again is careful of his own soul. He tries not only to avoid sin but also to avoid everything which may lead to it. He is careful about the company he keeps. He knows that evil communications corrupt the heart and that evil is more catching than good, just as disease is more infectious than health. He is careful about the use of his time; his chief desire is to spend it profitable.

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

Keeping Oneself Pure

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

A man who is born again is careful of his own soul. He tries not only to avoid sin but also to avoid everything which may lead to it. He is careful about the company he keeps. He knows that evil communications corrupt the heart and that evil is more catching than good, just as disease is more infectious than health. He is careful about the useof his time; his chief desire is to spend it profitable. He desires to live like a soldier in an enemy country-to wear his armor continually and to be prepared for temptation. He is diligent to be a watchful, humble, prayerful man.

What would theapostle say about you? Are you born again?

The Test

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

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

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

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

> InHoliness(1879), J. C. Ryle shows that holiness may be acquired only by those who add personal exertion to faith, and who observe the many practical exhortations in the Scriptures to saintliness in daily life. He explains the meaning of scriptural "perfection," the controversial seventh chapter ofthe doctrine of the indwelling Christ, the relationship of consecration to conversion, and the necessity for those who would be holy to "watch, pray, and fight." Like the great Puritan masters from whom he freely draws, he offers no easy way to the highest Christian life. His desire throughout is practical and persistent—that personal holiness may increase greatly among God's people.
>
> John Charles Ryle(1816-1900) began his service to the Lord as a minister of the gospel in parish churches within the Church of England, for almost forty years. He then became Bishop of Liverpool in 1880, and came to international prominence as preacher, Bible expositor, and author. Today he is best known for his plain and lively writings on practical and spiritual themes, in a style deliberately used to reach ordinary people. His great aim in all his ministry was to encourage strong and serious Christian living. His tracts and books sold in the millions in the late 1800s, and many have been republished in modern times. Ryle's successor as Bishop of Liverpool commented, "The words of such a man acquire new force as we read them. Ryle lived near God, and God lived through him."

[1]"O Saviour, what a precedent is this of Thy free and powerful grace! Where Thou wilt give, what unworthiness can bar us from Thy mercy? When Thou wilt give, what time can prejudice our vocation? Who can despair of Thy goodness, when he, that in the morning was posting to hell, is in the evening with Thee in Paradise?"-Bishop Hall.

[2]"He that puts off his repentance and seeking for pardon to the very last, in reliance upon this example, does but tempt God, and turn that to his own poison, which God intended for better ends.

"The mercies of God are never recorded in Scripture for man's presumption, and the failings of men never for imitation."-Lightfoot. Sermon. 1684.

"Most ungrateful and foolish is the conduct of those who take encouragement from the penitent thief to put off repentance to a dying moment; most ungrateful in perverting the grace of their Redeemer into an occasion of renewing their provocations against Him; and most foolish to imagine that what our Lord did in so singular circumstances, is to be drawn into an ordinary precedent."-Doddridge.

[3]"I know not that since the creation of the world there ever was a more remarkable and striking example of faith."-Calvin's Commentary on the Gospels.

"A great faith that can see the sun under so thick a cloud; that can discover a Christ, a Saviour, under such a poor, scorned, despised, crucified Jesus, and call Him Lord.

"A great faith that could see Christ's kingdom through His cross, and grave, and death, and when there was so little sign of a kingdom, and pray to be remembered in that kingdom."-Lightfoot. Sermon. 1684.

"The penitent thief was the first confessor of Christ's heavenly kingdom, the first martyr who bore testimony to the holiness of His sufferings and the first apologist for His oppressed innocence."-Quesnel on the Gospel.

"Probably there are few saints in glory who ever honoured Christ more illustriously than this dying sinner." – Doddridge.

"Is this the voice of a thief or a disciple? Give me leave, O Saviour to borrow Thine own words, 'Verily I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.' He saw Thee hang miserably by him, and yet styles Thee 'Lord.' He saw Thee dying, and yet talks of Thy kingdom. He felt himself dying, yet talks of a future remembrance. O faith, stronger than death, which can look beyond the cross at a crown; beyond dissolution at a remembrance of life and glory! Which of Thine eleven were heard to speak so gracious a word to Thee in these Thy last pangs?" – Bishop Hall.

[4]"We ought not to enter into curious and subtle arguments about the place of paradise. Let us rest satisfied with knowing that those who are engrafted by faith into the body of Christ are partakers of life, and there enjoy after death a blessed and joyful rest, until the perfect glory of the heavenly life is fully manifested by the coming of Christ."-Calvin's Commentary on the Gospels.

[5]"We give Thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this your brother out of the miseries of this sinful world."-Church of England "Burial Service."

"I have some of the best news to impart. One beloved by you has accomplished her warfare; has received an answer to her prayers, and everlasting joy rests upon her head. My dear wife, the source of my best earthly comfort for twenty years, departed on Tuesday."-Venn's Letter to Stillingfleet, announcing the death of his wife.

[6][Editor's note: "Church" is capitalized when it refers to the invisible true Church of God–the universal Church consisting of all true believers in Jesus Christ. It is distinguished from the outward visible church, which consists of all who profess to be church members, and the associated buildings and religious institutions. (This outward visible "church" is also capitalized when it is used in a proper name, i.e., the Church of England.)]

[7]forlorn hope - an advance guard of men sent on a hazardous mission, an arduous undertaking.

[8][Editor: Sacerdotalism emphasizes the necessity for a priest to administer the Lord's Supper, as a mediator between the believer and Christ.]

[9]To the apprehension of many people, the Quakers and Plymouth Brethren appear to ignore the ministerial office altogether.

[10]specious - deceptively attractive, having the ring of truth, but actually fallacious.

[11]adjures - to confess, swear to, admit.

[12]fastness - self-security.

[13]nostrums - a medicine, especially quackery, favored but questionable remedies.

[14][Editor: this is the message of "denying self" and all selfishness.]

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