

SERMONS ON HOLINESS

by John C. Ryle

Ryle's teachings on the necessity of personal holiness, particularly addressing young men on practical living out of Christian convictions and the pursuit of godliness in daily life.

3 Chapters

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“Without holiness no one will see the Lord.”--Hebrews 12:14

Our text for today opens up a subject of deep importance. That subject is practical holiness. It suggests a question that demands the attention of all professing Christians--Are we holy? Will we see the Lord?

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

That question concerns all ranks and situations of men and women. Some are rich and some are poor--some educated and some uneducated--some masters, and some servants; but there is no rank or state in life in which a man or woman ought not to be holy. Are we?

I ask to be heard today about this question. How does our account stand between our souls and God? In this hurrying, bustling world, let us stand still for a few minutes and consider the matter of holiness. I know I could have chosen a subject more popular and pleasant. I am sure I could have found one easier to handle. But I feel deeply I could not have chosen one more seasonable and more profitable to our souls. It is a solemn thing to hear the Word of God saying, “Without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

I will endeavor, by God’s help, to examine what true holiness is, and the reason why it is so needful. In conclusion, I will try to point out the only way in which holiness can be attained in a plain and practical manner.

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

A man may go to great lengths, and yet never reach true holiness. It is not knowledge--Balaam had that: nor great profession--Judas Iscariot had that: nor doing lots of things--Herod did that: nor zeal for certain matters in religion--Jehu had that: nor morality and outward respectability of conduct--the

rich young ruler had that: nor taking pleasure in hearing preachers-the Jews in Ezekiel's time had that: nor keeping company with godly people-Joab and Gehazi and Demas had that. Yet none of these was holy! These things alone are not holiness. A man or woman may have any one of them, and yet never see the Lord.

What then is true practical holiness?

It is a hard question to answer. I don't mean that there is any lack of Scripture on the subject. But I fear lest I should give a defective view of holiness, and not say all that ought to be said; or lest I should say things about it that ought not to be said, and therefore cause harm. Let me, however, try to draw a picture of holiness, that we may see it clearly before the eyes of our minds. Only let it never be forgotten, when I have said everything, that my explanation will be nothing but a poor imperfect outline at the best.

a) Holiness is the habit of agreeing with the mind with God, in accordance as we find His mind described in Scripture.

It is the habit of agreeing with God's judgment-hating what He hates-loving what He loves-and measuring everything in this world by the standard of His Word. The person who most completely agrees with God is the one who is the most holy person.

b) A holy person will endeavor to turn away from every known sin, and to keep every known commandment.

They will have a decided bent of mind toward God, a hearty desire to do His will-a greater fear of displeasing Him than of displeasing the world, and a love for all His ways. They will feel what Paul felt when he said, "In my inner being I delight in God's law" (Romans 7:22), and what David felt when he said, "I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path" (Psalms 119:128).

c) A holy person will strive to be like our Lord Jesus Christ.

They will not only live the life of faith in Him, and draw from Him all their daily peace and strength, but they will also strive to have the mind that was in Him, and to be "conformed to His likeness" (Romans 8:29). It will be their aim to bear with and forgive others, just as Christ forgave us-to be unselfish, just as Christ did not please Himself-to walk in love, just as Christ loved us-to be meek and humble, even as Christ made Himself nothing and humbled Himself. They will remember that Christ was a faithful witness for the truth-that He did not come to do His own will-that it was His food and drink to do His Father's will-that He would continually deny Himself in order to minister to others-that He was meek and patient in spite of undeserved insults-that He thought more of godly poor men than of kings-that He was full of love and compassion to sinners-that He was bold and uncompromising in denouncing sin-that He did not seek the praise of men, when He might have had it-that He went about doing good-that He was separate from worldly people-that He prayed continually-that He would not even let His nearest relatives stand in His way when God's work was to be done. These things a holy person will try to remember. By them they will endeavor to shape their course in life. They will lay to heart the saying of John, "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6); and the saying of Peter, that "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Happy is the person who has learned to make Christ his "everything," both for salvation and example! A great deal of time would

be saved, and a great deal of sin prevented, if men and women would often ask themselves the question, "What would Christ have said and done, if He were in my place?"

d) A holy person will pursue meekness, endurance, gentleness, patience, kindness, and control of their tongue.

They will put up with a lot, tolerate a great deal, overlook a lot, and be slow to talk of demanding their rights. We see a clear example of this in the behavior of David when Shimei cursed him-and of Moses when Aaron and Miriam spoke against him (2 Samuel 16:10; Numbers 12:3).

e) A holy person will pursue self-control and self-denial.

They will labor to subdue the desires of their body-to crucify their flesh with all of its affections and lusts-to curb their passions-to restrain their worldly inclinations, lest at any time they break loose. Oh, what a word of warning is that of the Lord Jesus to the Apostles, "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life" (Luke 21:34); and that of the Apostle Paul, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

f) A holy person will pursue love and brotherly kindness.

They will endeavor to observe the golden rule of doing to others as they would have others do to them, and speaking as they would want others to speak to them. They will be full of affection towards their brothers and sisters in Christ-towards their bodies, their property, their characters, their feelings, and their souls. "He who loves his fellowman," says Paul, "has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). They will detest all lying, slandering, backbiting, cheating, dishonesty, and unfairness, even in the smallest things. They will strive to adorn their religion in all of their outward demeanor, and to make it lovely and beautiful in the eyes of everyone around them. Sadly, what condemning words are found in the 13th chapter of 1 Corinthians, and the Sermon on the Mount, when laid alongside the conduct of many professing Christians!

g) A holy person will pursue a spirit of mercy and benevolence towards others.

They will not stand idle all day long. They will not be content with simply not harming others-they will try to do good to others. They will strive to be useful in their day and generation, and to lessen the spiritual needs and misery of those around them, as far as they can. Dorcas was such a person "always doing good and helping the poor," which she did,-not merely planning to do it or just talking about it, but she actually did it. Paul was another such person, stating: "I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well," he says, "If I love you more, will you love me less" (Acts 9:36; 2 Corinthians 12:15).

h) A holy person will pursue purity of heart.

They will dread all filthiness and uncleanness of spirit, and seek to avoid everything that might draw them into it. They know their own heart is like tinder, and will diligently keep clear of the sparks of temptation. Who will dare to talk of strength when David can fall? There are many hints to be gleaned from the ceremonial law. Under it the man who only touched a bone, or a dead body, or a grave, or a diseased person, at once became unclean in the sight of God. And these things were pictures and figures. Few Christians are ever too watchful and too particular about this

point.

i) A holy person will pursue the fear of God.

I do not mean the fear of a slave, who only works because they are afraid of punishment, and would be idle if they did not dread discovery. Rather, I mean the fear of a child, who wishes to live and move, as if they were always in their father's sight, because he loves them. What a noble example Nehemiah gives us of this! When he became Governor at Jerusalem he might have invoke taxation on the Jews, requiring money from them for his support. The former Governors had done so. There was no one to blame him if he did. But he says, "But out of reverence for God I did not act like that" (Nehemiah 5:15).

j) A holy man will pursue humility.

They will desire, in humility, to consider others better than themselves. They will see more evil in their own heart than in any other in the world. They will understand something of Abraham's feeling, when he says, "I am nothing but dust and ashes;"-and Jacob's, when he says, "I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant;"-and Job's, when he says, "I am unworthy;"-and Paul's, when he says, "I am the worst of sinners." Bradford, that holy and faithful martyr of Christ, would sometimes sign his letters with these words, "A most miserable sinner, John Bradford." Good old Mr. Grimshaw's last words, when he lay on his deathbed, were these, "Here goes an unprofitable servant."

k) A holy man will pursue faithfulness in all the duties and relationships in life.

They will try, not merely to fulfill their duties and responsibilities, as well as others who have no care or concern for their souls, but even better, because they have higher motives, they will try to be of more help than the others. Those words of Paul should never be forgotten, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord,"-"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Colossians 3:23; Romans 12:11). Holy persons should aim at doing everything well, and should be ashamed of allowing themselves to do anything poorly if they can help it. Like Daniel, they should seek to give no "basis for charges against themselves, "unless it has something to do with the law of their God" (Daniel 6:5). They should strive to be good husbands and good wives, good neighbors, good friends, good citizens, good in private and good in public, good in the place of business and good in their homes. Indeed, holiness is worth little, if it does not bear this kind of fruit. The Lord Jesus puts a searching question to His people, when He says, "What are you doing more than others?" Matthew 5:47).

l) Last, but not least, a holy person will pursue spiritual mindedness.

They will endeavor to set their affections entirely on things above, and to hold very loosely the things of earth. They will not neglect the daily business of their life; but the first place in their mind and thoughts will be given to the life to come. They will aim to live like those whose treasure is in heaven, and to pass through this world like a stranger and pilgrim traveling to their home. To commune with God in prayer, in the Bible, and in the assembly of His people-these things will be the holy person's principal enjoyments. They will value every thing and place and company, in the same proportion as it draws them nearer to God. They will enter into something of David's feeling, when he says, "My soul clings to you." "You are my portion, O LORD" (Psalms 63:8; Psalms

119:57).

Such is the outline of holiness. Such is the character that is pursued by those who are called "holy." Such are the main features of a holy man and a holy woman.

But here let me say, I trust no one will misunderstand me. I am fearful that my meaning will be mistaken, and that the description I have just given of holiness will discourage some tender conscience. I wouldn't willingly make one righteous heart sad, or throw a stumbling block in any believer's way.

I don't say for a moment that holiness shuts out the presence of indwelling sin-No, far from it. It is the greatest mystery of a holy person that they carry around with them a "body of death;"-that often when they want to do good "evil is right there with them"; that the "old self" is clogging all their movements, and, as it were, trying to draw them back at every step they take (Romans 7:21). But it is the quality of a holy person that they are not at peace with indwelling sin, as others are. They hate it, mourn over it, and long to be free from its company. The work of sanctification within them is like the wall of Jerusalem-the building goes forward "even in times of trouble" (Daniel 9:25).

Neither do I say that holiness comes to ripeness and perfection all at once, or that these graces I have touched on must be found in full bloom and strength before you can call a person holy-No, far from it. Sanctification is always a progressive work. Some persons' graces are like the sprout of a plant, some like the almost grown plant, and some are like the fully mature plant with fruit. All must have a beginning. We must never despise "the day of small things." And sanctification at the very best is an imperfect work. The history of the holiest saints that ever lived will contain many a "however", and "nevertheless" and "although", before you reach the end. The gold will never be without some dross-the light will never shine without some clouds, until we reach the heavenly Jerusalem. The blazing sun of our solar system itself has spots on his face. The holiest men and women have had many blemishes and defects when compared with the holy standard of the Word of God. Their life is a continual warfare with sin, the world, and the devil; and sometimes you will see them not overcoming, but overcome. The flesh is always fighting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and "we all stumble in many ways." (Galatians 5:17; James 3:2).

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

And boldly and confidently I say, that true holiness is a great reality. It is something in a man and a woman that can be seen, and known, and marked, and felt by all those around them. It is light: if it exists, it will show itself. It is salt: if it exists, its savor will be perceived. It is a precious perfume: if it exists, its presence will be apparent.

I am sure we would all be ready to make allowance for some backsliding, for some occasional deadness in professing Christians. I know a road may lead from one point to another, and yet have many a twists and curves; and a person may be truly holy, and yet be detoured by many weaknesses. Gold is not any less gold because it is mixed with an alloy, nor light any less light because it is faint and dim, nor grace any less grace because it is young and weak. But after every allowance, I cannot see how any person deserves to be called "holy", who willfully allows

themselves to continue in habitual sins, and are not humbled and ashamed because of them. I dare not call anyone "holy" who makes a habit of willfully neglecting known duties, and willfully doing what he knows God has commanded them not to do. Owen said it best, "I do not understand how a man can be a true believer to whom sin is not the greatest burden, sorrow, and trouble."

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

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

Can holiness save us? Can holiness do away with sin-cover iniquities-become a payment for transgressions-pay our debt to God? No: not a bit. God forbid that I should ever say so. Holiness can do none of these things. The holiest saints are all "worthless servants". Our purest works are no better than filthy rags, when tried by the light of God's holy law. The white robe which Jesus offers, and faith puts on, must be our only righteousness-the name of Christ our only confidence-the Lamb's book of life our only title to heaven. With all our holiness we are no better than sinners. Our best things are stained and tainted with imperfection. They are all more or less incomplete, wrong in the motive or defective in the performance. "No child of Adam will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Why then is holiness so important? Why does the Apostle say, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord"? Let me give you a few reasons.

a) For one thing, we must be holy, because the voice of God in Scripture plainly commands it. The Lord Jesus says to His people, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Paul tells the Thessalonians, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). And Peter says, "Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). "In this, "law and Gospel agree." (Leighton).

b) We must be holy, because this is one grand end and purpose for which Christ came into the world.

Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Jesus died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). And to the Ephesians, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her" (Ephesians 5:25-26) And to Titus, "Jesus gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14). In short, to talk of men and women being saved from the guilt of sin, without being at the same time saved from its dominion in their hearts, is to contradict the witness of all Scripture. Are believers said to be elect?-it is "through the sanctifying work of the Spirit." Are they predestined?-it is "to be conformed to the likeness of God's." Are they chosen?-it is "to be holy and blameless." Are they called?-it is "a holy calling." Are they afflicted?-it is that they may "share in his holiness." Jesus is a complete Savior. He does not merely take away the guilt of a believer's sin, He does more-He breaks the power of sin (1 Peter 1:2; Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4; Hebrews 12:10). c) We must

be holy, because this is the only sound evidence that we have a saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

James warns us there is such a thing as a dead faith—a faith which goes no further than the profession of the lips, and has no influence on a person’s character (James 2:17). True saving faith is a very different kind of thing. True faith will always show itself by its fruits—it will sanctify, it will work by love, it will overcome the world, it will purify the heart. I know that people are fond of talking about deathbed evidences of salvation. They will rest on words spoken in the hours of fear, and pain, and weakness, as if they might take comfort in them about their friends that are dying. But I am afraid in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred such evidences cannot be depended on. I suspect that, with rare exceptions, men and women die just as they have lived. The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is a holy life. They that live in the Lord are generally the only people who die in the Lord. If we would die the death of the righteous, let us not rest in slothful desires only; let us seek to live His life. It is a true saying, “That the state of a man or woman is nothing, and their faith is unsound, if their hope of glory does not purify their heart and life” (Traill).

d) We must be holy, because this is the only proof that we love the Lord Jesus Christ with sincerity.

This is a point on which Jesus has spoken most plainly, in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of John. “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”—“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.”—“You are my friends if you do what I command” (John 14:15, John 14:21, John 14:23; John 15:14).—It would be difficult to find any clearer words than these, and woe to those who neglect them! Surely that person must be in an unhealthy state of soul who can think of all that Jesus suffered, and yet cling to those sins for which that suffering was undergone. It was sin that wove the crown of thorns—it was sin that pierced our Lord’s hands, and feet, and side—it was sin that brought Him to Gethsemane and Calvary, to the cross and to the grave. Our hearts must be cold if we do not hate sin and labor to get rid of it, though we may have to cut off our right hand and pull out our right eye to do so.

e) We must be holy, because this is the only sound evidence that we are true children of God.

Children in this world are normally like their parents. Some, doubtless, are more so, and some less—but it is seldom that you cannot trace a kind of family likeness. And it is much the same with the children of God. The Lord Jesus says, “If you were Abraham’s children, then you would do the things Abraham did.”—“If God were your Father, you would love me” (John 8:39, John 8:42). If men and women have no likeness to the Father in heaven, it is vain to talk of their being His “sons and daughters.” If we know nothing of holiness we may flatter ourselves as we please, but we do not have the Holy Spirit living in us: we are dead, and must be brought to life again—we are lost, and must be found. “Those who are led by the Spirit of God,” they, and they only, “are sons [and daughters] of God” (Romans 8:14). We must show by our lives the family we belong to. We must let people see by our pure conversation that we are indeed the children of the Holy One, or our claim to be God’s children is nothing but an empty claim. “Do not say, that you have royal blood in your veins, and are born of God, unless you can prove your pedigree by having the courage to be holy” (Gurnall).

f) We must be holy, because this is the best way to do good to others.

We cannot live to ourselves only in this world. Our lives will always be doing either good or harm to those who see them. They are a silent sermon which all can read. It is indeed sad when they are a sermon for the devil's cause, and not for God's. I believe that far more is done for Christ's kingdom by the holy living of believers than we are at all aware of. There is a reality about such living which makes people feel, and obliges them to think. It carries a weight and influence with it, which nothing else can give. It makes Christianity beautiful, and draws men and women to consider it, like a lighthouse seen from a distance. The Day of Judgment will prove that many besides husbands have been "won over without words" by the conduct of a holy life (1 Peter 3:1). You may talk to persons about the doctrines of the Gospels, and few will listen, and still fewer understand. But your life is an argument that none can avoid. There is a meaning about holiness which even the most uneducated can understand. They may not understand justification, but they can understand love, kindness, and purity.

I believe there is far more harm done by unholy and inconsistent Christians than we are aware of. Such men and women are among Satan's best allies. They pull down, by their lives, what ministers build with their lips. They cause the chariot wheels of the Gospel to bog down. They supply the children of this world with a never-ending excuse for remaining as they are. "I cannot see the use of all this Christianity," said an irreligious businessman not long ago; "I observe that some of my customers are always talking about the Gospel, and faith, and election, and the blessed promises, and so forth; and yet these very people think nothing of cheating me out of money, when they have an opportunity. Now, if people who claim to be Christians can do such things, then I don't see what good there is in Christianity." I grieve to have to say such things, but I fear that Christ's name is all too often blasphemed because of the lives of Christians. Let us take heed lest the blood of souls should be required at our hands. May the Lord deliver us from the murder of souls by inconsistency and a careless Christian walk! Oh, for the sake of others, if for no other reason, let us strive to be holy!

g) We must be holy, because our present happiness depends a lot on it.

We cannot be reminded of this too often. Sadly, we are apt to forget that there is a close relationship between sin and sorrow, holiness and happiness, sanctification and comfort. God has so wisely ordered it, that our happiness and our holiness are linked together. He has mercifully provided that even in this world it will be to a person's best interest to be holy. Our justification is not by works-our calling and election are not according to our works-but it is vain for anyone to suppose that he will have a active sense of his justification, or an assurance of his calling, so long as he neglects good works, or does not strive to live a holy life. "We know that we have come to know Jesus if we obey his commands." "This is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest" (1 John 2:3; 1 John 3:19). A believer may just as soon expect to feel the sun's rays on a dark and cloudy day, as to feel strong comfort and happiness in Christ while he does not completely follow Him. When the disciples deserted the Lord and fled, they escaped danger, but they were miserable and sad. But when, a little while later, they confessed Him boldly before men, they were cast into prison and beaten; but we are told "The apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Jesus]" (Acts 5:41). Oh, for our own sakes, if there were no other reason, let us strive to be holy! They that follow Jesus most

fully will always follow Him most happily.

h) Lastly, we must be holy, because without holiness on earth we will never be prepared to enjoy heaven.

Heaven is a holy place. The Lord of heaven is a holy Person. The angels are holy creatures. Holiness is written on everything in heaven. The book of Revelation expressly says, "Nothing impure will ever enter [heaven], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful" (Revelation 21:27).

I solemnly appeal to everyone who listens to this sermon, How will we ever be at home and happy in heaven, if we die unholy? Death works no change. The grave makes no alteration. Each person will rise again with the same character in which they breathed their last breath. Where will our place be if we are strangers to holiness now?

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

Now perhaps you love the company of the flippant and the careless, the worldly-minded and the greedy, the drinkers and the pleasure-seekers, the ungodly and the wicked. None of them will be in heaven.

Now perhaps you think the saints of God are too strict and particular, and serious. You rather avoid them. You have no delight in their company. Well, let me tell you-there will be no other company in heaven.

Now perhaps you think praying, and reading of the Scriptures, and singing of hymns is boring and gloomy, and stupid work-a thing to be tolerated now and then, but not enjoyed. You believe that Sunday worship is a burden and a drain; you couldn't possibly spend more than a small part of it in worshipping God. But remember, heaven is a never-ending Sunday. The inhabitants there never rest day or night, they constantly are saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," and singing the praise of the Lamb. How could an unholy man or woman find pleasure in an occupation such as this?

Do you think you that such a person would delight to meet David, and Paul, and John, after a life spent in doing the very things they spoke against? Would he take sweet counsel with them, and find that they had much in common with him?-Think, above all, that he would rejoice to meet Jesus, the Crucified One, face to face, after cleaving to the sins for which Jesus died, after loving Jesus' enemies and despising Jesus' friends? Would he stand before Him with confidence, and join in the cry, "This is our God; we trusted in him, let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:9). Don't you think that the tongue of an unholy man would cleave to the roof of his mouth with shame, and his only desire would be to be quickly depart! He would feel like a stranger in an unknown land, a black sheep in the middle of Christ's holy flock. The voices of Cherubim and Seraphim, the songs of Angels and Archangels and all the company of heaven, would be a language which he could not understand. The very air would seem to be an air that he could not

breathe.

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

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

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

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

I do not ask whether you approve of holiness in others-whether you like to read the lives of holy people, and to talk of holy things, and to have holy books on your table-whether you mean to be holy, and hope you will be holy some day-I ask something further: Are you yourself holy this very day, or are you not? And why do I ask so directly, and press the question so strongly? I do it because the Scripture says, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." It is written, it is not my idea-it is the Bible, not my private opinion-it is the word of God, not the word of man-"Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

Sadly, what penetrating, probing words these are! What thoughts come across my mind, as I speak them! I look at the world, and see the greater part of it living in wickedness. I look at professing Christians, and see the vast majority having nothing of Christianity but the name. I turn to the Bible, and I hear the Spirit saying, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord."

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

You may try to put me off by saying "you feel a lot, and think a lot about these things: far more than many others." I answer, "This is not the point. The poor lost souls in hell think about these words too! The great question is not what you think, and what you feel, but what you DO."

You may say, "It was never meant that all Christians should be holy, and that holiness, such as I have described, is only for great saints, and people with special gifts." I answer, "I cannot see that in Scripture. I read that everyone who has hope in Christ purifies himself" (1 John 3:3)-"Without holiness no one will see the Lord."

You may say, "It is impossible to be holy and to do our duty in this life at the same time: the thing cannot be done." I answer, "You are mistaken. It can be done. With Christ on your side nothing is impossible. Many Christians before have done it: David, and Obadiah, and Daniel, and the servants of Nero's household, are all examples that prove it."

You may say, "If I were that holy I would be very different than other people." I answer, "I know that. It is just what you ought to be. Christ's true servants were always different than the world around them—a separate nation, a special people—and you must be also, if you would be saved!"

You may say, "At this rate very few will be saved." I answer, "I know it. It is precisely what we are told in the Sermon on the Mount." The Lord Jesus said so thousands of years ago. "Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:14). Few will be saved, because few will take the trouble to seek salvation. Men will not deny themselves the pleasures of sin and their own way for a little season. They turn their backs on an "inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade." "You refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:40).

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

Whatever we may think fit to say, we must be holy, if we would see the Lord. Where is our Christianity if we are not? We must not merely have a Christian name, and Christian knowledge; we must have a Christian character also. We must be saints on earth, if ever we want to be saints in heaven. God has said it, and He will not go back on His word: "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." "The Pope's calendar only makes saints of the dead, but Scripture requires holiness in the living" [Jenkyn]. That godly preacher Owen said, "Do not let men deceive themselves; sanctification is a qualification that is indispensable for those who are saved by the Lord Christ. He leads no one to heaven except those whom He sanctifies on the earth. This living Head will not admit any dead members."

Surely we needn't wonder that Scripture says "You must be born again" (John 3:7). Surely it is clear as the noonday sun that many professing Christians need a complete change—new hearts, new natures—if they are ever to be saved. Old things must pass away—they must become new creations. "Without holiness no one," no matter who they are, "will see the Lord."

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

I admit I fear the attitude of the times about this subject. I really doubt whether it holds that place which it deserves in the thoughts and attitudes of some of the Lord's people. I would humbly suggest that we are apt to overlook the doctrine of growing in grace, and that we do not sufficiently consider how very far a person may go in a profession of Christianity, and yet have no grace, and be dead in God's sight. I believe that Judas Iscariot seemed very much like the other Apostles. When the Lord warned them that one would betray Him, no one said, "Is it Judas?" We had better think more about the Churches of Sardis and Laodicea than we do.

I have no desire to make an idol of holiness. I do not wish to dethrone Christ, and put holiness in His place. But I must candidly say, I wish holiness was more thought of in this day than it seems to be, and I therefore take this opportunity to press the subject on all believers who are listening to this sermon. I fear it is sometimes forgotten that God has married together justification and sanctification. They are distinct and different things, beyond question, but one is never found

without the other. All justified people are sanctified, and all sanctified are justified. What God has joined together let no man dare to put asunder. Don't tell me of your justification, unless you have also some marks of sanctification. Do not boast Christ's work for you, unless you can show us the Spirit's work in you. Do not think that Christ and the Spirit can ever be divided. I do not doubt that many believers know these things, but I think it good for us to remember them. Let us prove that we know them by our lives. Let us try to keep in view this text more continually: "Make every effort to...be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."

I must frankly say I wish there was not such an excessive sensitivity on the subject of holiness as I sometimes perceive in the minds of believers. A man might really think it was a dangerous subject to handle, because it is touched so cautiously! Yet surely when we have exalted Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life," we cannot err in speaking strongly about what should be the character of His people. Rutherford said it well, "The way that says that a person doesn't need works and sanctification, is not the way of grace. Believing and doing are blood-friends."

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

That great preacher, John Owen, used to say, in the 17th century, that there were people whose whole religion seemed to consist in going about complaining of their own sinfulness, and telling everyone that they themselves could do nothing about it. I am afraid that today the same thing might be said with truth of some of Christ's professing people. I know there are texts in Scripture which warrant such complaints. I do not object to them when they come from people who walk in the steps of the Apostle Paul, and fight a good fight, as he did, against sin, the devil, and the world. But I never like such complaints when I see evidence for suspecting, as I often do, that they are only a cloak to cover spiritual laziness, and an excuse for spiritual sloth. If we say with Paul, "What a wretched man I am!" let us also be able to say with him, "I press on toward the goal." Let us not quote his example in one thing, and then not follow him in another" (Romans 7:24; Php_3:14).

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

Is it not true that we need a higher standard of personal holiness in this day? Where is our patience? Where is our zeal? Where is our love? Where are our works? Where is the power of Christianity to be seen, as it was in the past? Where is that unmistakable tone which used to distinguish the saints of old, and shake the world? Truly our silver has become dross, our wine mixed with water, and our salt has very little savor. We are all more than half asleep. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand. Let us wakeup, and sleep no more. Let us open our eyes wider than we have done before. "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily

entangles.”-“Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (Hebrews 12:1; 2 Corinthians 7:1). “Did Christ die,” says Owen, “and will sin live? Was He crucified in the world, and will we love the world? Oh, where is the spirit of him, who by the cross of Christ was crucified to the world, and the world to him!”

III. Let me, in the last place, offer a word of advice to all who desire to be holy.

Do you want to be holy? Do you want to become a new creation? Then you must begin with Christ. You will do nothing at all, and make no progress until you feel your sin and weakness, and run to Him. He is the root and beginning of all holiness, and the way to be holy is to come to Him by faith and be joined to Him. Christ is not only wisdom and righteousness to His people, but sanctification also. Men sometimes try, first of all, to make themselves holy, and they make sad work of it. They toil and labor, and make many resolutions, and make many changes; and yet, like the woman with the issue of blood, before she came to Christ, they feel that “instead of getting better they grew worse” (Mark 5:26). They run in vain, and labor in vain; and little wonder, for they are beginning at the wrong end. They are building up a wall of sand; their work runs down as fast as they throw it up. They are bailing water out of a leaky vessel: the leak gains on them, not they on the leak. No man can lay any other foundation of “holiness” than that which Paul laid, even Christ Jesus. “Apart from Christ we can do nothing” (John 15:5). It is a strong but true saying that, “Wisdom without Christ is damning folly-righteousness without Christ is guilt and condemnation-holiness without Christ is filth and sin-redemption without Christ is bondage and slavery” [Traill’s].

Do you want to attain holiness? Do you feel today a real heart desire to be holy? Do you want to be a partaker of the divine nature? Then go to Christ. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Do not delay. Do not even think about trying to make yourself ready. Go and say to Him, in the words of that beautiful hymn-

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

There is not a brick nor a stone laid in the work of our sanctification until we go to Christ. Holiness is His special gift to His believing people. Holiness is the work He carries on in their hearts, by the Spirit whom He puts within them. He is appointed a “Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins.”-“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (Acts 5:31; John 1:12). Holiness does not come from blood-parents cannot give it to their children: nor from the will of man-ministers cannot give it you by baptism. Holiness comes from Christ. It is the result of vital union with Him. It is the fruit of being a living branch of the True Vine. Then go to Christ and say, “Lord, save me not only from the guilt of sin, but send the Spirit, whom you promised, and save me from its power. Make me holy. Teach me to do your will.”

Do you want to continue to be holy? Then remain in Christ. He Himself says, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you-If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit” (John 15:4-5). God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ-a fullness for all a believer’s wants. He is the

Physician to whom you must go to each day, if you want to stay well. He is the Manna which you must daily eat, and the Rock of which you must daily drink. His arm is the arm on which you must daily lean, as you come up out of the wilderness of this world. You must not only be rooted, you must also be built up in Him. Paul was a man of God-a holy man-a growing, thriving Christian-and what was the secret of it all? He was one to whom Christ was "all in all". He was always "looking to Jesus". "I can do everything," he says, "through Christ who gives me strength." "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God." Let us go and do likewise (Hebrews 12:2; Php_4:13; Galatians 2:20).

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

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THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG MEN

Preface

For more than 100 years, J. C. Ryle's (John Charles Ryle) sermons have been consistently recognized, and their usefulness and impact have continued to

the present day, even in the outdated English of the author's own day.

Why then should expositions already so successful and of such stature and proven usefulness require adaptation, revision, rewrite or even editing? The answer is obvious. To increase its usefulness to today's reader, the language in which it was originally written needs updating.

Though his sermons have served other generations well, just as they came from the pen of the author in the nineteenth century, they still could be lost to present and future generations, simply because, to them, the language is neither readily nor fully understandable.

My goal, however, has not been to reduce the original writing to the vernacular of our day. It is designed primarily for you who desire to read and study comfortably and at ease in the language of our time. Only obviously archaic terminology and passages obscured by expressions not totally familiar in our day have been revised. However, neither J. C. Ryle's meaning nor intent have been tampered with.

Tony Capoccia

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THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG MEN

by

J. C. Ryle

(1816-1900)

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When the Apostle Paul wrote his Epistle to Titus about his responsibility as a minister, he mentioned young men as a group requiring particular attention. After speaking of older men and older women, and young women, he adds this advice, "Encourage the young men to be self-controlled" (Titus 2:6). I am going to follow the Apostle's advice. I propose to offer a few words of friendly exhortation to young men.

I am growing old myself, but there are few things that I can remember so well as were the days of my youth. I have a most distinct recollection of the joys and the sorrows, the hopes and the fears,

the temptations and the difficulties, the mistaken judgments and the misplaced affections, the errors and the aspirations, which surround and accompany a young man's life. If I can only say something to keep some young man walking in the right way, and preserve him from faults and sins, which may hurt his prospects both for time and eternity, I shall be very thankful.

There are four things which I propose to do:

- I. I will mention some general reasons why young men need exhorting.
- II. I will note some special dangers which young men need to be warned about.
- III. I will give some general counsel which I beg young men to receive.
- IV. I will set down some special rules of conduct which I strongly advise young men to follow.

On each of these four points I have something to say, and I pray to God that what I say may do good to some soul.

I. Reasons for Exhorting Young Men

1. What are the general reasons why young men need specific exhortation? I will mention several of them in order.

(1) For one thing, there is the painful fact that there are few young men anywhere who seem to be Christians.

I speak without respect of persons; I say it of all. Rich or poor, gentle or rough, educated or uneducated, in the city or in the country--it makes no difference. I shudder to think how few young men are led by the Spirit, how few are on that narrow road which leads to life, how few are setting their affections on things above, how few are taking up the cross, and following Christ. I say all this with sorrow, but I believe, in God's sight, that I am saying nothing more than the truth.

Young men, you form a large and most important class in the population of this country; but where, and in what condition, are your souls? Regardless of where we turn for an answer, the report will be one and the same! Let us ask any faithful minister of the gospel, and note what he will tell us. How many unmarried young people can he remember who come to the Lord's Supper? Who are the most backward about the doctrines of salvation, the most irregular about Sunday services, the most difficult to draw to weekly Bible studies and prayer meetings, the most inattentive to whatever is being preached? Which part of his congregation fills him with the most anxiety? Who are the Reubens for whom he has the deepest "searchings of heart"? Who in his flock are the hardest to manage, who require the most frequent warnings and rebukes, who cause him the greatest uneasiness and sorrow, who keep him most constantly in fear for their souls, and seem the most hopeless? Depend on it, his answer will always be, "The Young Men."

Let us ask the parents in any county throughout this land, and see what they will generally say. Who in their families give them the most pain and trouble? Who need the most watchfulness, and most often provoke and disappoint them? Who are the first to be led away from what is right, and

the last to remember cautions and good advice? Who are the most difficult to keep in order and limits? Who most frequently break out into open sin, disgrace the name they bear, make their friends unhappy, embitter the older relatives, and cause them to die with sorrow in their hearts? Depend on it, the answer will generally be, "The Young Men."

Let us ask the judges and police officers, and note what they will reply. Who goes to the night clubs and bars the most? Who make up street gangs? Who are most often arrested for drunkenness, disturbing the peace, fighting, stealing, assaults, and the like? Who fill the jails, and penitentiaries, and detention homes? Who are the class which requires the most incessant watching and looking after? Depend on it, they will at once point to the same group, they will say, "The Young Men."

Let us turn to the upper classes, and note the report we will get from them. In one family the sons are always wasting time, health, and money, in the selfish pursuit of pleasure. In another, the sons will follow no profession, and fritter away the most precious years of their life in doing nothing. In another, they take up a profession as a mere form, but pay no attention to its duties. In another, they are always forming wrong connections, gambling, getting into debt, associating with bad companions, keeping their friends in a constant fever of anxiety. Note that rank, and title, and wealth, and education, do not prevent these things! Anxious fathers, and heart-broken mothers, and sorrowing sisters, could tell sad stories about them, if the truth were known. Many a family, with everything this world can give, numbers among its relatives some name that is never named, or only named with regret and shame, some son, some brother, some cousin, some nephew, who will have his own way, and is a grief to all who know him.

There is seldom a rich family which hasn't got some thorn in its side, some blot in its page of happiness, some constant source of pain and anxiety; and often, far too often--the true cause is, "The Young Men"?

What shall we say to these things? These are facts, plain facts, facts which meet us on every side, facts which cannot be denied. How dreadful this is! How dreadful the thought, that every time I meet a young man, I meet one who is in all probability all enemy of God, traveling on the wide road which leads to hell, unfit for heaven! Surely, with such facts before me, will you not wonder that I exhort you, you must allow that there is a good reason.

(2) Death and judgment are waiting for young men, even as it waits for others, and they nearly all seem to forget it.

Young men, it is appointed for you to die; and no matter how strong and healthy you may be now, the day of your death is perhaps very near. I see young people sick as well as the elderly. I bury youthful corpses as well as aged. I read the names of persons no older than yourselves in every graveyard. I learn from books that, excepting infancy and old age, more die between thirteen and twenty-three than at any other period of life. And yet you live as if you were sure that presently you will never die.

Are you thinking you will pay attention to these things tomorrow? Remember the words of Solomon, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what

a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). "I will worry about serious things tomorrow," said an unsaved person, to one who warned him of coming danger; but his tomorrow never came. Tomorrow is the devil's day, but today is God's. Satan does not care how spiritual your intentions are, or how holy your resolutions, if only they are determined to be done tomorrow. Oh, give no place to the devil in this matter! All men don't live to be elderly fathers, like Isaac and Jacob. Many children die before their fathers. David had to mourn the death of his two finest sons; Job lost all of his ten children in one day. Your lot may be like one of theirs, and when death comes, it will be vain to talk of tomorrow, you must go at once.

Do you think that you will have a more convenient time to think about these things? So thought Felix and the Athenians to whom Paul preached to; but it never came. The road to hell is paved with such ideas. Better make sure to work while you can. Leave nothing unsettled that is eternal. Run no risk when your soul is at stake. Believe me, the salvation of a soul is no easy matter. Every one needs a "Great salvation," whether young or old; all need to be born again--all need to be washed in Christ's blood--all need to be sanctified by the Spirit. Happy is that man who does not leave these things uncertain, but never rests until he has the witness of the Spirit within him, testifying to him that he is a child of God.

Young men, your time is short. Your days are but a brief shadow, a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes, a story that is soon told. Your bodies are not made of brass. "Even the young men," says Isaiah, "stumble and fall" (Isaiah 40:30). Your health may be taken from you in a moment: it only needs an accident, a fever, an inflammation, a broken blood-vessel, and the worm would soon feed upon you in the grave. There is but a step between any one of you and death. This night your soul might be required of you. You are fast going the way of all the earth, you will soon be gone. Your life is all uncertainty, your death and judgment are perfectly sure. You too must hear the Archangel's trumpet, and go forth to stand before the great white throne of judgment, you too must obey that summons, which Jerome says was always ringing in his ears: "Get up, you dead, and come to judgment." "Yes, I am coming soon," is the language of the Judge Himself. I cannot, dare not, will not let you alone.

Oh that you would all take to heart the words of the Preacher: "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment" (Ecclesiastes 11:9) Amazing, that with such a prospect of coming judgment, any man can be careless and unconcerned! Surely none are so crazy as those who are content to live unprepared to die. Surely the unbelief of men is the most amazing thing in the world. The clearest prophecy in the Bible begins with these words, "Who has believed our message?" (Isaiah 53:1). The Lord Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Young men, I fear this be the report of many of you in the courts above: "They will not believe." I fear you be hurried out of the world, and awake to find out, too late, that death and judgment are realities. I fear all this, and therefore I exhort you.

(3) What young men will be, in all probability depends on what they are now, and they seem to forget this.

Youth is the planting time of full age, the molding season in the little space of human life, the turning point in the history of man's mind.

By the shoot that springs up we can judge the type of tree that is growing, by the blossoms we judge the kind of fruit, by the spring we judge the type of harvest coming, by the morning we judge the coming day, and by the character of the young man, we may generally judge what he will be when he grows up.

Young men, do not be deceived. Don't think you can, at will, serve lusts and pleasures in your beginning, and then go and serve God with ease at your latter end. Don't think that you can live with Esau, and then die with Jacob. It is a mockery to deal with God and your souls in such a fashion. It is an awful mockery to suppose you can give the flower of your strength to the world and the devil, and then put off the King of kings with the scraps and remains of your hearts, the wreck and remnant of your powers. It is an awful mockery, and you may find to your loss that the thing cannot be done.

I dare say you are planning on a late repentance. You do not know what you are doing. You are planning without God. Repentance and faith are the gifts of God, and they are gifts that He often withholds, when they have been long offered in vain. I grant you true repentance is never too late, but I warn you at the same time, late repentance is seldom true. I grant you, one penitent thief was converted in his last hours, that no man might despair; But I warn you, only one was converted, that no man might presume. I grant you it is written, Jesus is "Able to save completely those who come to God through him" (Hebrews 7:25). But I warn you, it is also written by the same Spirit, "Since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you" (Proverbs 1:24, 26).

Believe me, you will find it no easy matter to turn to God whenever you please. It is a true saying of the godly Leighton, "The way of sin is down hill; a man cannot stop when he wants too." Holy desires and serious convictions are not like the servants of the Centurion, ready to come and go at your desire; rather they are like the unicorn in Job, they will not obey your voice, nor attend at your bidding. It was said of the famous general Hannibal of old, when he could have taken the city he warred against, he would not, and in time when he would, he could not. Beware lest the same kind of thing happens to you in the matter of eternal life.

Why do I say all this? I say it because of the force of habit. I say it because experience tells me that people's hearts are seldom changed if they are not changed when young. Seldom indeed are men converted when they are old. Habits have deep roots. Once sin is allowed to settle in your heart, it will not be turned out at your bidding. Custom becomes second nature, and its chains are not easily broken. The prophet has well said, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jeremiah 13:23). Habits are like stones rolling down hill--the further they roll, the faster and more ungovernable is their course. Habits, like trees, are strengthened by age. A boy may bend an oak when it is a sapling--a hundred men cannot root it up, when it is a full grown tree. A child can wade over the Thames River at its fountain-head--the largest ship in the world can float in it when it gets near the sea. So it is with habits: the older the stronger--the longer they have held possession, the harder they will be to cast out. They grow with our growth, and strengthen with our strength. Custom is the nurse of sin. Every fresh act of sin lessens fear and remorse, hardens our hearts, blunts the edge of our conscience, and increases our evil inclination.

Young men, you may fancy I am laying too much stress on this point. If you had seen old men, as I have, on the brink of the grave, without any feelings, seared, callous, dead, cold, hard as stone--you would not think so. Believe me, you cannot stand still in your souls. Habits of good or evil are daily strengthening in your hearts. Every day you are either getting nearer to God, or further off. Every year that you continue unrepentant, the wall of division between you and heaven becomes higher and thicker, and the gulf to be crossed deeper and broader. Oh, dread the hardening effect of constant lingering in sin! Now is the accepted time. See that your decision not be put off until the winter of your days. If you do not seek the Lord when young, the strength of habit is such that you will probably never seek Him at all.

I fear this, and therefore I exhort you.

(4) The devil uses special diligence to destroy the souls of young men, and they don't seem to know it.

Satan knows very well that you will make up the next generation and therefore he employs every trick to make you his own. I would not have you to be ignorant of his schemes.

You are those on whom he puts his choicest temptations. He spreads his net with the most watchful carefulness, to entangle your hearts. He baits his trap with the sweetest morsels, to get you into his power. He displays his wares before your eyes with his utmost ingenuity, in order to make you buy his sugared poisons, and eat his accursed treats. You are the grand object of his attack. May the Lord rebuke him, and deliver you out of his hands.

Young men, beware of being taken by his snares. He will try to throw dust in your eyes, and prevent you seeing anything in its true colors. He would eagerly make you think that evil is good, and good is evil. He will paint, cover with gold, and dress up sin, in order to make you fall in love with it. He will deform, and misrepresent, and fabricate true Christianity, in order to make you take a dislike to it. He will exalt the pleasures of wickedness--but he will hide from you the sting. He will lift up before your eyes the cross and its painfulness--but he will keep out of sight the eternal crown. He will promise you everything, as he did to Christ, if you will only serve him. He will even help you to wear a form of Christianity, if you will only neglect the power. He will tell you at the beginning of your lives, it

is too soon to serve God--he will tell you at the end, it is too late. Oh, do not be deceived!

You don't know the danger you are in from this enemy; and it is this very ignorance which makes me afraid. You are like blind men, walking among holes and pitfalls; you do not see the perils which are around you on every side.

Your enemy is mighty. He is called "The Prince of this world" (John 14:30). He opposed our Lord Jesus Christ all through His ministry. He tempted Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and so brought sin and death into the world. He even tempted David, the man after God's own heart, and caused his latter days to be full of sorrow. He even tempted Peter, the chosen Apostle, and made him deny his Lord. Surely his hostility towards man and God is to be despised.

Your enemy is restless. He never sleeps. He is always going around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. He is always going back and forth in the earth, and walking up and down on it. You may be careless about your souls: but he is not. He wants your soul to make you miserable,

like himself, and will have your soul if he can. Surely his hatred towards men and God is to be despised.

And your enemy is cunning. For thousands of years he has been reading one book, and that book is the heart of man. He ought to know it well, and he does know it--all its weakness, all its deceitfulness, all its folly. And he has a storehouse full of temptations, such as are most likely to do the heart of man the most harm. Never will you go to the place where he will not find you. Go into the city--he will be there. Go into the wilderness--he will be there also. Sit among drunkards--and he will be there to help you. Listen to preaching--and he will be there to distract you. Surely such ill-will is to be despised.

Young men, this enemy is working hard for your destruction, however little you may think it. You are the prize for which he is specially contending for. He foresees you must either be the blessings or the curses of your day, and he is trying hard to effect a place in your hearts early in your life, in order that you may help advance his kingdom each day. Well does he understand that to spoil the bud is the surest way to mar the flower.

Oh that your eyes were opened, like those of Elisha's servant Dothan! Oh that you could see what Satan is scheming against your peace! I must warn you--I must exhort you. Whether you will hear or not, I cannot, dare not, leave you alone.

(5) Young men need exhorting because of the sorrow it will save them, to begin serving God now.

Sin is the mother of all sorrow, and no sort of sin appears to give a man so much misery and pain as the sins of his youth. The foolish acts he did--the time he wasted--the mistakes he made--the bad company he kept--the harm he did himself, both body and soul--the chances of happiness he threw away--the openings of usefulness he neglected; all these things that often embitter the conscience of an old man, throw a gloom on the evening of his days, and fill later hours of his life with self-reproach and shame.

Some men could tell you of the untimely loss of health, brought on by youthful sins. Disease racks their limbs with pain, and life is almost a weariness. Their muscular strength is so wasted, that the slightest weight seems a burden. Their eye has become prematurely dim, and their natural energy abated. The sun of their health has gone down while it is yet day, and they mourn to see their flesh and body consumed. Believe me, this is a bitter cup to drink.

Others could give you sad accounts of the consequences of idleness. They threw away the golden opportunity for learning. They would not get wisdom at the time when their minds were most able to receive it, and their memory most ready to retain it. And now it is too late. They don't have the time to sit down and learn. They no longer have the same power, even if they had the time. Lost time can never be redeemed. This too is a bitter cup to drink.

Others could tell you of grievous mistakes in judgment, from which they suffer all their lives. They had to have it their own way. They would not take advice. They formed some connection which has been altogether ruinous to their happiness. They chose a profession for which they were entirely unsuited. And they see it all now. But their eyes are only open when the mistake cannot be retrieved. Oh, this is also a bitter cup to drink!

Young men, young men, I wish you did but know the comfort of a conscience not burdened with a long list of youthful sins. These are the wounds that pierce the deepest. These are the arrows that drink up a man's spirit. This is the iron that enters into the soul. Be merciful to yourselves. Seek the Lord early, and so you will be spared many a bitter tear.

This is the truth that Job seems to have felt. He says, "You write down bitter things against me and make me inherit the sins of my youth" (Job 13:26). So also his friend Zophar, speaking of the wicked, says, "The youthful vigor that fills his bones will lie with him in the dust" (Job 20:11).

David also seems to have felt it. He says to the Lord, "Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways" (Psalm 25:7).

Beza, the great Swiss Reformer, felt it so strongly, that he named it in his will as a special mercy that he had been called out from the world, by the grace of God, at the age of sixteen.

Go and ask believers now, and I think many will tell you much the same. "Oh that I could live my young days over again!" He will most probably say, "Oh that I had spent the beginning of my life in a better way! Oh that I had not laid the foundation of evil habits so strongly in the springtime of my journey!"

Young men, I want to save you all this sorrow, if I can. Hell itself is truth known too late. Be wise in time. What youth sows, old age must reap. Do not give the most precious season of your life to that which will not comfort you in the latter days of your life. Sow to yourselves rather in righteousness: break up your hard ground, don't sow among thorns.

Sin may be easy for you to do with your hands, or run smoothly off your tongue now, but depend on it, the effects of your sin and you will meet again in time, however little you may like it. Old wounds will often ache and give pain long after they are healed, and only a scar remains: so may you find it with your sins. The footprints of animals have been found on the surface of rocks that were once wet sand, thousands of years after the animal that made them has perished and passed away; so also may it be with your sins.

"Experience," says the proverb, "is a hard school to attend, but fools will learn in no other." I want you all to escape the misery of learning in that school. I want you to avoid the wretchedness that youthful sins are sure to entail. This is the last reason why I exhort you.

II. Dangers of Young Men

2. There are some special dangers that young men need to be warned against.

(1) One danger to young men is pride.

I know well that all souls are in fearful peril. Old or young, it doesn't matter; all have a race to run, a battle to fight, a heart to humble, a world to overcome, a body to keep under control, a devil to resist; and we may very well say, Who is sufficient for these things? But still every age and condition has its own peculiar snares and temptations, and it is well to know them. He that is forewarned is forearmed. If I can only persuade you to be on your guard against the dangers I am going to name, I am sure I shall do your souls an essential service.

Pride is the oldest sin in the world. Indeed, it was before the world. Satan and his angels fell by pride. They were not satisfied with their first situation and status. Thus pride stocked hell with its first inhabitants.

Pride threw Adam out of paradise. He was not content with the place God assigned him. He tried to raise himself, and fell. Thus sin, sorrow, and death entered in by pride.

Pride sits in all our hearts by nature. We are born proud. Pride makes us rest content with ourselves--think we are good enough as we are--keep us from taking advice--refuse the gospel of Christ--turn every one to his own way. But pride never reigns anywhere so powerfully as in the heart of a young man.

How common is it to see young men with big heads, high-minded, and impatient of any counsel! How often they are rude and uncourteous to all around them,

thinking they are not valued and honored as they deserve! How often will they not stop to listen to a hint from an older person! They think that they know everything. They are full of conceit of their own wisdom. They think elderly people, and especially their relatives, are stupid, and dull, and slow. They want no teaching or instruction themselves: they understand all things. It almost makes them angry to be spoken to. Like young horses, they cannot bear the least control. They must be independent and have their own way. They seem to think, like those whom Job mentioned, "You are the people, and wisdom will die with you" (Job 12:2). And all this is pride.

Rehoboam was such a person, who despised the counsel of the old experienced men who stood before his father, and listened to the advice of the young men of his own generation. He lived to reap the consequences of his folly. There are many like him.

The prodigal son in the parable was also such a person, who needed to have his share of the inheritance so he could set himself up in the lifestyle that he desired. He could not submit to live quietly under his father's roof, but would go into a far country, and be his own master. Like the little child that will leave its mother's hand and walk alone, he soon feels the sting for his folly. He became wiser when he had to eat husks with the swine. But there are many like him.

Young men, I beseech you earnestly, beware of pride. Two things are said to be very rare sights in the world--one is a young man that is humble, and the other is an old man that is content. I fear that this is only too true.

Do not be proud of your own abilities, your own strength, your own knowledge, your own appearance, your own cleverness. Do not be proud of yourself, and your endowments of any kind. It all comes from not knowing yourself and the world. The older you grow, and the more you see, the less reason you will find for being proud. Ignorance and inexperience are the pedestal of pride; once the pedestal is removed--pride will soon come down.

Remember how often Scripture sets before us the excellence of a humble spirit. How strongly we are warned "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought" (Romans 12:3). How plainly we are told, "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know!" (1 Corinthians 8:2). How strict is the command, "Clothe yourselves with humility" (Colossians 3:12). And again, "Clothe yourselves with humility" (1 Peter 5:5). This is the garment of which many seem not to have so much as a rag.

Think of the great example our Lord Jesus Christ leaves us in this respect. He washed the feet of His disciples, saying, "You should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). It is written, "Though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor" (2 Corinthians 8:9). And again, "He made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself" (Philippians 2:7, 8). Surely to be proud is to be more like the devil and fallen Adam, than like Christ.

Think of the wisest man that ever lived--I mean Solomon. See how he speaks of himself as a "little child," as one who "does not know how to carry out his duties" or manage for himself (1 Kings 3:7). That was a very different spirit from his brother Absalom's, who thought himself equal to anything: "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice" (2 Samuel 15:4). That was a very different spirit from his brother Adonijah's, who "exalted himself, saying, I will be king" (1 Kings 1:5). Humility was the beginning of Solomon's wisdom. He writes it down as his own experience, "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 26:12).

Young men, take to heart the Scriptures just quoted. Do not be too confident in your own judgment. Stop being so sure that you are always right, and others wrong. Don't trust your own opinion, when you find it contrary to that of older men, and especially to that of your own parents. Age gives experience, and therefore deserves respect. It is a mark of Elihu's wisdom, in the book of Job, that "Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he" (Job 32:4). And afterwards he said, "I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. I thought, 'Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom'" (Job 32:6-7). Humility and silence are beautiful graces in young people. Never be ashamed of being a learner: Jesus was one at twelve years; when He was found in the temple, He was "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). The wisest men would tell you they are always learners, and are humbled to find after all how little they know. The great Sir Isaac Newton used to say that he felt

himself no better than a little child, who had picked up a few precious stones on the shore of the sea of knowledge.

Young men, if you would be wise, if you would be happy, remember the warning I give you--Beware of pride.

(2) Another danger to young men is the love of pleasure.

Youth is the time when our passions are strongest--and like unruly children, cry most loudly for indulgence. Youth is the time when we have generally our most health and strength: death seems far away, and to enjoy ourselves in this life seems to be everything. Youth is the time when most people have few earthly cares or anxieties to take up their attention. And all these things help to make young men think of nothing except pleasure. "I serve lusts and pleasures:" that is the true answer many a young man should give, if asked, "Whose Servant are you?"

Young men, time would not permit me to tell you all the fruits this love of pleasure produces, and all the ways in which it may do you harm. Why should I speak of carousing, partying, drinking, gambling, movie-going, dancing, and the like? There are few to be found who don't know something of these things by bitter experience. And these are only instances. All things that give a

feeling of excitement for the time--all things that drown thought, and keep the mind in a constant whirl--all things that please the senses and delight the flesh--these are the sort of things that have mighty power at your time of life, and they owe their power to the love of pleasure. Be on your guard. Do not be like those of whom Paul speaks, "Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4).

Remember what I say: if you would cling to earthly pleasures--these are the things which murder souls. There is no surer way to get a seared conscience and a hard heart towards the things of God, than to give way to the desires of the flesh and mind. It seems like nothing at first, but it tells in the long run.

Consider what Peter says: "Abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11). They destroy the soul's peace, break down its strength, lead it into captivity, and make it a slave.

Consider what Paul says: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed" (Colossians 3:5). "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). Once the body was a perfect home for a soul--now it is all corrupt and disordered, and needs constant watching. It is a burden to the soul--not a helper; a hindrance--not an assistance. It may become a useful servant, but it is always a bad master.

Consider, again, the words of Paul: "Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Romans 13:14). "These," says Leighton, "are the words, the very reading of which gave Augustine a great conviction of heart, causing an immoral young man to be turned into a faithful servant of Jesus Christ." Young men, I wish this might be the case with all of you.

Remember, again, if you cling to earthly pleasures, they will all be unsatisfying, empty, and pointless. Like the locusts of the vision in Revelation, they seem to have crowns on their heads: but like the same locusts, you will find they have stings--real stings--in their tails. All that glitters is not gold. All that tastes sweet is not good. All that pleases for a while is not real pleasure.

Go and take your fill of earthly pleasures if you will--you will never find your heart satisfied with them. There will always be a voice within, crying, like the leech in Proverbs 30:15, "Give! Give!" There is an empty place there, which nothing but God can fill. You will find, as Solomon did by experience, that earthly pleasures are but a meaningless show--promising contentment but bringing a dissatisfaction of spirit--gold plated caskets, exquisite to look at on the outside, but full of ashes and corruption within. Be wise in your youth. Write the word "poison" on all earthly pleasures. The most lawful of them must be used in moderation. All of them are soul-destroying if you give them your heart. Pleasure, must first have the guarantee that it is not sinful--then it is to be enjoyed in moderation.

And I will not shrink from warning all young men to remember the seventh commandment; to beware of adultery and sexual immorality, of all impurity of every kind. I fear that we don't very often speak on this part of God's law. But when I see how prophets and Apostles have dealt with this subject, when I observe the open way in which the Reformers of our own Church denounced it, when I see the number of young men who walk in the wicked footsteps of Reuben, and Hophni,

and Phinehas, and Amnon, I for one cannot, with a good conscience, hold my peace. The world becomes more wicked because of our failure to teach and preach on this commandment. For my own part, I feel it would be false and unscriptural delicacy, in addressing men, not to speak of that which is preeminently the "young man's sin."

The violation of the seventh commandment is the sin above all others, that, as Hosea says, "takes away the understanding" (Hosea 4:11). It is the sin that leaves deeper scars upon the soul than any other sin that a man can commit. It is a sin that destroys thousands of young men in every age, and has even overthrown a few of the saints of God in the past. Samson and David are fearful proofs. It is the sin that man dares to smile at, and smooths over using the terms: thrills, love, uncontrollable passions, and natural desires. But it is the sin that the devil rejoices over, for he is the "unclean spirit;" and it is the sin that God abhors, and declares He "will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

Young men, "Flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18) if you love life. "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient" (Ephesians 5:6). Flee from the opportunity of it--from the company of those who might draw you into it--from the places where you might be tempted to do it. Read what our Lord says about it in Matthew 5:28, "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Be like the holy servant Job: "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1). Flee from talking about it. It is one of the things that ought not even be hinted about in conversation. You cannot even touch black grease without getting your hands dirty. Flee from the thoughts of it; resist them, destroy them, pray against them--make any sacrifice rather than give way to them. Imagination is the hotbed where this sin is too often hatched. Guard your thoughts, and there will be little fear about your actions.

Consider the caution I have been giving. If you forget everything else, do not let this be forgotten.

(3) Another danger to young men is thoughtlessness.

Not thinking is one simple reason why thousands of souls are thrown away forever into the Lake of Fire. Men will not consider, will not look ahead, will not look around them, will not reflect on the end of their present course, and the sure consequences of their present ways, and wake up to find they are damned for a lack of thinking.

Young men, none are in more danger of this than yourselves. You know little of the perils around you, and so you are careless how you walk. You hate the trouble of serious, quiet thinking, and so you make wrong decisions and bring upon yourselves much sorrow. Young Esau had to have his brother's stew and sold his birthright: he never thought how much he would want it in the future. Young Simeon and Levi had to avenge the rape of their sister Dinah, and kill the Shechemites: they never considered how much trouble and anxiety they might bring on their father Jacob and his house. Job seems to have been especially afraid of this thoughtlessness among his children: it is written, that when they had a feast, and the "period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This was Job's regular custom" (Job 1:5).

Believe me, this world is not a world in which we can do well without thinking, and least of all do well in the matter of our souls. "Don't think," whispers Satan: he knows that an unconverted heart is like a dishonest businessman's financial records, they will not bear close inspection. "Consider your ways," says the Word of God--stop and think--consider and be wise. The Spanish proverb says it well, "Hurry comes from the devil." Just as men marry in a rush and then are miserable with their mate, so they make mistakes about their souls in a minute, and then suffer for it for years. Just as a bad servant does wrong, and then says, "I never gave it a thought," so young men run into sin, and then say, "I did not think about it--it did not look like sin." Not look like sin! What would you expect? Sin will not

come to you, saying, "I am sin;" it would do little harm if it did. Sin always seems "good, and pleasant, and desirable," at the time of commission. Oh, get wisdom, get discretion! Remember the words of Solomon: "Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm" (Proverbs 4:26).

Some, I dare say, will object that I am asking what is unreasonable; that youth is not the time of life when people ought to be grave and thoughtful. I answer, there is little danger of their being too much so in the present day. Foolish talking and kidding, and joking, and excessive amusement, are only too common. I don't argue the fact that there is a time for all things; but to be always flippant and joking is anything but wise. What does the wisest of men say--"It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure" (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4). Matthew Henry tells a story of a great statesman in Queen Elizabeth's time, who retired from public life in his latter days, and gave himself up to serious thought. His former merry companions came to visit him, and told him that he was becoming somber: "No," he replied, "I am serious; for everyone around me is serious. God is serious in observing us--Christ is serious in interceding for us--the Spirit is serious in striving with us--the truths of God are serious--our spiritual enemies are serious in their endeavors to ruin us--poor lost sinners are serious in hell--and why then should you and I not be serious too?"

Oh, young men, learn to be thoughtful! Learn to consider what you are doing, and where you are going. Make time for calm reflection. Commune with your

own heart, and be still. Remember my caution--Do not be lost merely for the lack of thought.

(4) Another danger to young men is contempt of Christianity.

This also is one of your special dangers. I always observe that none pay so little outward respect to Christianity as young men. None take so little part in our services, when they are present at them--use Bibles so little--sing so little--listen to preaching so little. None are so generally absent at prayer meetings, Bible Studies, and all other weekday helps to the soul. Young men seem to think they do not need these things--they may be good for women and old men, but not for them. They appear ashamed of seeming to care about their souls: one would almost fancy they considered it a disgrace to go to heaven at all. And this is contempt of Christianity--it is the same spirit which made the young people of Bethel mock Elisha--and of this spirit I say to all young men, Beware! If it is worthwhile to be a

Christian, it is worthwhile to be in earnest about it.

Contempt of holy things is the straight road to hell. Once a man begins to make a joke of any part of Christianity, then I am never surprised to hear that he has turned out to be an unbeliever.

Young men, have you really made up your minds to this? Have you clearly looked into the fires which are before you, if you persist in despising Christianity? Call to mind the words of David: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1). The fool, and no one but the fool has said it: but he has never proved it! Remember, if there ever was a book which has been proved true from beginning to end, by every kind of evidence, that book is the Bible. It has defied the attacks of all enemies and faultfinders. "The Word of the LORD is flawless" (Psalm 18:30). It has been tested in every way, and the more it has been tested, the more evidently has it been shown to be the very handiwork of God Himself. What will you believe, if you do not believe the Bible? There is no choice but to believe something ridiculous and absurd. Depend on it, no man is so grossly naive as the man who denies the Bible to be the Word of God; and if it be the Word of God, be careful that you don't despise it.

Men may tell you that there are difficulties in the Bible; things hard to understand. It would not be God's book if there were not. And what if there are? You don't despise medicines because you cannot explain all that your doctor does with them. But whatever men may say, the things needed for salvation are as clear as daylight. Be very sure of this--people never reject the Bible because they cannot understand it. They understand it too well; they understand that it condemns their own behavior; they understand that it witnesses against their own sins, and summons them to judgment. They try to believe it is false and useless, because they don't like to believe it is true. An evil lifestyle must always raise an objection to this book. Men question the truth of Christianity because they hate the practice of it.

Young men, when did God ever fail to keep His word? Never. What He has said, He has always done; and what He has spoken, He has always made good.

Did He fail to keep His word at the flood? No. Did He fail with Sodom and Gomorrah? No. Did He fail with unbelieving Jerusalem? No. Has He failed with the Jews up to this very hour? No. He has never failed to fulfill His word. Take care, lest you be found among those who despise God's Word.

Never laugh at Christianity. Never make a joke of sacred things. Never mock those who are serious and earnest about their souls. The time may come when you will count those happy whom you laughed at--a time when your laughter will be turned into sorrow, and your mockery into seriousness.

(5) Another danger to young men is the fear of man's opinion.

"The fear of man" will indeed "prove to be a snare" (Proverbs 29:25). It is terrible to observe the power which it has over most minds, and especially over the minds of the young. Few seem to have any opinions of their own, or to think for themselves. Like dead fish, they go with the stream and tide: what others think is right, they think is right; and what others call wrong, they call wrong too. There are not many original thinkers in the world. Most men are like sheep, they follow a leader. If it was the fashion of the day to be Roman Catholics, they would be Roman Catholics, if it was to be Islamic, they would be Islamic. They dread the idea of going against the current of the

times. In a word, the opinion of the day becomes their religion, their creed, their Bible, and their God.

The thought, "What will my friends say or think of me?" nips many a good inclination in the bud. The fear of being looked at, laughed at, ridiculed, prevents many a good habit from being taken up. There are Bibles that would be read this very day, if the owners dared. They know they ought to read them, but they are afraid: "What will people say?" There are knees that would be bent in prayer this very night, but the fear of man forbids it: "What would my wife, my brother, my friend, my companion say, if they saw me praying?" Oh, what wretched slavery this is, and yet how common! "I was afraid of the people and so I gave into them," Saul said to Samuel, "and so he violated the Lord's command" (1 Samuel 15:24). "I am afraid of the Jews," said Zedekiah, the graceless king of Judah: and so he disobeyed the advice which Jeremiah gave him (Jeremiah 38:19). Herod was afraid of what his guests would think of him: so he did that which made him "greatly

distressed," he beheaded John the Baptist. Pilate feared offending the Jews: so he did that which he knew in his conscience was unjust--he delivered up Jesus to be crucified. If this is not slavery, what is?

Young men, I want you all to be free from this bondage. I want each of you to care nothing about man's opinion, when the path of duty is clear. Believe me, it is a great thing to be able to say "No!" Here was good King Jehoshaphat's weak point--he was too easy and yielding in his dealings with Ahab, and therefore caused many of his troubles (1 Kings 22:4). Learn to say "No!" Don't let the fear of not seeming good-natured make you unable to do it. When sinners entice you, be able to say decidedly, "I will not give in to them" (Proverbs 1:10).

Consider how unreasonable this fear of man is. How short lived is man's hostility, and how little harm he can do you! "Who are you that you fear mortal men, the sons of men, who are but grass, that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth?" (Isaiah 51:12-13). And how thankless is this fear! No one will really think better of you for it. The world always respects those the most, who act boldly for God. Oh, break these bonds, and cast these chains from you! Never be ashamed of letting men see that you want to go to heaven. Do not think it a disgrace to show that you are a servant of God. Never be afraid of doing what is right.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Try only to please God, and He will soon make others pleased with you. "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7).

Young men, be of good courage. Don't worry what the world says or thinks: you will not always be with the world. Can man save your soul? No. Will man be your judge in the great and dreadful day of judgment? No. Can man give you a good conscience in this life, a good hope in death, a good answer in the morning of resurrection? No! no! no! Man can do nothing of the sort. Then "Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults. For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool" (Isaiah 51:7-8). Call to mind the saying of Gardiner:

"I fear God, and therefore I have no one else to fear." Go and be like him.

Such are the warnings I give you. Take them to heart. They are worth thinking about. I am greatly mistaken if they are not greatly needed. The Lord grant that they have not been given to you in vain.

III. General Counsels to Young Men

3. In the third place, I wish to give some general counsels to young men.

(1) Try to get a clear view of the evil of sin.

Young men, if you did know what sin is, and what sin has done, you would not think it so strange that I exhort you as I do. You do not see it in its true colors. Your eyes are naturally blind to its guilt and danger, and therefore you cannot understand what makes me so worried about you. Oh, don't let the devil succeed in persuading you that sin is a small matter!

Think for a moment what the Bible says about sin; how it dwells naturally in the heart of every man and woman alive (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23), how it defiles our thoughts, words, and actions, and that continually (Genesis 6:5; Matthew 15:19), how it renders us all guilty and abominable in the sight of a holy God (Isaiah 64:6; Habakkuk 1:13), how it leaves us utterly without hope of salvation, if we look to ourselves (Psalm 143:2; Romans 3:20), how its fruit in this world is shame, and its wages in the world to come--death (Romans 6:21, 23). Think calmly about all this. I tell you this day, it is just as sad to be dying of cancer and not knowing it, as it is to be a living man, and not know it.

Think what an awful change sin has worked on all our natures. Man is no longer what he was when God formed him out of the dust of the ground. He came out of God's hand upright and sinless (Ecclesiastes 7:29). In the day of his creation he was, like everything else, "very good" (Genesis 1:31). And what is man now? A fallen creature, a ruin, a being that shows the marks of corruption all over, his heart like Nebuchadnezzar, degraded and earthly, looking down and not up, his affections like a household in disorder, calling no man master, all extravagance and confusion, his understanding like a lamp flickering in the socket, impotent to guide him, not knowing good from evil, his will like a rudderless ship, tossed to and fro by every desire, and constant only in choosing any way rather than God's.

What a wreck man is, compared to what he might have been! We may understand such figures being used as blindness, deafness, disease, sleep, death, when

the Spirit has to give us a picture of man as he is. And man as he is, remember, was made so by sin.

Think, too, what it has cost to make atonement for sin, and to provide a pardon and forgiveness for sinners. God's own Son must come into the world, and take upon Him our nature, in order to pay the price of our redemption, and deliver us from the curse of a broken law. He who was in the beginning with the Father, and by whom all things were made, must suffer for sin the just for the unjust--must die the death of a criminal, before the way to heaven can be laid open to any soul. See the Lord Jesus Christ despised and rejected of men, scourged, mocked, and insulted--look at Him bleeding on the cross of Calvary--hear Him crying in agony, "My God, my God, why have you

forsaken me?" Note how the sun was darkened, and the rocks shook at the sight; and then consider, young men, what must be the evil and guilt of sin.

Think, also, what sin has already done on the earth. Think how it threw Adam and Eve out of Eden, brought the flood upon the old world, caused fire to come down on Sodom and Gomorrah, drowned Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, destroyed the seven wicked nations of Canaan, scattered the twelve tribes of

Israel over the face of the earth. Sin alone did all this.

Think, moreover, of all the misery and sorrow that sin has caused, and is causing, to this very day. Pain, disease, death, strifes, quarrels, divisions, envy, jealousy, malice, deceit, fraud, and cheating, violence, oppression, robbery, selfishness, unkindness, and ingratitude; all these are the fruits of sin. Sin is the parent of them all. It is sin that has so marred and spoiled the face of God's creation.

Young men, consider these things, and you will not wonder that we preach as we do. Surely, if you did think of them, you would break with sin forever. Will you play with poison? Will you sport with hell? Will you take fire in your hand? Will you harbor your deadliest enemy in your arms? Will you go on living as if it mattered nothing, whether your sins were forgiven or not, whether sin had dominion over you, or you over sin? Oh, awake to a sense of sin's sinfulness and danger! Remember the words of Solomon: "Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright" (Proverbs 14:9).

Hear, then, the request that I make of you this day, pray that God would teach you the real evil of sin. If you would have your soul saved then get up and pray.

(2) Seek to become acquainted with our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is, indeed, the principal thing in Christianity. This is the cornerstone of Christianity. Till you know this, my warnings and advice will be useless, and your endeavors, whatever they may be, will be in vain. A watch that does not keep time is as useless as religion without Christ.

But don't let me be misunderstood. It is not the mere knowing of Christ's name that I mean, it is the knowing of His mercy, grace, and power, the knowing of Him not by the hearing of the ear, but by the experience of your hearts. I want you to know Him by faith, I want you, as Paul says, to know "the power of his resurrection; becoming like Him in His death" (Philippians 3:10). I want you to be able to say of Him, He is my peace and my strength, my life and my consolation, my Physician and my Shepherd, my Savior and my God.

Why do I make such a point of this? I do it because in Christ alone "all His [God's] fullness dwells" (Colossians 1:19), because in Him alone there is a full supply of all that we require for the needs of our souls. Of ourselves we are all poor, empty creatures, empty of righteousness and peace, empty of strength and comfort, empty of courage and patience, empty of power to stand, or go on, or make progress in this evil world. It is in Christ alone that all these things are to be found--grace, peace, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. It is just in proportion as we live upon Him, that we are strong Christians. It is only when self is nothing and Christ is all our confidence, it is only then that we shall do great exploits. Only then are we armed for the battle of life, and shall overcome. Only then are we prepared for the journey of life, and shall move forward.

To live on Christ, to draw all from Christ, to do all in the strength of Christ, to be ever looking to Christ; this is the true secret of spiritual prosperity. "I can do everything," says Paul, "through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Young men, I set before you Jesus Christ this day, as the treasury of your souls; and I invite you to begin by going to Him. Let this be your first step--go to Christ. Do you want to consult friends? He is the best friend: "a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). Do you feel unworthy because of your sins? Do not fear: His blood cleanses from all sin. He says, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (Isaiah 1:18). Do you feel weak, and unable to follow Him? Do not fear: He will give you the power to become sons of God. He will give you the Holy Spirit to live in you, and seal you for His own; He will give you a new heart, and He will put a new spirit within you. Are you troubled or beset with a strange bent to evil? Do not fear: there is no evil spirit that Jesus cannot cast out, there is no disease of soul that He cannot heal. Do you feel doubts and fears? Throw them aside: "Come to Me," He says; "whoever comes to me I will never drive away." He knows very well the heart of a young man. He knows your trials and your temptations, your difficulties and your foes. In the days of His flesh He was like yours--a young man at Nazareth. He knows by experience a young man's mind. He can understand the feeling of your temptations--because He Himself suffered when He was tempted. Surely you will be without excuse if you turn away from such a Savior and Friend as this.

Hear the request I make of you this day--if you love life, seek to become acquainted with Jesus Christ.

(3) Never forget that nothing is so important as your soul.

Your soul is eternal. It will live forever. The world and all that it contains will pass away--firm, solid, beautiful, well-ordered as it is, the world will come to an end. "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (2 Peter 3:10). The works of statesmen, writers, painters, architects, are all short lived: your soul will outlive them all. The angel's voice shall proclaim one day, that "There will be no more delay!" (Revelation 10:6).

Try, I beg you, to realize the fact, that your soul is the one thing worth living for. It is the part of you which ought always be considered first. No place, no employment is good for you, which injures your soul. No friend, no companion deserves your confidence, who makes light of your soul's concerns. The man who hurts you, your property, your character, only does you temporary harm. Your true enemy is the one who plots to damage your soul.

Think for a moment why you were born into the world. Not merely to eat and drink, and indulge the desires of the flesh, not merely to dress up your body, and follow its lusts wherever they may lead you, not merely to work, and sleep, and laugh, and talk, and enjoy yourselves, and think of nothing but time. No! you were meant for something higher and better than this. You were placed here to train for eternity. Your body was only intended to be a house for your immortal spirit. It is flying in the face of God's purposes to do as many do--to make the soul a servant to the body, and not the body a servant to the soul.

Young men, God does not show favoritism or respects the honors bestowed by men. He rewards no man's heritage, or wealth, or rank, or position. He does not see with man's eyes. The poorest saint that ever died in a ghetto is nobler in His sight than the richest sinner that ever died in a palace. God does not look at riches, titles, education, beauty, or anything of the kind. There is only one thing that God does look at, and that is the immortal soul. He measures all men by one standard, one measure, one test, one criterion, and that is the state of their souls.

Do not forget this. Keep it in view, morning, noon, and night, the interests of your soul. Rise up each day desiring that your soul may excel, lie down each evening, inquiring of yourself whether your soul has really grown. Remember Zeuxis, the great painter of old. When men asked him why he labored so intensely, and took such extreme pains with every picture, his simple answer was, "I paint for eternity." Do not be ashamed to be like him. Set your immortal soul before your mind's eye, and when men ask you why you live as you do, answer them in his spirit, "I live for my soul." Believe me, the day is fast coming when the soul will be the one thing men will think of, and the only question of importance will be this, "Is my soul lost or saved?"

(4) Remember it is possible to be a young man and yet to serve God.

I fear the snares that Satan lays for you on this point. I fear that he will succeed in filling your minds with the vain notion, that to be a true Christian as a youth is impossible. I have seen many carried away by this delusion. I have heard it said, "You are requiring an impossibility in expecting so much Christianity from young people. Youth is no time for seriousness. Our desires are strong, and it was never intended that we should keep them under such strong Christian control, as you wish us to do. God meant for us to enjoy ourselves. There will be plenty of time for religion in the future." And this kind of talk is only too much encouraged

by the world. The world is only too ready to wink at youthful sins. The world appears to think it a matter of course that young men must "sow their wild oats." The world seems to take it for granted that young people must be irreligious, and that it is not possible for them to follow Christ.

Young men, I will ask you this simple question--Where will you find anything of this in the Word of God? Where is the chapter or verse in the Bible which will support this talking and reasoning of the world? Doesn't the Bible speak to old and young alike, without distinction? Is not sin--sin, whether committed at the age of twenty or fifty? Will it form the slightest excuse, in the day of judgment, to say, "I know I sinned, but I was young then?" Show your common sense, I beg of you, by giving up such vain excuses. You are responsible and accountable to God from the very moment that you know right and wrong.

I know very well that there are many difficulties in a man's way. But there are always difficulties in the way of doing right. The path to heaven is always narrow, whether we be young or old.

THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG MENcontd

There are difficulties, but God will give you the grace to overcome them. God is no hard master. He will not, like Pharaoh, require you to make bricks without straw. He will make sure that the path He requires us to walk is never an impossible road. He never gave commands to man which He would not give man the power to perform.

There are difficulties, but many a young man has overcome them in the past, and so can you. Moses was a young man with passions like yourself; but see what is said of him in Scripture: "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26). Daniel was a young man when he began to serve God in Babylon. He was surrounded by temptations of every kind. He had few people with him, and many against him. Yet Daniel's life was so blameless and consistent, that even his enemies could not find any fault in him, except "it has something to do with the law of his God" (Daniel 6:5). And these are not solitary cases. There is a cloud of witnesses whom I could name. Time would not allow me, if I were to tell you of young Isaac, young Joseph, young Joshua, young Samuel, young David, young Solomon, young Abijah, young Obadiah, young Josiah, young Timothy. These were not angels, but men, with natural hearts like your own. They too had obstacles to contend with,

lusts to mortify, trials to endure, hard places to travel, like any of you. But young as they were, they all found it possible to serve God. Will they not all rise in judgment and condemn you, if you persist in saying it cannot be done?

Young men, try to serve God. Resist the devil when he whispers it is impossible. Try, and the Lord God of the promises will give you strength in the trying. He loves to meet those who struggle to come to Him, and He will meet you and give you the power that you feel you need. Be like the man whom Bunyan's Pilgrim saw in the Interpreter's house, go forward boldly, saying "Write down my name." Those words of our Lord are true, though I often hear them repeated by heartless and unfeeling tongues: "Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

Difficulties which seemed like mountains shall melt away like snow in spring. Obstacles which seemed like giants in the distance, will dwindle into nothing when you actually face them. The lion that blocks the way that you are traveling and causes you great fear, will prove to be chained and unable to harm you. If men believed the promises more, they would never be afraid of their assigned duties. But remember that little word I press upon you, and when Satan says, "You cannot be a Christian while you are young:" answer him, "Get behind me, Satan: by God's help I will try."

(5) Determine as long as you live to make the Bible your guide and adviser.

The Bible is God's merciful provision for sinful man's soul, the map by which he must steer his course, if he would attain eternal life. All that we need to know, in order to make us peaceful, holy, or happy, is richly contained there. If a young man wants to know how to begin his life well, let him hear what David says: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word" (Psalm 119:9).

Young men, I charge you to make a habit of reading the Bible, and not to let the habit be broken. Do not let the laughter of friends, do not let the bad customs of the family you live in, don't let any of these things prevent your doing it. Determine that you will not only have a Bible, but also make time to read it too. Allow no man to persuade you that it is only a book for Sunday school children and old women. It is the book from which King David got wisdom and understanding. It is the book which young Timothy knew from his childhood. Never be ashamed of reading it. Do not "scorn instruction" (Proverbs 13:13).

Read it with the prayer that the Holy Spirit's grace will help you understand it. It has been said, "A man may just as soon read the Scripture without eyes, as understand the spirit of it without grace."

Read it reverently, as the Word of God, not of man, believing implicitly that what it approves is right, and what it condemns is wrong. Be very sure that every doctrine which will not stand the test of Scripture is false. This will keep you from being tossed to and fro, and carried about by the dangerous opinions of these latter days. Be very sure that every practice in your life which is contrary to Scripture, is sinful and must be given up. This will settle many a question of conscience, and cut the knot of many a doubt. Remember how differently two kings of Judah read the Word of God: Jehoiakim read it, and at once tore the page to pieces, and burned it in the fire (Jeremiah 36:23). And why? Because his heart rebelled against it, and he was resolved not to obey. Josiah read it, and at once tore his clothes, and cried mightily to the Lord (2 Chronicles 34:19). And why? Because his heart was tender and obedient. He was ready to do anything which Scripture

showed him was his duty. Oh that you may follow the last of these two, and not the first!

And read it regularly. This is the only way to become "mighty in the Scriptures." A quick glance at the Bible now and then does little good. At that rate you will never become familiar with its treasures, or feel the sword of the Spirit fitted to your hand in the hour of conflict. But store up your mind with Scripture, by diligent reading, and you will soon discover its value and power. Texts will rise up in your hearts in the moment of temptation. Commands will suggest themselves in times of doubt. Promises will come across your thoughts in the time of discouragement. And thus you will experience the truth of David's words, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11); and of Solomon's words, "When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch

over you; when you awake, they will speak to you" (Proverbs 6:22).

I dwell on these things more because this is an age of reading. There seems no end to the producing of many books, though few of them are really profitable. There seems a rage for cheap printing and publishing. Newspapers of every sort abound, and the tone of some, which have the widest circulation, speaks badly for the taste of the age. Amidst the flood of dangerous reading, I plead for my Master's book, I call upon you not to forget the book of the soul. Do not let

newspapers, novels, and romances be read, while the prophets and Apostles be despised. Do not let the exciting and sensual swallow up your attention, while the edifying and the sanctifying can find no place in your mind.

Young men, give the Bible the honor due to it every day you live. Whatever you read, read that first. And beware of bad books: there are plenty in this day. Take heed what you read. I suspect there is more harm done to souls in this way than most people have an idea is possible. Value all books in proportion as they are agreeable to Scripture. Those that are nearest to it are the best, and those that are farthest from it, and most contrary to it, the worst.

(6) Never make an intimate friend of anyone who is not a friend of God.

Understand me, I do not speak of acquaintances. I do not mean that you ought to have nothing to do with anyone but true Christians. To take such a line is neither possible nor desirable in this world. Christianity requires no man to be discourteous.

But I do advise you to be very careful in your choice of friends. Do not open all your heart to a man merely because he is clever, agreeable, good-natured, and kind. These things are all very well in their way, but they are not everything. Never be satisfied with the friendship of any one who will not be useful to your soul.

Believe me, the importance of this advice cannot be overrated. There is no telling the harm that is done by associating with godless companions and friends. The devil has few better helps in ruining a man's soul. Grant him this help, and he cares little for all the armor with which you may be armed against him. Good education, early habits of morality, sermons, books, all, he knows well, will avail you little, if you will only cling to ungodly friends. You may resist many open temptations, refuse many plain snares; but once you take up a bad companion, and he is content. That awful chapter which describes Amnon's wicked conduct about Tamar, almost begins with these words, "Now Amnon had a friend, a very shrewd man" (2 Samuel 13:3).

You must remember, we are all creatures of imitation: precept may teach us, but it is example that draws us. There is that in us all, that we are always disposed to catch the ways of those with whom we live; and the more we like them, the stronger does the disposition grow. Without our being aware of it, they influence our tastes and opinions; we gradually give up what they dislike, and take up what they like, in order to become closer friends with them. And, worst of all, we catch their ways in things that are wrong far quicker than in things that are right. Health, unhappily, is not contagious, but disease is. It is far more easy to catch a chill than to impart a warmth; and to make each other's religion dwindle away, than grow and prosper.

Young men, I ask you to take these things to heart. Before you let any one become your constant companion, before you get into the habit of telling him everything, and going to him with all your troubles and all your pleasures--before you do this, just think of what I have been saying; ask yourself, "Will this be a useful friendship to me or not?"

"Bad company" does indeed "corrupt good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33). I wish that text were written in the hearts of all young men. Good friends are among our greatest blessings; they may keep us away from much evil, remind us of our course, speak an appropriate word at the right time, draw us upward, and draw us on. But a bad friend is a burden, a weight continually dragging,

us down, and chaining us to earth. Keep company with an unsaved man, and it is more than probable you will in the end become like him. That is the general consequence of all such friendships. The good go down to the bad, and the bad do not come up to the good. The world's proverb is only too correct: "Clothes and company tell true tales about character." "Show me who a man lives with and I will show you what he is."

I dwell upon this point, because it has more to do with your prospects in life than first appears. If you ever marry, it is more than probable you will choose a wife from among your circle of friends or their acquaintances. If Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had not formed a friendship with Ahab's family, he would most likely not have married Ahab's daughter. And who can estimate the importance of a right choice in marriage? It is a step which, according to the old saying, "either makes a man or ruins him." Your happiness in both lives may depend on it. Your wife must either help your soul or harm it. She will either fan the flame of Christianity in your heart, or throw cold water upon it, and make it burn low. She will either be, wings or handcuffs, an encouragement or an hindrance to your Christianity, according to her character. He that finds a good wife does indeed "finds a good thing;" so if you have the desire to find one, be very careful how you choose your friends.

Do you ask me what kind of friends you should choose? Choose friends who will benefit your soul, friends whom you can really respect, friends whom you would like to have near you on your deathbed, friends who love the Bible, and are not afraid to speak to you about it, friends that you would not be ashamed of having at the coming of Christ, and the day of judgment. Follow the example that David sets for you: he says, "I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts" (Psalm 119:63). Remember the words of Solomon: "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Proverbs 13:20). But depend on it, bad company in this life, is the sure way to procure worse company in the life to come.

IV. Special Rules for Young Men

4. In the last place, I will set down some particular rules of conduct which I strongly advise all young men to follow.

(1) For one thing, resolve at once, by God's help, to break off every known sin, however small.

Look within, each one of you. Examine your own hearts. Do you see there any habit or custom which you know is wrong in the sight of God? If you do, don't delay for a moment in attacking it. Resolve at once to lay it aside. Nothing, darkens the eyes of the mind so much, and deadens the conscience so surely, as an allowed sin. It may be a little one, but it is not any less dangerous. A small leak will sink a great ship, and a small spark will kindle a great fire, and a little allowed sin in like manner will ruin an immortal soul. Take my advice, and never spare a little sin. Israel was commanded to kill every Canaanite, both great and small. Act on the same principle, and show no mercy to little sins. Well says the book of the Song of Songs, "Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards"

(Song of Songs 2:15).

You can be sure that no wicked man ever meant to be so wicked at his first beginnings. But he began with allowing himself some little sins, and that led on to something greater, and that in time produced something greater still, and thus he became the miserable being that he now is. When

Hazael heard from Elisha of the horrible acts that he would one day do, he said with astonishment, "How could your servant, a mere dog, accomplish such a feat?" (2 Kings 8:13). But he allowed sin to take root in his heart, and in the end he did them all.

Young men, resist sin in its beginnings. They may look small and insignificant, but mind what I say, resist them, make no compromise, let no sin lodge quietly and undisturbed in your heart. There is nothing finer than the point of a needle, but when it has made a hole, it draws all the thread after it. Remember the Apostle's words, "A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" (1 Corinthians 5:6).

Many a young man could tell you with sorrow and shame, that he traces the ruin of all his worldly prospects to the point I speak of--to giving way to sin in its beginnings. He began habits of deception and dishonesty in little things, and they grew on him. Step by step, he has gone on from bad to worse, till he has done things that at one time he would have thought impossible till at last he has lost his standing, lost his character, lost his peace, and almost lost his soul. He allowed a gap in the wall of his conscience, because it seemed a little one, and once allowed, that gap grew larger every day, till in time the whole wall seemed to come down.

Remember this especially in matters of truth and honesty. Be careful in even the least syllable spoken. "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much" (Luke 16:10). Whatever the world may like to think, there are no little sins. All great buildings are made up of little parts--the first stone is as important as any other. All habits are formed by a succession of little acts, and the first little act is of mighty consequence. The axe in the fable only begged the trees to let him have one little piece of wood to make a handle, and he would never trouble them any more. He got it, and then he soon cut them all down. The devil only wants

to get the wedge of a little allowed sin into your heart, and you will soon be all his own. It is a wise saying, "There is nothing small between us and God, for God is an infinite God."

There are two ways of coming down from the top of a ladder; one is to jump down, and the other is to come down by the steps: but both will lead you to the bottom. So also there are two ways of going to hell; one is to walk into it with your eyes open--few people do that; the other is to go down by the steps of little sins--and that way, I fear, is only too common. Put up with a few little sins, and you will soon want a few more. Even a heathen could say, "Who was ever content with only one sin?" If you put up with little sins then your path in life will be worse and worse every year. Jeremy Taylor very clearly described the progress of sin in a man:

First it startles him, then it becomes pleasing, then easy, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then a way of life! Then the man

feels no guilt, then obstinate, then resolves never to repent, and then he is damned.

Young men, if you don't want to come to this, remember the rule I give you this day--resolve at once to break off every known sin.

(2) Resolve, by God's help, to shun everything which may prove an occasion of sin.

It is an excellent saying, "He that would be safe from the acts of evil, must widely avoid the occasions." There is an old fable, that the butterfly once asked the owl how she should deal with

the fire, which had singed her wings; and the owl counseled her, in reply, not to even look at its smoke. It is not enough that we determine not to commit sin, we must carefully keep at a distance from all approaches to it. By this test we ought to examine the ways we spend our time--the books that we read, the friends that we visit, the part of society which we interact with. We must not be content with saying, "There is nothing wrong here;" we must go further, and say, "Is there anything here which may cause me to sin?"

This is one great reason why idleness is to be avoided. It is not that doing nothing is of itself so wicked; it is the opportunity it affords to evil and empty thoughts; it is the wide door it opens for Satan to throw in the seeds of bad things; it is this which is mainly to be feared. If David had not given opportunity to the devil, by walking on his house-top in Jerusalem with nothing to do, he probably never would have seen Bathsheba bathing, nor murdered her husband Uriah.

This, too, is one good reason why worldly entertainments are so objectionable. It may be difficult, in some instances, to show that they are, in themselves, positively unscriptural and wrong. But there is little difficulty in showing that the tendency of almost all of them is most injurious to the soul. They sow the seeds of an earthly and sensual frame of mind. They war against the life of faith. They promote an unhealthy and unnatural craving after excitement. They minister to the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. They dim the view of heaven and eternity, and give a false color to the things of time. They take away time for private prayer, and Scripture reading, and calm communion with God. The man who mingles in them is like one who gives Satan an advantage. He has a battle to fight, and he gives his enemy the help of sun, and wind, and hill. It would indeed be strange if he did not find himself continually overcome.

Young men, endeavor, as much as you can, to keep clear of everything which may prove injurious to your soul. People may say you are too conscientious, too particular, and ask where is the great harm of such and such things? But don't listen to them. It is dangerous to play tricks with sharp tools: it is far more dangerous to take liberties with your immortal soul. He that would be safe must not come near the brink of danger. He must look on his heart as a barrel of gunpowder, and be cautious not to handle one spark of temptation more than he can help.

What is the use of your praying, "Lord keep me from temptation," unless you are careful not to run into it and "keep me from evil," unless you show a desire to keep out of its way? Take an example from Joseph--Not merely did he refuse solicitation to sin from his master's wife, but he showed his prudence in refusing to even be "with her" (Genesis 39:10). Take to heart the advice of Solomon, not only to "Not set foot on the path of the wicked," but to "Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go your way" (Proverbs 4:15); "Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly!" (Proverbs 23:31). The man who took the vow of a Nazarite in Israel, not only took no wine, but he even abstained from grapes in any shape whatever. "Hate what is evil," says Paul to the Romans (Romans 12:9); not merely not to do it; "Flee the evil desires of youth," he writes to Timothy; get away from them as far as possible (2 Timothy 2:22). Oh, how needful are such cautions! Dinah just had go out among the wicked Shechemites, to see their ways, and she lost her virginity. Lot just had pitched his tent near sinful Sodom, and he lost everything but his life.

Young men, be wise with your time. Do not always be trying to see how near you can allow the enemy of souls to come, and yet escape him. Hold him at arm's length. Try to keep clear of

temptation as far as possible, and this will be one great help to keep clear of sin.

(3) Resolve never to forget the eye of God.

The eye of God! Think of that. Everywhere, in every house, in every field, in every room, in every company, alone or in a crowd, the eye of God is always on you. "The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good" (Proverbs 15:3), and they are eyes that read hearts as well as actions.

Endeavor, I beg you, to realize this fact. Remember that you have to deal with an all-seeing God, a God who never sleeps, a God who understands your thoughts, and with whom the night shines as the day. You may leave your father's house, and go away, like the prodigal, into a far country, and think that there is nobody to watch your conduct; but the eye and ear of God are there before you. You may deceive your parents or employers, you may tell them lies, and act one way before their faces, and another behind their backs, but you cannot deceive God. He knows you through and through. He heard what you said as you came here today. He knows what you are thinking of at this minute. He has set your most secret sins in the light of His countenance, and they will one day come out before the world to your shame, except you take heed.

How little is this really felt! How many things are done continually, which men would never do if they thought they were seen! How many matters are transacted in the rooms of imagination, which would never bear the light of day! Yes; men entertain thoughts in private, and say words in private, and do acts in private, which they would be ashamed and blush to have exposed before the world. The sound of a footstep coming has stopped many a deed of wickedness. A knock at the door has caused many an evil work to be hastily suspended, and hurriedly laid aside. But oh, what miserable folly is all this! There is an all-seeing Witness with us wherever we go. Lock the door, pull down the blind, turn out the light; it doesn't matter, it makes no difference; God is everywhere, you cannot shut Him out, or prevent His seeing. "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). Young Joseph understood this well when his employer's wife tempted him. There was no one in the house to see them, no human eye to

witness against him; but Joseph was one who lived as seeing Him that is invisible: "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

(Genesis 39:9)

Young men, I ask all of you to read Psalm 139. I advise all of you to learn it by heart. Make it the test of all your dealings in this world's business: say to yourself often, "Do I remember that God sees me?"

Psalm 139

"O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain."

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,’ even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.”

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

“How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.”

“If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

“Live as in the sight of God. This is what Abraham did, he walked before Him. This is what Enoch did, he walked with Him. This is what heaven itself will be, the eternal presence of God. Do nothing that you would not like God to see. Say nothing, you would not like God to hear. Write nothing, you would not like God to read. Go no place where you would not like God to find you. Read no book of which you would not like God to say, ‘Show it to Me.’ Never spend your time in such a way that you would not like to have God say, ‘What are you doing?’”

(4) Be diligent in the practice of your Christianity.

Be regular in going to church, whenever it is open for prayer and preaching, and it is in your power to attend. Be regular in keeping, the Lord's day holy, and determine that God's day out of the seven shall always be given to its rightful owner.

I would not want to leave any false impression on your minds. Do not go away and say I told you that going to church made up the whole of Christianity. I will tell you no such thing. I have no wish to see you grow up formalists and Pharisees. If you think the mere carrying of your body to a certain building, at certain times, on a certain day in the week, will make you a Christian, and prepare you to meet God, I tell you flatly you are miserably deceived. All services without heart-service are unprofitable and vain. They only are true worshipers who "Worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks" (John 4:23).

But the practices of Christianity are not to be despised because they are not saviors. Gold is not food, you cannot eat it, but you would not say it is useless, and throw it away. Your soul's eternal well-being most certainly does not depend on the practices of Christianity, but it is certain that without them, as a general rule, your soul will not do well. God might take all who are saved to heaven in a chariot of fire, as He did Elijah, but He does not do so. He might teach them all by visions, and dreams, and miraculous interventions, without requiring them to read or think for

themselves, but He does not do so. And why not? Because He is a God that works by means, and it is His law and will that in all man's dealings with Him means shall be used. No one but a fool would think of building a house

without ladders and scaffolding, and just so no wise man will despise means.

I dwell on this point, because Satan will try hard to fill your minds with arguments against the practices of Christianity. He will draw your attention to the numbers of persons who use them and are no better for the using. "See there," he will whisper, "do you not observe that those who go to church are no better than those who stay away?" But do not let this move you. It is never fair to argue against a thing because it is improperly used. It does not follow that the practices of Christianity can do no good because many do them and get no good from them. Medicine is not to be despised because many take it and do not recover their health. No man would think of giving up eating, and drinking because others choose to eat and drink improperly, and so make themselves sick. The value of the practices of Christianity, like other things, depends, in a great measure, on the manner and spirit in which we use them.

I dwell on this point too, because of the strong anxiety I feel that every young man should regularly hear the preaching of Christ's gospel. I cannot tell you how important I think this is. By God's blessing, the ministry of the gospel might be the means of converting, your soul, of leading you to a saving knowledge of Christ, of making you a child of God in action and in truth. This would indeed be cause for eternal thankfulness. This would be an event over which angels would rejoice. But even if this were not the case, there is a restraining power and influence in the ministry of the gospel, under which I earnestly desire every young man to be brought. There are thousands whom it keeps back from evil, though it has not yet turned them to God--it has made them far better members of society--though it has not yet made them true Christians. There is a certain kind of mysterious power in the faithful preaching of the gospel, which has an effect on multitudes who

listen to it without receiving it into their hearts. To hear sin exposed for what it is, and holiness lifted up, to hear Christ exalted, and the words of the devil denounced--to hear the kingdom of heaven and its blessedness described, and the world and its emptiness exposed; to hear this week after week, Sunday after Sunday, is seldom without a good effect to the soul. It makes it far harder afterwards to run out and commit gross sins. It acts as a wholesome check upon a man's heart. This, I believe, is one way in which that promise of God is made good, "My word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty" (Isaiah 55:11). There is so much truth in that strong saying of Whitefield, "The gospel keeps many a person from going to jail and from being hanged, if it does not keep him from hell."

Let me name another point which is closely connected with this subject. Let nothing ever tempt you to become a Christian who does not make every effort to attend church on Sunday and make the day special to the Lord. Make up your mind to give all your Sundays to God. A spirit of disregard for this day is growing up among us with fearful rapidity, and not least among young men. Sunday vacations, Sunday visiting, Sunday excursions, to the exclusion of church attendance and honoring of the Lord, are becoming more common every year than they were, and are doing infinite harm to souls.

Young men, be jealous on this point. Whether you live in the city or in the country, take up a decided line; resolve not to miss church on Sunday and the fellowship of God's people. Do not let the plausible argument of "needing to sleep-in to rest your body," do not let not the example of all those around you, do not let the invitation of companions pull you away from fellowship and worship; let none of these things move you to depart from this settled rule, that Sunday's are for God's honor and for fellowship with His people.

Once you don't consider Sundays important or anything special in your Christian life, then in the end you will give up caring for your soul. The steps which lead to this conclusion are easy and common. Begin with not honoring the Lord's Day, and you will soon not honor God's people; cease to honor God's book; and in time you will give God no honor at all. Let a man lay the foundation of having no respect for God's worship or the fellowship of the saints, and I am never surprised if he finishes with no God. It is a remarkable saying of Judge Hale, "Of all the persons who were convicted of capital crimes while he was on the bench, he found only a few who would not confess, on inquiry, that they began their career of wickedness by a neglect of the church and God's people."

Young men, you may have friends who forget the honor of the Lord's day; but resolve, by God's help, that you will always remember to keep it special. Honor it by a regular attendance at some place where the gospel is preached. Settle down under a faithful ministry, and once settled, let your place in church never be empty. Believe me, you will find a special blessing following you: "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD'S holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob" (Isaiah 58:13-14). And one thing is very certain, your feelings about Sunday and the fellowship will always be a test and criterion of your fitness for heaven. Fellowship and worship are a foretaste and a fragment of heaven. The man who finds them a burden and not a privilege, may be sure that his heart stands in need of a mighty change.

(5) Resolve that wherever you are, you will pray.

Prayer is the life-breath of a man's soul. Without it, we may have a name to live, and be counted Christians; but we are dead in the sight of God. The feeling that we must cry to God for mercy and peace is a mark of salvation; and the habit of spreading before Him our soul's needs is an evidence that we have the spirit of adoption. And prayer is the appointed way to obtain the relief of our spiritual necessities. It opens the treasury, and sets the fountain flowing. If we don't have, it is because we don't ask.

Prayer is the way to procure the outpouring of the Spirit upon our hearts. Jesus has promised the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. He is ready to come down with all His precious gifts, renewing, sanctifying, purifying, strengthening, cheering, encouraging, enlightening, teaching, directing, guiding, into all truth. But then He waits to be asked.

And here it is, I say it with sorrow, here it is that men fall short so miserably. Few indeed are to be found who pray: there are many who go down on their knees, and say a form perhaps, but few who pray; few who cry out to God, few who call on the Lord, few who seek as if they wanted to

find, few who knock as if they hungered and thirsted, few who wrestle, few who strive with God earnestly for an answer, few who give Him no rest, few who continue in prayer, few who pray always without ceasing and do not grow weak. Yes: few pray! It is just one of the things assumed as a matter of course, but seldom practiced; a thing which is everybody's business, but in fact hardly anybody performs.

Young men, believe me, if your soul is to be saved, you must pray. God has no speechless children. If you are to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil, you must pray: it is in vain to look for strength in the hour of trial, if it has not been sought for. You may be thrown in with those who never do it, you may have to sleep in the same room with someone who never asks anything of God, still, mark my words, you must pray.

I can believe that you find it difficult to do, difficulties about opportunities to pray, and times to pray, and places to pray. I dare not lay down too strict rules on such points as these. I leave them to your own conscience. You must be guided by circumstances. Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed on a mountain; Isaac prayed in the fields; Hezekiah turned his face to the wall as he lay upon his bed; Daniel prayed by the riverside; Peter, the Apostle, on the housetop. I have heard of young men praying in stables and haylofts. All that I contend for is this, you must know what it is to "go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen"

(Matthew 6:6). There must be stated times when you must speak to God face to face, you must every day have your times for prayer--You must pray.

Without this, all my advice and counsel is useless. This is that piece of spiritual armor which Paul names last in his list, in Ephesians 6, but it is in truth that is first in value and importance. This is that meat which you must eat daily, if you would travel safely through the wilderness of this life. It is only in the strength of this that you will get onward towards the mountain of God. I have heard it said that some people who grind metal sometimes wear a magnetic mouthpiece at their work, which catches all the fine metal dust that flies around them, prevents it from entering their lungs, and so saves their lives. Prayer is the mouthpiece that you must wear continually, or else you will never work uninjured by the unhealthy atmosphere of this sinful world. You must pray.

Young men, be sure no time is so well spent as that which a man spends on his knees. Make time for this, whatever your situation may be. Think of David, King of Israel: what does he say? "Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice" (Psalm 55:17). Think of Daniel. He had all the business of a kingdom on his hands; yet he prayed three times a day. See there the secret of his safety in wicked Babylon. Think of Solomon. He begins his reign with prayer for help and assistance, and hence his wonderful prosperity. Think of Nehemiah. He could find time to pray to the God of heaven, even when standing in the presence of his master, Artaxerxes. Think of the example these good men have left you, and go and do likewise.

Oh that the Lord may give you all the spirit of grace and supplication! "Have you not just called to me: 'My Father, my friend from my youth'" (Jeremiah 3:4). Gladly would I consent to the fact that all of this message should be forgotten, if only this doctrine of the importance of prayer might be impressed on your hearts.

V. Conclusion

And now I hurry towards a conclusion. I have said things that many perhaps will not like, and not receive; but I appeal to your consciences, Are they not true?

Young men, you all have consciences. Corrupt and ruined by the fall as we are, each of us has a conscience. In a corner of each heart there sits a witness for God, a witness who condemns when we do wrong, and approves when we do right. To that witness I make my appeal this day, are not the things that I have been saying true?

Go then, young men, and resolve this day to remember your Creator in the days of your youth. Before the day of grace is past, before your conscience has become hardened by age, and deadened by repeated trampling under foot, while you have strength, and time, and opportunities, go and join yourself to the Lord in an everlasting covenant not to be forgotten. The Spirit will not always strive. The voice of conscience will become feebler and fainter every year you continue to resist it. The Athenians said to Paul, "We want to hear you again on this subject" but they had heard him for the last time (Acts 17:32). Make haste, and don't delay. Linger and hesitate no more.

Think of the unspeakable comfort you will give to parents, relatives, and friends, if you take my counsel. They have expended time, money, and health to raise you, and make you what you are. Surely they deserve some consideration. Who can know the joy and gladness which young people have in their power to give? Who can tell the anxiety and sorrow that sons like Esau, and Hophni, and Phinehas, and Absalom may cause? Truly indeed does Solomon say, "A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother" (Proverbs 10:1). Oh, consider these things, and give God your heart! Let it not be said of you at last, as it is of many, that your "youth was a disorder, your manhood a struggle, and your old age a regret."

Think of the good you might be doing for the world. Almost all the eminent saints of God sought the Lord early. Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel, all served God from their youth. God seems to delight in putting special honor upon young servants; and think of what we could expect, if young men in our own day would consecrate the springtime of their lives to God? Workers are wanted now in almost every great and good cause, and cannot be found. Technology of every kind for spreading truth exists, but there are not people to make it work.

Money is more easily obtained for doing good than men. Ministers are wanted for new churches, missionaries are wanted for new fields, teachers are wanted

for Sunday School, many a good cause is standing still merely for want of workers. The supply of godly, faithful, trustworthy men, for posts like those I have named, is far below the demand.

Young men of the present day, you are wanted for God. This is an age of activity. We are shaking off some of our past selfishness. Men no longer sleep the sleep of apathy and indifference about others, as their forefathers did. They are beginning to be ashamed of thinking like Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" A wide field of usefulness is open before you, if you are only willing to enter into it. The harvest is great, and the workers are few. Be zealous of good works. Come, come to the aid of the Lord against the wickedness of this age.

This is, in some sort, to be like God, not only good, but doing good (Psalm 119:68). This is the way to follow the steps of your Lord and Savior: "He went around doing good" (Acts 10:38).

And who can doubt that this is the path which makes an immortal soul beautiful? Who would not rather leave this world like Josiah, grieved by all, than depart like Jehoram, "to no one's regret?" (2 Chronicles 21:20). Is it better to be idle, frivolous, to live for your body, your selfishness, your lusts, and your pride, or to spend and be spent in the glorious cause of usefulness to your fellow men--to be a blessing to your country and the world, to be the friend of the prisoner and the captive, to be the spiritual father of hundreds of immortal souls in heathen lands, to be a burning and a shining light, an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men, the

inspiration of every Christian heart that comes across your path? Oh, who can doubt? Who can for one moment doubt?

Young men, consider your responsibilities. Think of the privilege and luxury of doing good. Resolve this day to be useful. Give your hearts at once to Christ.

Think, lastly, of the happiness that will come to your own soul, if you serve God, happiness as you travel through life, and happiness in the end, when the journey is over. Believe me, whatever vain notions you may have heard, believe me, there is a reward for the righteous even in this world. Godliness has indeed the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come. There is a solid peace in feeling that God is your friend. There is a real satisfaction in knowing that however your unworthiness, you are complete in Christ, that you have an enduring portion, that you have chosen that good part which shall not be taken from you.

The backslider in heart may well be content with his own ways, but "the good man [will be] rewarded for his" (Proverbs 14:14). The path of the worldly

man grows darker and darker every year that he lives; the path of the Christian is like a shining light, brighter and brighter to the very end. His sun is just rising when the sun of the worldly is setting forever; his best things are all beginning to blossom and bloom forever, when those of the worldly are all slipping out of his hands, and passing away.

Young men, these things are true. Listen to the word of exhortation. Be persuaded. Take up the cross. Follow Christ. Yield yourselves to God.

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