

BRIGHT RAYS AND REVIVING SHOWERS!

by James Smith

Smith's collection of meditations and sermons emphasizing practical Christianity focused on glorifying God through service to others, leading readers from self-centeredness to Christ and motivating missionary zeal.

46 Chapters

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00 Bright Rays and Reviving Showers!

Bright Rays and Reviving Showers! A Book for All People and All Times James Smith, 1865

00p PREFACE

PREFACE

To glorify God, by doing good to men — is the great end of the present life; and it is only as we keep the eye on this object, that we answer the design of God in our creation and salvation. The Lord has formed us for himself, that we may show forth his praise. God aims at our welfare in connection with his own honor, in all that he does; and in proportion as we are taught by his Spirit, influenced by his love, and ruled by his word — we shall do the same. Self must be dethroned — that Jehovah may be exalted. Selfishness must be crucified — that benevolence may be displayed. God must be imitated in his moral perfections if we would prove our relationship to him, and union with him.

"Be therefore merciful — as your Father also is merciful." Thus spoke Jesus to his beloved disciples. "Be imitators of God as dear children," is Paul's exhortation to his brethren at Ephesus. And thus we are exhorted by the Holy Spirit, through him. To bring souls to Christ is of immense importance, and to stir up believers to assist in doing so, is only second in importance to it: and such is the aim and object of this book.

Yes, to glorify God by bringing souls to Christ, and to stir up believers to engage in this great work, is the object we have in view. Reader, we wish to render you holy and happy; and this can only be done by leading you to receive Christ as your Savior, and then engaging you heartily and constantly in his cause. It is only in doing good — that we expect to get good; and it is only as we aim at God's glory in all that we do — that we can benefit the souls of others, or secure solid happiness to ourselves. In this work you will find:

variety — and yet harmony;

law — as well as gospel;

works — as well as faith;

love — as well as light;

bright beams — as well as dark clouds.

We wish . . .

to awaken conscience,

to arouse the affections,

to lead to the Savior,

to consecrate to God,

to engage in his service for his praise.

Time flies! Death is working in us! And eternity is just before us! Let us, therefore, work while we have the opportunity, as it will soon be gone forever.

Reader, are you in Christ? Have you the Spirit of Christ? Are you laboring for Christ? Is it your object and aim to bring sinners to Christ? Ponder these questions well. They are deeply solemn, and of the greatest importance. If you are a stranger to experimental religion, may the Lord make this little work a blessing to you. If you are a believer in Jesus, enjoying nearness and fellowship with him — lift up your heart to God, that he would accompany this feeble instrument with his own powerful blessing. Oh, You who use the weak things of this world, and things that are despised — use this little book for the glorifying of your rich grace: and render it the means of leading thousands of souls to Jesus, for your great mercy's sake. Amen.

01 A New Year's Motto!

A New Year's Motto!

"Look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near!" Luke 21:28 The time of his second coming approaches, and it befits his disciples to think of that event, and diligently prepare for it. But if we do not witness the descent of our Lord in the clouds — death will soon come and usher us into his presence; and before that we may be exposed to many and painful troubles, so that the direction given by our Lord to his disciples may be just suitable, "Then look up!"

We are entering upon a new year, we shall have new toils, new trials, new temptations, and new troubles; but whenever they come — let us "look up!" And, with a view to encourage our souls to do so, let us, at the opening of the year, consider —

First, the OCCASIONS to which this advice is applicable. There may be national calamities — such as pestilence, famine, or war; but whatever comes upon the nation, the Christians in it should "look up"

There may be persecution — laborers may lose their jobs, cottagers their cottages, and children many of their comforts, for Christ's and conscience' sake. While the sword of the magistrate is sheathed, the pen, the tongue, the frowning countenance — persecutes some; the withholding employment or custom persecutes others; but if persecution should rage against any of us this year, let us "look up."

Providence may frown and throw us into perplexity and difficulty; losses and crosses may become almost our daily lot; we may think that God is turned against us, and that everything is contrary to us; but when our circumstances are most trying, when our souls are ready to faint within us — then let us remember the Lord has engaged for us by promise and by covenant, and let us "look up."

We may be called to change our residences, and leave dear friends and connections behind us; or, what is worse, our friends may be alienated from us, and turn against us; but if every friend frowns upon us, even if father and mother forsake us, or if we be removed to the ends of the earth — let us remember that our God is the same to us, and that he is ever near us; therefore let us "look up."

If death should enter in at our windows, and take away the desire of our eyes with a stroke; if our parents should die, our children be removed, or our wives or husbands be laid in the grave; though lover and friend be removed far from us, and our acquaintance into darkness, still, whatever death may do — let us determine that we will "look up."

If darkness becloud our evidences, obscure our path, and throw its gloom over our minds; if discouragement brood over our souls, or place stumbling-blocks in our way; if all our past experience appear questionable, and our acceptance with God at present doubtful, still let us not

give way or yield to despondency — but let us "look up."

If thrown on the bed of sickness, racked with pain and fainting with weakness; if death stand before us, and the grave appear ready for us; if eternity throws its revealing light upon us, or draws back its curtain to us — let us not tremble, or shake with fear, but let us "look up." In whatever state, in whatever place, into whatever condition we may be brought this year — let us seek grace to follow our Lord's loving advice, and "look up" We will now notice —

Secondly, the DIRECTION our Savior gives: "Then look up!" Do not look back — as Lot's wife did. Do not look within — as too many do. Do not look around — as David did. But "look up!" Look up to God — He is your Father, your Friend, your Savior. He can help you. He will help you. He says, "Look unto Me, and be delivered — for I am God!"

Look up for light to guide you — and He will direct your path.

Look up for grace to sanctify you — and the grace of Jesus will be found sufficient for you.

Look up for strength to enable you to do and suffer God's will — and His strength will be made perfect in your weakness.

Look up for comfort to cheer you — and as one whom his mother comforts, so will the Lord comfort you.

Look up for courage to embolden you — and the Lord will give courage to the faint; and to those who have no might — He will increase strength.

Look up for endurance to keep you — and the God who preserves you will enable you quietly to bear the heaviest burden, and silently to endure the most painful affliction.

Look up for providence to supply you — and the jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry; but God shall supply all your needs, according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Look up in faith — exercising confidence in the Word of a faithful God.

Look up in prayer — asking for what God has graciously promised.

Look up in hope — expecting what you ask in the name of Jesus.

Look up with adoration — and adore the sovereignty, righteousness, and wisdom of God.

Look up constantly — let nothing daunt or discourage you! Rather say, "Our eyes are on the Lord our God until He shows us mercy."

Look up — for this will keep . . .

the head from swimming,

the heart from sinking,

the knees from trembling,

the feet from slipping, and

the hands from hanging down!

Well, my friends, what do you say? Will you follow this advice? Will you take this counsel? Will you act upon this direction? He who loves you best, who knows you most, and who always wishes you well — gave it. Take it — and you will never regret it. Act upon it — and you will never repent of it.

It is impossible to say what will happen to us, or what will be required of us this year — but "Look up!" This direction, if properly attended to, will . . . procure for us all that we need, secure us against all that we dread, and make us more than a match for all our foes and fears!

Fellow-Christian, are you fearful? "Look up" and hear Jesus saying to you, "Do not be afraid — I Myself will help you!" Are you discouraged? "Look up" — and your youth shall be renewed like the eagle's, and fresh light, comfort, and courage shall be given to you! Are you desponding? "Look up" for Jesus never breaks the bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax. Do not look too much at your sin — look most at the infinitely meritorious blood of God's dear Son! Do not look too much at self — but look at Jesus, who ever lives to make intercession for you in Heaven. Are you stripped of your comforts, your props, and your goods? Then look up! He who stripped you — loves you! He will be more than all these to you! He will bind up your broken heart, calm your perturbed spirit, cheer your drooping mind, and fill you with his own peace and happiness.

Look up . . .

for all that you need;

from all that you fear;

through all that would obstruct your way;

and notwithstanding all that would deter you from doing so.

Look up every day, saying with David, "In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before You and will look up!" Psalms 5:3

Look up in every trial, saying "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence comes my help: my help comes from the Lord, who made Heaven and earth!" Do not look at your sin — it will discourage you! Do not look at your self — it will distress you! Do not look at Satan — he will bewilder you! Do not look to men — they will deceive, or disappoint you! Do not look at your trials — they will deject you! But do as the church did, look up "until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees" (Lamentations 3:50).

"Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us — looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith!" Hebrews 12:1-2. Look only, look always, look intently, to Jesus; run looking, work looking, fight looking, suffer looking, live looking, and die looking — to Jesus, who is at God's right hand in glory. Oh, look, look, look to Jesus!

"Behold the Lamb of God, who bore

Your burdens on the tree;

And paid in blood the dreadful score—

The ransom due for You!
Look to Him until the sight endears
The Savior to your heart;
His pierced feet — bedew with tears,
Nor from His cross depart!
Look to Him until His dying love
Your every thought control;
Its vast constraining influence prove,
O'er body, spirit, soul.
Look to him, as the race you run,
Your never failing Friend;
Finish He will, the work begun,
And grace — in glory end!

02 Divine Care!

Divine Care!

"Casting all your care upon Him — for He cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7 The Christian's life is very much made up of cares— and comforts.

Cares spring from earth — comfort comes from Heaven;

cares prove him to be a sinner — holy comforts prove him a believer;

cares flow in from a variety of quarters — true comfort from only one;

cares come naturally — but comforts come supernaturally.

We are sure to have cares — but shall we have comfort? This depends on God's grace — which gives it; and our faith — which receives it.

Cares must be cast on our God, or they will prove a burden too heavy for us — they will depress, bewilder, and make us wretched! But here is our comfort — we have always One to care for us; and the very one who of all others — we would wish to do so: "The LORD cares for you!"

God cares for WHOM? For you believer, who is born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God which lives and abides forever. For you believer, who is a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, as all your fathers were. For you believer, who is persecuted by the world, and hated by all men — for your Savior's sake. For you believer, to whom Christ is precious, as he is to every one who really believes in him. For you believer, who is worried and harassed by Satan — who as a roaring lion goes about seeking whom he may devour. For you believer, who is placed in humble circumstances, being numbered with the poor of this world. For you believer, who is compassed about with so many cares, and who enjoys so few comforts; who is surprised at the fiery trials which try you, as though some strange thing had happened unto you. God's care extends to every Christian; the young and the aged, the weak and the strong, the poor and the wealthy, the doubting and the confident. Believer, He cares for you! WHO is it that cares for us? It is the Lord Almighty — the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy! It is He whom the angels obey, the seraphim adore, and all creation glorifies!

It is the Lord — who is so great, that we have no adequate conception of His greatness!

It is He who is so good — that it is impossible fully to set forth His goodness!

It is He who is so glorious — that no sinner can see His face and live!

It is He who created all things with His Word!

It is He who governs all things by His wisdom!

It is He who upholds all things by His power!

It is He whose resources are infinite!

It is He whose compassion is exquisite!

It is He whose patience is without limit! But though he is so exalted, so happy, and so unspeakably great — He cares for you! He is the one who . . .

enters into all the circumstances of His people,

is ever present with them, and

rejoices over them to do them good.

He cares for you — as base as you are.

He cares for you — as sinful as you are.

He cares for you — as depressed and discouraged as you are.

HE cares for YOU! He cares for you individually, and according to the circumstances in which you are placed.

WHAT does he do? He cares for you. He thinks of you. He watches over you. He sympathizes with you. He feels the deepest interest in you. He ever seeks your welfare. He infallibly secures your good. Your misery touches his heart; your needs lie open to his view; and your cries enter into his ears. He cares for you — more than for the proudest monarch on his throne, or the mightiest production of his power.

He cares for you, and his care is constant — it is not fitful or occasional, but ever the same.

He cares for you, and his care is paternal; it is the care of a father for his child, the child whom he tenderly loves, and for whose welfare he feels the deepest concern.

He cares for you, and his care is perpetual; he will never care for you less than he does at present; when old age weakens you, when needs pinch you, when death appears just before you — he will care for you as much as he did in youth, or as he does at this moment.

He cares for you, and his care is beneficial; it prevents innumerable evils, and secures the greatest possible amount of good. It is more advantageous than the care of the kindest father, though that father were monarch of the mightiest empire, and possessed unbounded wealth! The care of God is of more value than the care of all his creatures combined.

He cares for you, but his care is mysteriously exercised; it benefits us certainly — but secretly. It conceals itself behind the blessings it brings, and the evils it prevents.

He cares for you, and his care is special; it is not the care which he has for the beasts which perish, or the sinners who die under his frown. It is care that extends to the very hairs of your heads — which are all numbered; and to all the events and occurrences of life — however minute or commonplace.

Beloved, here is our comfort. We may lose the care of an earthly parent by death — but the Lord ever lives, and while he lives he cares for us! We may lose the care of a kind and earthly friend,

through the malice of a foe or misrepresentations — but the Lord ever loves us, thoroughly knows us, and never ceases to care for us.

Here is the ground of our confidence for the future. We cannot put trust in a friend, or put confidence in a guide; we know not where we shall be, nor what we shall be, for we know not what a day may bring forth. But this we know, that God will care for us, and, caring for us, will fulfill his promises to us, and make all his goodness pass before us.

If God cares for us — then let us cast all our cares upon him; let us live in daily fellowship with him; let us seek all our supplies from him. If God cares for us — let us not dishonor him by nursing our doubts, or encouraging our fears — but let us trust in him at all times, for his word is true, his love is constant, and his knowledge is perfect. Let us "be anxious for nothing — but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let our request be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Php 4:6-7).

Let us attend to our Savior's loving admonition, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own!" (Matthew 6:34).

We shall never be without a friend — however trying our circumstances may be; or without a guide — however perplexing or difficult our path. The care of God is more than the care of all the angelic multitudes; and if the care of God is not sufficient to preserve, supply, and satisfy us — then nothing is. May the Lord help us to believe this precious truth, to realize it daily, that we may pass through the present world under the impression, "I am the object of God's tender, paternal, and ceaseless care!"

03 The Fallen Professor

The Fallen Professor

"He feeds on ashes, deceived heart has turned him aside! He cannot save himself, or say: Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?" Isaiah 44:20 This is true of very many in the present day. They professed religion, for a time they did run well, we were full of hope respecting them — but they are turned aside. Self-examination is always important — but especially so before we make a public profession of Christ. Let a man examine himself thoroughly — and so let him be baptized and be joined to his people. Some are for delaying a profession of religion too long, and some rush into it too hastily. Few things are more difficult for a pastor, than to know whom to encourage to come forward, and whom to keep back.

We have a character in our eye, let us look at him: "a deceived heart has turned him aside." This will apply to a professor, one who has numbered himself with God's people. He was sound in the truth. He embraced the doctrines of the gospel. He took the precepts for his guide. He professed to rely on the promises. The bible was his book, and a sound gospel ministry his delight. He was regular in his attendance upon the means of grace. He came not only to the sermons — but to the prayer meetings. His attention and apparent devotion, were pleasing and encouraging. His fixed eye, and serious behavior, inspired us with confidence. There was nothing light, or restless, or unfitting; he was in behavior as befits godliness. He was useful in his station in life. He spoke for Christ to his fellows, he took a class in the Sunday school, he wrote religious letters, he distributed gospel tracts, he appeared desirous of benefitting all around him. He was his pastor's hope, the church's joy, and a lesson to the world!

We wished there were many like him, for his talents were respectable, his education was good, his manners were pleasing, and everything seemed to indicate that he would be a useful character. But a change has taken place! A blight has settled upon the flower! A cloud has obscured the prospect. The pastor's heart is grieved. The weak of the flock are stumbled. The church mourns. The enemy triumphs.

What has happened? He is turned aside! He has turned from God. The closet is forsaken — he prays no more. The truth is given up — and lax, if not infidel, principles are embraced, propagated, and defended. Duty is disregarded; he feels like Pharaoh, if he does not speak like him, when he said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?" The church is despised and forsaken. The prayer-meeting was first neglected, then he only attended the public services once on the Lord's-day. Then he only came occasionally. At last he gave up altogether. He was warned — but he despised the warning. He was exhorted — but he rejected the exhortation. The world flattered him,

pride took possession of him, and

Satan gained the complete mastery over him!

He withdrew from his old Christian associates, and from the field of labor; as he did not enjoy religion, he could not, he would not, labor to bring others to seek it. The bible was left unopened, the voice of conscience was stifled, the company of the godly was shunned — and he turned aside to folly. The world, which he once despised — he now values. The evil company he once avoided — he now seeks. Vanity is his characteristic, and vanity will be his recompense. He is turned aside after Satan, who now rules in his heart, leads captive his affections, bewilders his judgment, stupefies his conscience, and powerfully works upon his imagination.

Worldly men gather him into their company — he is courted, flattered, and captivated! He is completely led away by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the sinful pride of life. He cannot bear reflection, he avoids being much alone, he has become the friend of the world, and is completely turned aside. But what did it? A deceived and a deceitful heart has turned him aside.

Error was presented in a fascinating dress.

Pride of intellect was fostered.

Satan laid his snares, adapted his temptations to his age, temperament, disposition, and circumstances: he took the bait, and was caught by the hook! His natural lusts were pampered, and the reins were thrown upon their neck.

He became giddy, bewildered, and was deceived! But how was he brought to this state?

He walked on the very edge of Christian liberty, instead of getting and keeping as near to the Savior as he could.

He yielded to temptation, first secretly, and in reference to little things — which paved the way for greater sins; for if Satan can get us to yield to a small temptation today — he will entice us with a greater one tomorrow.

He tampered with sin, lowering the standard, making allowance for the weakness of nature, the force of circumstances, and the custom of the times.

He listened to false teachers, whose business is always to lead us to think . . .

lightly of sin,

lowly of the Savior,

highly of self, and

unscripturally of God.

He read improper books — such as . . .

feed vanity,

excite lust,

pamper pride,

produce levity,

lead away from God,
unfit for prayer, and
secretly undermine vital piety.
He became deluded,
laughed at his former fears,
ridiculed his conscientious scruples,
questioned the truths of Scripture, and
scorned those 'fanatics' who . . .
talk of experimental religion,
incessantly dwell upon Scripture doctrines,
and old-fashioned practices.

Thus the Holy Spirit was grieved and vexed — so that he was given up to his own heart's lusts, and he walked in his own vain counsels.

Lively Christians were forsaken and treated with contempt. The cultivation or preservation of the heart was entirely neglected. The eye was left at liberty to rove and pry into improper objects and subjects. The ear became the entrance to what was polluting, misleading, and degrading. The carnal desire sought to know practically, and indulge in the lowest degrees of sin. And so the text was fulfilled in him, "A deceived heart has turned him aside!" Where is he now? In the path of DANGER — for "he walks in the counsel of the ungodly, he stands in the way of sinners, he sits in the seat of the scornful."

What is he now? A deceived soul. "He feeds on ashes! He cannot save himself, or say: Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?"

What does his conduct say to you? Let us, therefore, fear! "Beware lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, you fall from your own steadfastness." "Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." "Trust not in your own heart, lean not unto your own understanding; for he who trusts in his own heart is a fool." "Watch and pray — lest you enter into temptation." "Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

Get close to God, and keep close to God. Dwell in the fear of the Lord all the day long.

Keep at the greatest possible distance from temptation!

If Satan can get you to listen — he may get you to look;

if he gets you to look — he may get you to desire;

if he gets you to desire — he will get you to yield!

"Resist the devil — and he will flee from you."

Cry to the strong for strength. Cultivate a sense of your own weakness. Live and walk in fellowship with Jesus. Often think of the words of the Holy Spirit, by Peter, of tempters and the results, "These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them!" 2 Peter 2:17-21 Young men, beware.

Curious, critical hearers, take heed.

Men of business, who are much in the company of the world — stand in awe. Your adversary, the devil, goes about seeking whom he may devour.

Let us all daily pray, "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of your wing. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Hold me up — and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto your statutes continually."

04 What Is Your Life?

What Is Your Life?

"What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while — and then vanishes!" James 4:14

If God asks a question — we should listen to it, think of it, and prepare an answer. Here the Lord puts a question to us; it refers to the brevity of our mortal existence; he asks each one of us, "What is your life?" We think much of it. We make great provision for it. We spend much thought upon it. We are very careful to preserve it. But what is it? Let us ponder this question. Let us give it the attention it deserves. It is especially suitable to us when shut up in our sick chamber, when afflicted and tried with losses and crosses, or at the commencement of a new year. Our sufferings may be great, our trials may be many — but they must be short — for what is our life? Let us look at the DURATION of our life. It is exceedingly brief. No one figure can set forth its brevity, or sufficiently affect our minds with it — and therefore many are employed. Our life is like a flower, which springs up under the influence of an eastern sun, which blossoms for an hour, and then fades and dies. Our life is like a shadow, which lessens and lessens until in a few minutes it is gone. Our life is like the shuttle which flies in the weaver's hand, and passes before the eye so swiftly, that one can but just see it and say — it is gone! Our life is like the wind which rushes by us; we hear it, we feel it — and it is no more. Our life is like the dried leaf which is made the sport of the breeze, and soon carried out of sight. In one passage in the book of Job, we have figures taken from three elements, to represent its rapid flight.

"My days are swifter than a runner; they fly away without a glimpse of joy. They skim past like boats of papyrus, like eagles swooping down on their prey!" (Job 9:25-26). My life is like the swift ships, with all their sails spread, which, with the canvas crowded, glide along the watery way. My life is like the eagle hastening to its prey, compelled by hunger; with strong pinions it cuts the air, and is soon at the point where it would be!

What then, is your life? "You are a mist that appears for a little while — and then vanishes!"

What is your life in retrospect? Look back over the past ten or twenty years; how swiftly they have passed away, and every year appears to pass more quickly than the last!

What is your life in comparison? What are your thirty, or forty, or even seventy years — if compared with the age of the antediluvian patriarchs — Methuselah, for instance? But what are they in comparison with eternity? Think of endless duration, of interminable ages; and while you think of them, ask, "What is my life?" Ah, what? No comparison can be drawn — but the thought may be improved. May the Lord help us to improve it. This naturally leads us to inquire — What is the DESIGN of our life? Why was life given us? Why is it continued to us? Our life has reference to three parties:

First, to ourselves — the design is to prepare us for eternity. We must live forever; but how depends upon the present. If we live in sin here — we must live in suffering forever. If time is spent

in folly — eternity will be spent in bitter, unavailing remorse and sorrow. But if we believe in Jesus, exercise repentance toward God, are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and devote our lives to God's service — then eternity will to us be an endless existence in pleasure, satisfaction, and unspeakable delight. In reference to God — the design of our life is to glorify him, which we can only do by believing his promises, embracing his Son, observing his precepts, and consecrating our time and all our talents to his praise. Here we should live for God — and then in eternity we shall live with God. Here we should aim in all things to honor God — and then in eternity God will honor us. In reference to our fellow-men — the design of our life is to benefit and do them good. No one is created for himself. Each one is bound to his fellow, and every one should aim to benefit the whole. We should serve our generation by the will of God. Our life is misapplied, it is squandered, it is wasted in folly — if we do not use it to secure our eternal salvation, to promote God's glory, and to advance the holiness and happiness of our fellow-men.

What is the CHARACTER of our life?

Looking at its natural character — it is a gift conferred upon us by our beneficent Creator. A gift which, if rightly used, will prove invaluable; but which, if abused, will be an occasion of eternal regret. God gave us life; he placed us highest in the scale of his creatures; he made us capable of serving, enjoying, and glorifying him forever; he has given us also the means of grace, set before us the way of salvation, and promised his Holy Spirit unto those who ask him. Having given us life, he has crowned that life with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and has pointed out the way by which we may obtain everlasting blessedness. But let us look at its moral character. What is our life in reference to others? Is it exemplary? Is it convincing? Is it useful? Is it likely to make a good impression? What is our life in reference to ourselves? Is it holy or profane? Is it godly or ungodly? Is it befitting an immortal being, one who must live forever? This view of the subject is not sufficiently attended to by many. Is it attended to by us?

What is the IMPORTANCE of our life? Ah, who shall say? Who can describe, what language can set forth — the importance of our present life? Our life is the bud of being — the flower will not open on this side the grave. Our life is the youth of existence — we shall not be full-grown in this world. Our life is the seedtime of eternity — what is sown now — will be reaped in an eternal, changeless state. Our life is the introduction to immortality!

What then is its importance? Ask the dying sinner, whose eyes are just opened, whose soul is just awakened to the solemnities of the eternal world. What reply will he give? Look at his death-struck countenance, mark the expression of his half-glazed eye, hear the accents of his tremulous voice; but he fails, he tries in vain to set forth the importance of the present life. He exclaims, "Oh, that I had my time over again! Oh, that I had one year — but one month, one week, of the time I have squandered! But wishing is in vain! The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved! The importance of life I cannot describe. The value of time I can never declare."

Ask the lost soul. The soul which, like the rich man, lifts up its eyes in Hell, being in torment. Despair now rules over the immortal spirit. Agonies, beyond description, torture the never dying intellect. What is the lost soul's estimate of the importance of life? It would require a new language to describe, unearthly figures to illustrate, and a voice such as we have never heard — to set forth its estimate of the precious gift of life! Only in the depths of Hell, or in the highest Heavens — is the value of life really known! The glorified saint, while he tunes his golden harp, sings his

never-dying song, and drinks in pure and celestial pleasure, can estimate — but not fully describe, the importance of this present life!

Unsaved sinner — what is your life? Is it sin? Time spent in opposing God? Time squandered upon folly? Time dreamed away to no useful purpose? Is it trifling? On, how many trifle away their precious time! They despise their own souls. They live as if existence were bounded by time — and all beyond were annihilation. Is it folly? How many live as fools! They provide for the body — but they neglect the soul. They live for time — but they lose sight of eternity. The allotted time passes away unheeded. The day of salvation is spent in sin! They only lay a foundation for everlasting self-condemnation, and open in their own hearts a source of never ceasing agony!

Believer — what is your life? Is it Christ? Can you say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ!" Does Christ live in you? Are you spiritually minded — and do you find it life and peace? Is it a wise preparation for eternity? Are you living now — as you will wish you had lived by-and-bye?

Life is at best but short — let us improve it.

Life is uncertain — let us make sure work for eternity.

Life, if rightly viewed, is very solemn — let us spend it as intelligent and accountable creatures should. And when tempted to trifle, when inclined to squander away a day or an hour — let the question influence our decision, "What is your life?" If it is brief — should it be spent thus? And let the Savior's question be seriously considered by all who make gain the end of life — "What shall it profit a man — if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37.)

Reader! the time is short, eternity is near, salvation is of infinite importance! Let us therefore decide, and accept the Savior's glorious invitation at once, and so shall we be saved forever!

05 The Christian's Daily Prayer

The Christian's Daily Prayer "O Lord, remember me, and visit me." Jeremiah 15:15 The prophet was in great trouble! Life was almost a burden. Yet the Lord had promised to show him special favor. He had promised to be with him, and that it should be well with his remnant. But the promises which support us — do not always cheer us. We have always more wealth in our possession — than we turn to account. But he falls upon his knees, he looks up to his God. Oh, what a relief is prayer! We never value prayer — as we do in deep affliction, when the heart must find vent or burst!

He cries, "O Lord, you know my sincerity and deep suffering." He had sincerely sought the people's good, and done the Lord's will. But sincerity often exposes to suffering — but while it does so, it soothes the spirit. "Lord," he says, "remember me, and visit me." How beautifully simple! How expressive! How suited to us! Let us look at this prayer, and make it our own.

It is a prayer for times of trouble. Most are suffering from one cause or another. Oh, that the Lord would sanctify the sorrows of his people, and make the sufferings of his foes — the means of their conversion!

"O Lord, REMEMBER me!" Who can bear to be forgotten? Especially by a kind, wealthy, and powerful friend. How could we bear to be forgotten by the Lord? But though he never will forget us — yet we may plead for a special remembrance:

"Lord, I am tried, troubled, and cast down! Remember that I am your child! You have put me among your children. I have called you, Abba, Father. You have owned me at your throne of grace, and I cannot live contented without your smile and your blessing. Lord, I am your weeping child. The sorrows of my heart are enlarged; oh, bring me out of my distresses!

Oh Lord, remember that I am your friend. I have been reconciled to you by the death of your Son. I have committed my all unto you. I have been familiar with you. I have poured out all my heart before you. I cannot be happy — except you think of me, send to me, and show me friendship.

Oh Lord, remember that I am your soldier, engaged in your cause and quarrel. I wear your armor. I fight under your banner. I am jealous of your honor. But I am wounded in the field. I find my foes too strong for me. My heart betrays me. My courage fails me. I cannot conquer — unless you appear for me, and strengthen me with strength in my soul.

Oh Lord, remember that I am your servant. I have been long in your family. I love your children. I sometimes enjoy your work. But I am weak, beset with fears, and discouraged in the path of duty! Lord, oh, remember me!

Oh Lord, remember me, for I am in an enemy's land. It is not the country I love and long for. I am in a howling wilderness, where there are few friends, little pleasant food, or refreshing rest. I am in a house of disease and death. All are suffering, and many are dying around me.

Oh Lord, remember . . .
my weakness — for it is great;
my fears — for they are many;
my temptations — for they are violent;
my infirmities — for they are numerous and painful; and
my present circumstances — for they are very trying.

Oh Lord, remember . . .
my prayers — and answer them;
my desires — and grant them;
my needs — and supply them;
my sorrows — and sanctify them;
my labors — and crown them with your effectual blessing!

Oh Lord, remember me — though I am so sinful — though I am so unworthy. Remember me, for I do remember you, and long for your presence and your love.

Oh Lord, remember me, for Jesus did so when he suffered in Gethsemane, and died on the cruel tree.

Oh Lord, remember me, or I shall be miserable now, and wretched for evermore! Oh Lord, remember me, for it does not matter who else remembers me or who forgets me — if I only have the assurance of your love and favor. Remember me, O Lord, with the favor you bear unto your people. Oh, visit me with your salvation, that I may see the good of your chosen people, and glory with your inheritance."

"O Lord, VISIT me!" What is life — without God's presence! What would the world be — if God did not visit us! How could we bear it — if he were to say, "You have had the last visit — I will come to you no more!" But he will see us again, and our hearts shall rejoice. He will come unto us, and he will bless us. Still, promises are not enough — if we are really alive to God. We want their fulfillment. We cannot be satisfied unless the Lord comes, and manifests himself unto us.

O Lord, visit me — and soften my heart — it is hard and unfeeling! I have tried to melt it in vain. I have taken it to Sinai — there it grows harder. I have taken it to Gethsemane and Calvary — but no place, no scene, no subject will do. It must be your presence, your smile, the sense of your love. Only come unto me, and my hard heart will yield, and flow with streams of penitential tears.

O Lord, visit me — and sanctify my temper. It is harsh and unlovely. It is trying to myself and others. I have had a long and severe conflict with it — but it is unlovely still. But your presence will make me meek, gentle, loving, kind-hearted, and good-tempered with all about me. In my very worst moods, a visit from you fills me with shame, self-abhorrence, gratitude, and humility; and then I am good-tempered in a moment.

O Lord, visit me — and revive my graces. My faith is weak. My hope is languid. My love is unsettled and wandering. A visit from you will fill me with confidence, raise my expectations, and cause my whole soul to glow with love! Then zeal will burn, repentance will work, fortitude will spring up, and every grace that should adorn the Christian character — will be in lively act and exercise.

Oh Lord, visit me — and brighten my evidences. They are often so dim, so unsatisfactory, that I can derive no comfort from them. I want to feel sure that I am a Christian: to have no doubts, no misgivings; to have every satisfactory evidence in my heart and life; but unless you visit me, I feel certain that I shall not.

Oh Lord, visit me — and cheer my spirits. I am dejected and cast down. My comforts droop and die. I am low — in a low place.

Oh Lord, visit me — and confound my foes. They are many. They are powerful. They get access to my heart. They bewilder, confuse, and mislead me! They often cast me down wounded, and fill me with fear and dread.

Oh Lord, visit me — and perfect my resignation. I would yield to your will in everything. I would prefer your choice to my own. I would be perfectly satisfied with all your arrangements.

Oh Lord, visit me, and produce this blessed, this desirable state of mind.

Beloved, God's remembrance is always fruitful, it always brings us good things. God's visits are always beneficial. They check every evil, nourish every grace, revive every virtue, and satisfy every really good desire. In this short prayer — is all we shall need in life or in death. Are you concerned that God should remember you? Could you bear to be forgotten of God? Did God ever visit you in mercy? Has he visited you lately? Can you be satisfied without his visits? Oh, make the prophet's prayer your own, and daily cry, "O Lord, remember me, and visit me!"

"Lord, when I quit this earthly stage,
Where shall I fly, but to your breast?
For I have sought no other home,
For I have desired no other rest.
I cannot live contented here,
Without some glimpses of your face;
And Heaven without your presence there,
Would be a dark and tiresome place! When earthly cares engross the day,
And hold my thoughts aside from you,
The shining hours of cheerful light,
Are long and tedious years to me. And if no evening visits paid,
Between my Savior and my soul,

How dull the night! how sad the shade,
How mournfully the minutes roll! My God! and can a humble child,
That loves you with a flame so high,
Be ever from your face exiled,
Without the pity of your eye?
Impossible! for your own hands
Have tied my heart so fast to you,
And in your book the promise stands,
That where you are — your friends must be!"

06 Consistent Teaching

Consistent Teaching "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?"Romans 2:21

We all need teaching; but, generally speaking, we love to teach — rather than to be taught. We instruct others — but neglect ourselves. This is true of preachers and Bible teachers especially. The language of Paul may be addressed to many of us, "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?" Let us endeavor for once to be impartial, and look at this point closely, soberly, and seriously.

You teach others to be temperate — but indulge yourself far beyond what nature requires! A variety of fine dishes must be provided, and, if positive gluttony is avoided — conscience has learned to be silent. If two invitations are given — one to plain and poor meal, where the spare time will be taken up in prayer and godly conversation; and another to a sumptuous table, where gossip and entertainment will engage the attention — which will be preferred? "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?" "

You teach others self-denial — but do not practice the same yourself. Others are exhorted to make sacrifices — to work for God — to earn, that they may give, to give even out of their poverty. But the teacher is paid for all that he does, and gives little or nothing. Not a journey does he take — without some remuneration; not a sacrifice does he make, not a power does he overtax. He talks freely, urges warmly, illustrates eloquently, argues fervently; but he is ranked among some whom our Lord addressed, "They do not practice what they preach." Reader, is this at all like you? "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?"

You teach others to be humble; but is humility your characteristic? A proud man in the pulpit preaching humility — or a proud teacher in the class teaching humility — what an anomaly! And yet there are such things. They talk about humility; but their general bearing, their conduct towards others, their evident self-importance — proves that they are not humble. They appear to say, "Others should be humble — yet I may be proud. Others should be meek — yet I may be haughty. Others should submit — yet I may resent. Others should forbear — yet I may avenge myself." Or, "Do as I say — not as I do." Can this be right? How must it appear in the eyes of God?

Preacher, teacher, professor — are you proud? Is there the proud look? The haughty manner? The contemptuous sneer? The cold, distant, self-important bearing? Can this be approved by God? Will this pass the scrutiny of the Most High? Will the Holy Spirit fill your heart, or consecrate your body as his temple? Is it any wonder that you meet with no success? "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?"

You teach activity for God and immortal souls; but relaxation, the parlor, the worthless book, or some entertainment — occupies your time and attention. Others should go out into the streets and lanes of the city, and into the highways and hedges; others should visit the sick, relieve the poor, warn the rebellious, expostulate with the backslider, and carry the gospel to every creature. But you have not the tact, the talent, the time — in one word, you have not the disposition. If you would

try — there is very much that you could do. Indeed, none of us know what we can do — until we try. The slothful man says, "There's a lion in the streets! If I go outside, I might be killed!" A likely thing — "A lion in the streets!" No, no! It is laziness, it is sloth and the love of ease in the heart. Be active yourself, or say nothing about it. Never blame others, except you set them the example. "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?"

You teach, it may be, close walking with God; but, like Peter, you follow afar off yourself. What! is it good for others to get near to God, to live as under his eye, to speak always as within his hearing, and to endeavor to commend themselves to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator — and can it be well for you to live at a distance, to forget his presence, to speak as if he heard you not, and to walk as though he regarded not your conduct? Many talk of close walking — who know but little about it. They are seldom closeted with God. They realize but little of his presence. They receive but few communications from him. They are but seldom thirsting for his presence. Alas! the frivolous conversation, the worldly spirit, the careless manner, and the lack of conformity to God — tell a tale which cannot be well misunderstood! You who urge others to walk closely with God, "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?"

You teach also the importance of gospel ordinances; but are they prized by you? Do you frequent the prayer-meeting and the weekly sermon? Or, will a little weariness, a short distance, or a slight indisposition — satisfy your conscience as furnishing a sufficient reason for your absence? If gospel ordinances are important, let them be treated with respect, and be observed with punctuality. Have you been baptized on a profession of your faith? Why not? Do you regularly attend at the Lord's table? Is your place in the sanctuary regularly occupied? If ordinances are means of grace — do you not need grace? If you need grace, ought you not regularly to use the means through which grace is communicated? If you do not regularly use the means — is it not evident that you do not desire the grace you need? If you teach at all — you should teach the value and importance of gospel ordinances; but if you do so teach — you ought to be very careful to corroborate by your conduct — what you teach with your tongue. "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?"

You teach that a man should be prepared for death, or stand ready for the coming of his Lord. But are you prepared to die? Are you ready, if the Bridegroom should come? Are you watching, waiting, and working? Do you live above the world, distinct from the world — aiming always to glorify God in the world? Is your hope laid up in Heaven? Can you prove that your treasure is there, because your hearty hopes and affections are there? Are you like the loving bride — who sighs, desires, and longs for the return of her beloved bridegroom? Are you looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God our Savior, Jesus Christ? Or, are you living for the world, pleased with the world, scraping together the yellow dust of the world, and feeling the greatest reluctance to leave the world? Would the news of the Lord's coming today, or tomorrow — be unpleasant to you? Search, look, and allow me to ask, "You, then, who teach others — do you not teach yourself?"

Dear brethren, this subject requires the most solemn and serious consideration. How can we teach others consistently — if we do not teach ourselves, so as to practice what we teach?

How can we reprove others for gluttony — if we take as much or more ourselves?

How can we preach "owe no man anything" — if we contract debts and neglect to pay them?

How can we urge others to be meek and lamb-like — if we are passionate and roar like lions?

How can we exhort others to self-denial — if we indulge ourselves in pampering our appetites, in costly apparel, in expensive journeys, and unnecessary furniture?

How can we reprove others for inactivity — if we are dull, lifeless, and dronish?

How can we urge others to liberality — if we are close-fisted, covetous, and lovers of filthy lucre ourselves? In a word, how can we reprove any sin — if we ourselves indulge in it!

How can we exhort to any duty — if we ourselves neglect it!

How can we urge to the attainment of any excellence — if we disregard it ourselves!

How can we be of much use, either to the world or the church — unless we ourselves live up to our profession?

Holy Spirit! come down in all the fullness of your power upon all our pastors, preachers, and teachers — and so sanctify, influence, and transform us — that we may teach what is truth, and practice what we teach; and conform our lives to our profession — for the dear Redeemer's sake. Amen.

07 The Sons of God

The Sons of God

Jehovah determined not only to save his people — but to raise them to the highest possible honor and happiness; therefore he predestined them to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, to the praise of the glory of his grace. In the fullness of time, he sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law — to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because we are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Thus the Father decreed our adoption, the Son came to redeem us from bondage, and the Holy Spirit takes possession of our hearts, teaching us to call God, "Father." The purpose of adoption flowed from the Father's grace,

the way of adoption was cleared by the Son's blood, and

the nature and knowledge of adoption are imparted by the Spirit's work. The Father's love is the source,

the Son's redemption is the channel,

the Holy Spirit is the guide, and

adoption into God's family is the blessing. The Father chose us to dwell with and enjoy him,

the Son paid our ransom price with his blood, and

the Holy Spirit effects our freedom and leads us to the Father's throne.

Thus we are equally indebted to each of the divine persons in Jehovah, and should daily bless the Father, praise the Son, and adore the Holy Spirit — uniting the Father's purpose, the Son's merit, and the Spirit's power in our thoughts and our songs. Without the Trinity, we can form no scriptural idea of salvation; and no one understands the bible doctrine of salvation, who does not perceive that three divine persons are engaged in effecting it. The sons of God are sinners! They are convinced of it, they deeply feel it, they mourn over it, and seek to be restored to God's image. They hate sin, love holiness, and daily pray to be made like Jesus — who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. The sons of God love the Savior, placing all their dependance on his perfect work, pleading his name before the Father for every blessing, and endeavoring to copy his example in the world, in the family, and the church of God. The sons of God look up to God as a father, craving his blessing, seeking all their supplies from his hand, and doing his will from the heart; or, if they cannot claim the relationship, they are ready to envy those who can, and sigh and cry for the Spirit of adoption, that he may hear witness with their spirits that they are the children of God. To them no privilege is so precious, no blessing so desirable, no favor so great — as to be able to claim and enjoy their covenant relationship to God. The sons of God suffer much from temptation, are often harassed with doubts, and are hated by the world which lies in the wicked one. Here they have no continuing city — but they seek one to come; they

are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, as all their fathers were. They live by faith in God's promise, providence, and presence, and expect every blessing from his unmerited love. They know they have no claim on God, because they have sinned — yet they have confidence and hope, because God is gracious and has given them his word. They expect to be chastised, because their Father is wise, and yet often fret and complain when they smart under the rod. They long for their eternal home — yet dislike the way to it. They pray for deliverance — yet cleave to the earth. The sons of God are all singular characters; they see Him who is invisible, taste that the Lord is gracious, crucify the old man with its deeds, walk with God in friendship and peace, and set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth.

Beloved, if we are the children of God, our privileges are great — but our trials will be great too. Our joys will be peculiarly sweet — but our sorrows will be proportionably bitter.

If we enjoy the friendship of God — we must endure the hatred of the world. If we walk with Jesus in love — we shall be tempted and harassed by Satan. If we have confidence in God's word — we shall be exercised with ten thousand fears. If we have the assurance of faith — we shall be plagued with many gloomy doubts. If our hearts are renewed by grace — we shall be distressed with their hardness and indifference. If we have the spirit of prayer — we shall groan because we know not now to pray, or what to pray for. If we are at peace with God — we shall have a constant conflict in our own bosoms: the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. If we are strong in the Lord — we shall feel that we are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves — but that God must work in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. If we hate sin — we shall feel it working in us, disturbing and distressing us, and often causing us to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" Our lives will be a paradox, and we shall understand the apostle when he says,

"We are . . .

troubled on every side — yet not distressed;

perplexed — but not in despair;

persecuted — but not forsaken;

cast down — but not destroyed;

known — yet regarded as unknown;

dying — and yet we live on;

beaten — and yet not killed;

sorrowful — yet always rejoicing;

poor — yet making many rich;

having nothing — and yet possessing everything."

"How strange is the course that a Christian must steer

How perplexed is the path he must tread;

The hope of his happiness — rises from fear,
And his life — he receives from the dead. His fairest pretensions must wholly be waived,
And his best resolutions be crossed;
Nor can he expect to be perfectly saved,
Until he finds himself, utterly lost. When all this is done, and his heart is assured
Of the total remission of sins;
When his pardon is signed, and his peace is procured,
From that moment — his conflict begins!"

08 The Prayer of Moses

The Prayer of Moses "Return, O Lord! How long will it be?" Psalms 90:13 So sighed Moses, the man of God, when Israel was wandering in the desert, when death was sweeping away the rebellious generation which came out of Egypt, from the earth; and when God, to a great extent, kept at a distance from them. And so may we sigh and pray, under our present depressing, discouraging circumstances, as the visible church of Christ. God has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud: and he has covered himself with a cloud, so that our prayers will not pass through. We sigh and cry — but he seems to shut out our prayer; we mourn his absence — but he does not favor us with his presence as we desire and wish to enjoy it. The prayer of Moses is ours; yes, beloved, we are crying out, "Return, O Lord! How long will it be?"

What is the CAUSE of this exclamation? Why do we thus pray?

Because we are not favored with those sweet, soul-melting joys which we used to enjoy. One branch of God's kingdom was, "joy in the Holy Spirit." One characteristic of the believer was, that he "rejoiced in Christ Jesus." The disciples "were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." Once, in our experience, his teachings dropped as the rain, and his communications distilled as the dew. We sat under his shadow with delight, and his fruit was sweet unto our taste. But where are those joys now? When do we enjoy such precious seasons? Where are the people that are in such a case? Alas, generally speaking, we are cold, hard, lifeless, and unspiritual; therefore, we may well cry, "Return, O Lord! How long will it be?"

Again, the sanctifying influences of the blessed Spirit do not attend the Word as they once did. Time was, when the preacher could say to his people, "We all with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord — are being changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." By the gospel ordinances, the Lord sanctified his people:

the covetous became liberal;

the proud became humble;

the idle became industrious;

the self-indulgent learned to practice self-denial;

the earthly-minded became spiritual;

a gradual, progressive — but marked change took place in them! But now, professors remain very much what they were, which makes us exclaim, "Return, O Lord! How long will it be?"

Once more, the saving operations of the quickening Spirit are withheld. Once sinners were converted by thousands: great multitudes both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. The hand of the Lord was with his servants, and multitudes were turned unto the Lord. The Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved. The gospel was accompanied with an invincible power, and the hearers were born again by the word of truth. The gospel came not in word only —

but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Now how few are really converted to God; and even in the converted — how slight the work appears. Once the soul was like softened wax, and the image of Christ was deeply impressed upon it; now it is rather like drawing paper, and the likeness of Jesus is only seen drawn in faint outline upon it. Well, therefore, may we cry, "Return, O Lord! How long will it be?" And we do so, because we can find no substitute for the divine presence. We have learning, eloquence, argument, emotional appeals, earnest entreaties, and loving tenderness — but all this will not do! Things remain just as they were! We can be satisfied with nothing less than the presence of God. We value the servants — but we want the Master. We prize the instruments — but we long for the divine Agent. We have the wells — but we want the living, the life-giving water. And all our efforts will decay to nothing — except the Lord returns in power. In many places, our churches decrease, our congregations dwindle, our pastors are dispirited, and dull discontent pervades all the true people of God. These things make us cry, and cry with painful earnestness, "Return, O Lord! How long will it be?" But what ANSWER may we suppose that the Lord will give to many of us?

Perhaps he may say that he will not return as we desire — until we separate from the world as he has bidden us. His word is, "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." But, like Ephraim of old, we have mixed ourselves among the people. Politics, business, carnal associations, and worldly thinking have led us astray; so that there is but very little difference between the professing people of God — and those who make no profession. He requires us to stand out in bold relief from the world — to be distinct and distinguishable — to be like a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hidden. While worldly professors have balls, dances, concerts, etc. — we shall be left to cry, "Return, O Lord! How long will it be?"

Again, we may not expect him to return — until we realize the end of our salvation. We are called with a Heavenly calling. We are called to glory and virtue. Our calling is to publish and preserve God's truth — to represent and set forth the true nature of Christ's holy religion — to endeavor to pluck sinners as brands from the burning, and lead them on to glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life.

We are saved: to live for God — to live like Jesus — to aim at the honor of God in everything we do — to live as saints, or unearthly persons, who are born from above, buried with Christ, risen with Christ, ascended with Christ, and identified with Christ!

We are to act like the temples of the Holy Spirit — the companions of God the Father, and of his Son Jesus Christ, with whom we profess to live in close, constant, and sensible fellowship.

We are to make God's glory the one great end of our existence, so that, whether we think or speak, rest or work, worship or visit, eat or drink, or whatever we do — we do all to the glory of God.

We may not expect the Lord to return — until we stir up ourselves to take hold upon him. Like Jacob we must go out into the plain, and there wrestle with God. Like Elijah — we must go to the top of Carmel, and there plead until we prevail. Like Hezekiah we must turn our faces to the wall, and pray until God yields to us. Like the disciples at Emmaus we must constrain him to turn in and

abide with us.

Brethren, let us remember, that the energetic prayer of the righteous man avails much; that God will attend to his own elect when they cry day and night unto him — though he may seem to hold out long. Let us, therefore, stir up ourselves to take hold on him, and give him no rest until he bows the Heavens and comes down, and works wonders in our midst! Do we feel this to be our state? Is God at a distance from us? Are the ordinances comparatively barren? Is the gospel almost without effect? Are our churches and ministers at a loss to know what to do? Do we pant and long for a change? Is this the rooted, reigning, abiding desire of our souls? Can we be satisfied with no less? Are we becoming impatient and passionately crying out, "Return, O Lord! How long will it be?" Or can we be still, silent, and comparatively indifferent under such a state of things?

Brethren, the Spirit of God is grieved — and we have grieved him! Our Heavenly Father's heart is wounded — and we have wounded it! Our adorable Savior has been crucified afresh — and we have crucified him!

These things call for deep thought, for bitter tears, for daily repentance, for fervent prayers, for frank confession, for earnest pleadings, and for immediate reformation! Do we feel upon this subject — as we ought to feel? Do you? Do we act under the circumstances — as we ought to act? Do you? God refuses to be considered the author or the cause of these things, therefore he demands of us, "Is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these his doings? Do not my words do good unto him that walks uprightly?" Can we have walked uprightly, then? Impossible, or God would not withhold his presence from us! Hear his own word, "The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly!"

09 Counsel and Comfort

Counsel and Comfort "Hope in God." Psalms 42:5

Fellow-Christian, we live in trying times. Nations are convulsed, thrones are tottering, crowns are falling, confusion reigns, and men's hearts are failing them for fear! We cannot but feel; but we ought not to fear. There is enough to make us watch and pray — but not enough to deject or cast us down. The Lord reigns. Our Savior has all power in Heaven and in earth. He directs every event, and will overrule every occurrence for the fulfillment of his word, and the good of his beloved people. "He works all things after the counsel of his own will." Men may rage, infidels may blaspheme, professors may murmur, and real Christians may be filled with alarm; but He says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." The Lord sits above the water-floods, he remains King forever! Therefore, let no man's heart fail him. Let us look to the divine word. Let us look out for the Lord's hand. There is the rainbow of mercy in every cloud; but only the eye of faith can discern it.

Beloved, are you passing through storms, tempests, and trials? Hope in God — whatever your trial may be. Are you sick? He will make your bed, and sanctify your pain. Are you poor? He will answer your prayers, and supply your need. Are you sorrowful? He will comfort you, and give you joy for your sorrow. Are you tempted? He will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able to bear. Are you bereaved? He will be better to you than ten children. He will be a father to the fatherless, and a husband to the widow. He is a friend that loves at all times, and ever lives to manifest his friendship. Are you in perplexity? He will bring the blind by a way which they knew not, and make your way plain before you. Do you imagine that your trials are singular? He assures you that no temptation has taken you but such as is common to men, and he bids you not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you. Do you doubt your interest in Jesus, and your title to the promises? Read his sweet invitations, cast yourself afresh into his arms, and still hope in his mercy. Whatever may be your trial, whether inward or outward, personal or relative, spiritual or temporal, still "hope in God."

Hope, and do not fret, though the wicked prosper, and everything seems to be against you.

Hope, and do not murmur; for you have a thousand mercies more than you deserve, and more than some of your fellow-pilgrims.

Hope, and do not despond; for all things shall work together for your good; your God has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm.

Hope, and do not forebode; for light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.

Hope, and do not complain; for your Lord forewarned you of all that has happened. He told you that in the world you should have tribulation — but in him you should have peace.

Hope, and do not dread; no, not even death: for he who has delivered does deliver, and he will yet deliver you. He has delivered you in six troubles, and in seven he will not forsake you.

Hope in God — for he is gracious, merciful, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. He is faithful to his word. He is full of love to his children. He is pledged by his word to be a father to you. He will not fail you, nor forsake you. He will surely do you good, and do you good even by your present trials and troubles.

Hope in God — for he has an infinite variety of blessings to bestow. He has all you need — and has it for you. He has all you ever will want — and he will supply all your need. He has all you can consistently desire — and he will fulfill the desire of those who fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them.

Hope in God — for he has said to the coming sinner, "I will never cast out." To the tried saint, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain you." To every believer, "My grace is sufficient for you." To the weary, way-worn pilgrim to the celestial country, "Your shoes shall be iron and brass, and as your days so shall your strength be." To each Christian, "I will never leave you, I will never, no never, forsake you!"

Hope in God — for he will do as he has said; yes, he will do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. He will make all his goodness pass before us, and show us great and mighty things which we know not.

Hope in God — for you may; his invitations warrant you.

You ought; for his commands lay you under obligation.

You should; for his promises are exceedingly great and very precious.

Hope, then, in God —

not in circumstances — however favorable;

not in creatures — however kind;

not in events — however propitious;

not in connections — however encouraging;

not in evidences — however bright;

not in prospects — however blooming.

Hope in God —

when you read his word,

when you attend his ordinances,

when you face his foes,

when you circulate his truth,

when he hides his face,

when your comforts wither,

when your gourds die,
when your friends forsake you,
when your foes slander you,
when your health declines,
when poverty approaches,
when storms gather,
when Satan assaults, and
when death stares you in the face!

Hope — and be not dismayed. Let hope be . . .

the helmet that guards your head;

the anchor that steadies your vessel;

the friend that holds up your head when the water-floods overflow you. In a word, at all times, in all places, under all circumstances — hope in God, for you shall yet praise him, who is the health of your countenance and your God!

10 A Word to the Bereaved

A Word to the Bereaved "I spoke to you in your prosperity; but you said — I will not hear!"
Jeremiah 22:21

Prosperity is not always a blessing. Ease sometimes genders hardness of heart. Painful discipline is absolutely necessary. The Lord speaks to the prosperous — but they are too busy to attend. He brings a cloud over their affairs, he changes his pleasant dealings with them, and says, "Heed the rod and the One who appointed it!"

There is a parent bereaved of a lovely Christian child; it was an idol; or, if not, it was in a fair way of becoming so. The affections were set upon it. The Lord was displaced by it. It became absolutely necessary to remove it, for nothing else would do. The Lord had spoken by his word, by his ministers, by the gentle voice of his Spirit — but all was disregarded. The fond and foolish parent would not hear. Now the beloved object is taken away, and the idolater refuses to be comforted. The Lord's ways are called mysterious. The heart rises in opposition, and it is just ready to indulge in hard thoughts of Him, or to murmur against Him. But it must not be. No, rather examine your course. Turn over the pages of your past history. Attend to the Lord's inquiry, "Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the Lord your God when he led you in the way?" An eastern shepherd had taught his flock to know his voice and follow him. But on one occasion, when the weather was fine, and all was pleasant, he wished to lead his flock to another spot. He called them to follow him; a ewe who was feeding with her lamb beside her, refused to do so. He turned and snatched up her lamb and carried it off in his bosom, and she readily henceforth followed his call. Just so the good Shepherd, when we allow our lambs so to engross our attention, or captivate our affections, that we neglect to hear his voice, and obey his call, takes our lamb, lays it in his bosom, saying, "Follow me."

Bereaved Christian, has Jesus taken away your lamb? He has laid it in his bosom. He is carrying it to his Father's house. He will place it beyond the reach of the storm, the wolf, and painful disease. He is tender over it. He will take the utmost care of it. He will feed it, and lead it to living fountains of water. He will wipe away every tear from its eyes. It shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on it, nor any heat. It is safe. It is happy. It is at home. It knows its Shepherd's voice, is always in its Shepherd's presence, and enjoys its Shepherd's love. Happy lamb! Gracious Shepherd! Glorious flock!

Beloved! the Shepherd, who has your lamb in his bosom, still gently whispers, "Follow me." He spoke to you in your prosperity — but you would not hear; he speaks to you now in your sadness and sorrow, listen and attend to his voice. Follow him into his chambers of secret communion, there he will soothe and solace your soul. Follow him into his ordinances where he feeds his flock, and he will make you to lie down in green pastures, and lead you beside the still waters; he will restore your soul. Follow him in the path of tribulation with patient spirit and steady pace, and he will show you the path of life, and conduct you to his Father's right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.

Look not for your missing lamb — but look up in the Shepherd's face; there love is enthroned in brightness, and sympathy speaks in tears. Look at the Shepherd's arms, your lamb is safe there; and look at his warm bosom, your lamb is happy there. It was necessary that he should thus discipline you, and you will see this by-and-by. At present believe his word; he says, "I will do you no hurt." Believe his love to you, it is too great to allow the presence of a rival, or to allow you to injure yourself by improper attachments. Had he loved you less, he might have spared your feelings. You might have retained your loved one. Can you regret that Jesus loves you so much? Could you wish him to love you less? My friend, weep no longer. Dry up your tears. Listen to your Shepherd's voice. Follow in your Shepherd's footsteps. Detach your affections from earth and earthly things, and set them on those things which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God.

It is but a little while, and we shall be done with everything here on this poor earth. If the Lord had not taken your child now, you must have left it very soon; and if you had left it behind you in a world like this, who can tell what might have been its sufferings or its sorrows? If the Lord had not taken it from you — it may have been necessary that he should take you from it, and this might have been far worse. Your Savior has done wisely, you will see this by-and-by. Your Savior has acted kindly, and the time is coming when you will acknowledge it. Silence, then, your complaints. Dry up your tears. Rise from your mourning. Go forth at your Redeemer's call, and ask, as you fall in submission at his feet, "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

We may anticipate his reply. "Love me more. Keep closer to my side. Speak to me more frequently, and more fully. Live for my honor. Walk by my word. Let nothing occupy my place in your affections. Rest in my love to you. Rely on the promises I have made you. Attend to the cautions I have given you. Expect the mansion which I am now preparing for you."

Lord Jesus, let us not refuse to hear you — but give us your grace in such abundance, that we may listen to catch the first sounds of your voice, and stand ready to do whatever you shall command, or to surrender whatever you shall call for!

11 A Young Mother's Prayer

A Young Mother's Prayer

Occasioned by an expression uttered

by a mother, over her firstborn By James Smith, 1865

"Lord, bless my babe!" the youthful mother cried,
And fondly pressed her infant to her breast;
Then offered it to Him, who loved and died,
To give poor suffering mothers peace and rest.
It was her first-born, and she loved it well,
Admired each feature, full of strange delight;
Then turned the kindness of her God to tell,
Whose tender care had blessed her with the sight.
Perhaps she thought, "Ah! If I had been blind,
And felt my loved one on my bosom lie,
But could not see its face — my God, how kind
To let me see my baby's lovely eye!
Its little head had slumbered on my breast,
Its velvet cheek awakened sweet surprise;
Its ruby lips a mother's bosom prest,
Who longed to see it with her poor blind eyes.
"Or, if I had been deaf, and could not hear
Its little voice which thrills through all my soul.
How often would I have shed the bitter tear,
And found it hard my feelings to control.
"To know it prattled, pleasing all around,
And calling Mother with an angel's voice.
Unable to drink in the charming sound,

How could I with a mother's joy rejoice?
"But I have eyes to see my darling child,
And ears to listen to its feeblest cry;
My heart has danced already, while it smile,
And I have seen strange beauty in its eye!
Or, had my babe been blind, and could not see
Its mother's face, or nature's beauties bright;
How painful and distressing unto me,
Its sightless eye-balls destitute of light!
"Or, if it had been deaf, and could not hear
My voice, which seeks to soothe and hush its cries;
That were a burden I could scarcely bear,
Though to complain, in me, would be unwise.
"But my sweet babe has sight and hearing too,
Its senses and its members are complete;
The goodness of my God in this I view,
And lay my loved one at my Savior's feet.
"I do feel grateful, O God of love!
Accept the praises of my thankful heart;
And let me, though a sinner, daily prove,
The peace Your presence only can impart.
"Lord, bless my babe! Your daughter let it be;
In early life convert it by Your Word:
Oh, may it soon Your great salvation see,
And own You as its Savior and its Lord!
"This youthful mother offers up her child,
Savior, accept and fill it with Your love.
May it be holy, gentle, loving, mild,
And all the riches of Your mercy prove.

"Teach me to train it in Your holy ways,
And early lead it to Your gracious throne;
Oh, let my babe show forth my Savior's praise,
And by it, may Your holy will be done!
"I would not nurse it for the world or sin.
Or see it prove an enemy to Thee;
I'll early try its little heart to win,
And pray that it may consecrated be.
"It was Your gift, I love it for Your sake,
And hope to see it live Your name to fear;
Mother and babe into your keeping take,
And all through life, oh, may we find You near!
"Nor let my child assume my Savior's place;
To Him, my warmest love is ever due;
Blessed Spirit, daily fill my mind with grace,
That Jesus' glory I may still pursue.
"Lord, bless my babe, and spare it to me still,
Healthy and strong, to comfort my fond heart;
Oh, may it walk by Your preceptive will,
And in Your service, all its powers exert.
"Tis Yours, created by Your power alone,
As Yours, I wish to treat it day by day;
Oh, may Your precious blood its sins atone,
And from its spirit purge each stain away.
"Accept my feeble praise for mercies given,
And keep me near your side through all my way;
Conduct and teach me until I enter Heaven,
Nor let me from Your holy precepts stray.
"A mother's heart, before a Savior's throne,

Would thus my fondest wishes now express;
To me be all Your tender mercy shown,
And do, dear Savior — do my baby bless!
"You had a mother once, when here on earth:
You know how anxious is a mother's heart;
Oh, grant, do grant my child a second birth,
Your Holy Spirit to her soul impart.
"A mother's tears, are precious in Your sight,
A mother's prayers, You surely will receive;
Oh, fill a mother's breast with joyous light,
And to my darling girl, Your blessing give!
"You, You are worthy — honor to receive,
The highest honor earth or Heaven can raise;
Let all who from your fullness, grace receive,
In one harmonious anthem sound your praise!"

12 A Source of Comfort

A Source of Comfort "Be merciful — just as your Father is merciful." Luke 6:36

Jesus revealed Jehovah as a father. He constantly kept this idea before the minds of his disciples. He turned their thoughts from his greatness — to his goodness. He taught them to realize that he was their Father. They were . . .

to pray to him as such;

to trust in him as such;

to love him as such;

to obey him as such.

He was here setting forth his moral excellencies for their imitation. He commands them to be merciful — as their Father also is merciful. There is something very precious in this representation of the Most High God. He is our Father. As such, he is not only great, glorious, omnipotent, and just — but he is merciful. He is naturally, infinitely, eternally merciful. He is merciful to all — but more especially to his children. Yes, he delights to manifest his mercy to them. He is merciful this day, and he will be merciful to us through all our future days. Is our Father merciful? Then he will sympathize with us. Our sufferings will affect him. They will touch his heart. They will awaken his tenderest sympathies. We shall not suffer alone. He will come to us. He will sustain us. He will administer to our necessities. He will even make our bed in our sickness. His sympathy will effectually benefit us. Others may pity — he will relieve. Others may speak — he will apply. Others may wish us well — he will really do us good. Of us it shall by-and-by be said, as it was of Israel of old, "In all their afflictions — he was afflicted." Is our Father merciful? Then he will listen to us. Every sigh, every groan, every broken prayer — shall enter into his ears! He will listen to the beating of the contrite heart — to the heaving of the troubled bosom — to the sobs of the distressed spirit. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer. He will turn away from the strains of the seraphim, from the hallelujahs of all the celestial host — to listen to the moanings of his Ephraim, to the cries of his tempted, depressed, and afflicted children below! Beloved, he will never turn a deaf ear to our prayers — as poor, imperfect, and broken though they be. He cannot, for he is merciful. Is our Father merciful? Then he will pardon us. He will pardon not only once or twice — but every time we confess our sins with sorrow, and plead for pardon in Jesus' name. How often we have to go and confess the same sins, and seek forgiveness of the same offences. Nor dare we promise, that if he forgives us now — that we will be guilty of them no more. For corruption within us, and Satan without us, will soon lead us to commit them again. Still our merciful Father forgives us, and will continue do so. How strange was the plea of Moses when seeking pardon for the rebellious Israelites, "Let the power of my Lord be great, as you have forgiven them from Egypt until now." "As far as the east is from the west, so far will he remove our transgressions from us." Hear his own gracious announcement, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and will not remember your sins."

If our Father is merciful — then he will notice the least good thing in us. He did so in Abijah, the child of Jeroboam, as it is written, "He only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel." It may only be the desire to labor for him — without the power. The wish to be useful — without the opportunity. A little zeal for him. A little love to him. A little faith in him. A little sorrow that we have grieved him. A little kindness to some one of his people — the giving of a cup of cold water only. The speaking a word for him. Whatever good there is in us, generated by his Holy Spirit (and there is no good but what the ever blessed Spirit does produce) — he notices, approves, commends, records, and fosters!

Man may overlook it. We ourselves may think little of it. Not so our merciful Father; it is precious in his sight, and is highly esteemed by him. How different is prejudiced man! In his eyes — one fault in us, hides ten of our virtues; for one spot, he overlooks a score beauties. Oh, to resemble our ever merciful Father, in noticing and admiring what is good in his children.

If our Father is merciful — then he will accept the smallest thing from us. The child has but little to offer only some common field flower, or some simple drawing — but he brings it in love, he presents it to his father with a smile, he seems to say, "I wish it were gold, or some rich gem," and the father receives it gladly, and is pleased with it. Just so with our ever loving Father who is in Heaven. What can we bring him? What have we to present to him? It is, perhaps, only a loving wish, or a grateful acknowledgment, or a song of praise, or a poor sinful prayer. But it is what we have — and the Lord accepts it with more pleasure than he does Gabriel's services, or Michael's obedience!

He says, "My child would bring me something worthy of me, if he had it; but as he has it not — I accept the will for the deed." If there is first a willing mind, "it is accepted according to that a man has, and not according to that he has not."

If our Father is merciful — then he will allow no real evil to befall us. He can prevent it, and he will. Afflictions are not always evils. Rather, sanctified afflictions are among our choicest mercies, our most efficient teachers. David had many, sore, and long continued afflictions — but were they evils? Oh, no — they were blessings in disguise; therefore he writes, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." And again, "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me."

Solomon long since wrote, and providence has ever since proved the truth of the saying, "There shall no evil happen to the just." We have been tried. We have been cast down. We have been stripped. We have been disappointed. We have been painfully humbled. Our hearts have often bled — for they have been often and deeply pierced. But has any real evil befallen us? Can we bring this charge against our most merciful Father? Shall we be able to do so in Heaven? No, never! Never!

If our Father is merciful — then he will have us love one another for his sake. He loves all his children. He pities every one of his family. He bids us to love every one of our brothers and sisters. It is his will that we should love each other. It is our happiness to love one another. We cannot be like our Father — if we do not love all his children — if we do not love them always — if we do not love them with a warm and glowing love. Oh, for more love to the Lord's people!

If God is our Father, and our Father is merciful — what a source of comfort is opened to us. We know not what awaits us. We know not what we may have to pass through. But let what will come — we shall have one to love us, and one whose love is infinite, unchangeable, and glorious. Yes, our Father's heart will be always set upon us — it will always be full of love to us, to do us good.

We shall always have one to care for us. He will care for our persons to protect them, for our graces to foster them, and for our circumstances to adapt his mercies to them. The believer can never justly say, "No one cares for me," for his God cares for him — and his care is so efficient, that he is bidden to cast all his concerns upon God, and enjoy peace, because God cares for him.

We shall always have one to provide for us. We cannot be fatherless. We cannot be neglected. Our Father knows our needs, our weakness, and our dependent condition; he is ever merciful, his mercy is ever great to wards us, and therefore our supplies are certain. This led the apostle to write so confidently to his kind-hearted Philippians and say, "My God shall supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

If God is our merciful Father — let us cherish the thought. It is sweet. It is pleasant. It is profitable. It must do us good. How much better to think of our mercies — than our miseries; of our merciful Father — than of our malicious foes.

If God is our merciful Father — let us improve the privilege. Let us go to God as His children. Let us ask of him — as of a father. Let us credit his word, rely on his care, rejoice in his mercy, wait at his footstool, work in his vineyard, trust in his faithfulness, and hasten home to be with him in glory everlasting forever.

If God is our merciful Father — let us honor the relationship. Let us walk with God in holy fellowship, obey God with ardent zeal, imitate God with care and caution, and endeavor to exhibit the excellencies of his moral character in our conduct and conversation. Let us be holy — for God is holy. Let us be loving — for God is love. Let us be merciful — for our Father also is merciful. Let us attend to our Savior's admonition, delivered with so much love when instructing his disciples on the mount, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven."

Reader, is God your Father? Do you feel a child's love to him? Do you exercise filial confidence in him? Do you go to him for counsel, for supplies, for comfort, for all you need? Do you look upon him as merciful, and strive to imitate this excellence? Masters, are you merciful to your men? Men, are you merciful to your fellow-men? Mistresses, are you merciful to your servants? Servants, are you merciful to all about you? To be merciful you must not be unjust, or dishonest; but exercise mercy, every one toward another, consistently with the claims of kindred, and the requirements of God's holy precepts, as they bear upon the different relationships of life. Beloved, "be merciful, even as your Father who is in Heaven is merciful."

13 The Safeguard

The Safeguard "When I see the blood — I will pass over you." Exodus 12:13 The time for Israel's deliverance from Egypt had now arrived. God was faithful to his word. But while he fulfils his promise, he instructs his people; and through them, he instructs his church in all ages. The first-born of Egypt are to be destroyed; but how shall Israel escape? A lamb was to be selected, separated, and slain; his blood was to be caught in a basin, and to be sprinkled on the sideposts and lintels of their doors; and God said, "When I see the blood — I will pass over you."

Blood! there is something repulsive in blood. Who can look upon it without a shudder? Yet blood is to be the means of Israel's safety. Beloved, God speaks to us. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." His blood is the blood of the new covenant. It cleanses from all sin, and it secures all it cleanses. Let us look at: This attractive OBJECT. Justice demands blood. God acknowledges the equity of the demand. But if the sinner bleeds — his blood can make no atonement; if, therefore, he dies — his unatoned guilt demands that he suffer the second death — never-ending punishment. But the blood of Jesus attracts the eye of Divine Justice, meets all its claims, and satisfies all its demands. Precious blood! It is the blood of the Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world. The Lamb of God — the accepted substitute for man! The Lamb of God — slain in the sinner's stead! The Lamb of God — who becomes the food of all for whom he was slain. His blood is our safety. Sprinkled upon the door — no enemy could pass through to harm us. Sprinkled upon the door — we are certainly and eternally safe! Our safety is not in the door, however strong; nor in the lock, however intricate; nor in the bolts, however numerous; but in the blood! No blood on the door — no safety for the inhabitants within. No blood on the conscience — no safety from the messenger of death.

Oh, reader, see to it that the blood of Christ is your confidence! See to it that the blood of Christ is sprinkled on your soul! For God requires application of the blood. It was not enough that the Lamb was slain, roasted, and eaten, or that his blood was in the basin in the house. It must be on the door-posts and lintels. Nor is it enough for us that Jesus died — it must be applied to us.

God looks for the blood. Every Israelite had blood on his door. God looked on every door and saw it, and then he passed over. My dear friend, God looks upon your heart, upon your conscience; but does he see the blood — the blood of his own dear Son there? If he does, he is satisfied, he is reconciled to you; but if there is no blood, there is no satisfaction, no reconciliation, no peace. He will accept of none of your sacrifices, however costly; he will hear none of your prayers, however earnest; he will regard none of your sufferings, however painful; he will receive none of your services, however scriptural in outward form, if they are intended to be a substitute for the blood. You may give all the substance of your house — you may pray until your knees become like camels' hoofs — you may inflict sufferings upon yourself until nature faints under them — you may perform religious services without number and without end — but except the blood of Christ is applied to you — all is in vain.

God is fully satisfied with the blood of his dear Son, and he is fully satisfied with every one that places his dependence on it; but he is satisfied with nothing without this.

Oh, see to it, then, that your reliance is on the blood of Jesus alone! If any Israelite had substituted anything for the blood on the door, however costly, however beautiful, or however apparently reasonable — he must have perished; the destroying angel would not have passed over him. Trust, then, in the blood of Jesus alone, and see The beneficial RESULT. There was danger, for the angel of justice was going through the land. There was danger of violent death. Just so now, we are all in danger as sinners — in danger of the second death. But when the blood was sprinkled — there was safety — perfect safety. So now, when the blood of Jesus is sprinkled on our consciences — we are safe — eternally safe. God is then satisfied — for the law has received all that it demands. He is pleased — for justice unites with mercy in our salvation. He is pledged to secure us, for his word is passed, and he is faithful to that word, he says of all on whom he sees the blood. "They shall never perish! No weapon formed against them shall prosper. They shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; they shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end." The blood-sprinkled Israelite is safe, distinguished, and happy; for when God sees the blood he passes over him.

See then, beloved, first, What we all need of — the blood, the precious blood of Jesus; for it is the blood alone which makes atonement for the soul. In Jesus we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of our sins.

See, secondly, To what we should all look — to the blood. Do you need pardon? Look to the blood! Do you need peace? Look to the blood! Do you need victory over Satan? Look to the blood! Do you need perfect safety in life and death? Then look to the blood!

See, thirdly, In what we should all trust — in the blood. Not in our convictions, not in our comforts, not in our prayers, not in our sufferings; but in the blood of Jesus alone should we trust, for access to God, acceptance with God, and safety from God.

See, fourthly, Of what we should boast — the blood. "God forbid," exclaimed the Apostle, "God forbid that I should boast, except in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ." "God forbid," exclaims every true believer, "God forbid that I should boast of anything, except the glorious person, perfect work, and precious blood of my Lord Jesus Christ."

See, fifthly, What we should teach — the blood. In the pulpit, in the Sunday-school, and in the social circle — we should teach all to look to, trust in, and place entire dependence on — the blood of Jesus alone. Whether we speak, or whether we write, we should constantly say,

"Not the crucifix — but the cross;

not Mary — but Jesus;

not men's works — but a Savior's precious blood."

See, finally, Of what we should beware —

of neglecting the blood of Jesus,

of substituting anything for the blood of Jesus,

of mixing anything with the blood of Jesus, or

of thinking lightly of the blood of Jesus.

It is precious blood! It is invaluable blood! Without it, no sinner can be saved; with it, any sinner may. Oh, my soul,

meditate on this blood;

plead nothing before God — but this blood;

teach nothing as the ground of acceptance with God — but this blood;

depend on nothing for comfort or salvation — but this blood;

look to nothing for peace in life or in death — but this precious, precious blood!

14 The Poor Man's Course and Comfort

The Poor Man's Course and Comfort

It is no uncommon thing for a poor man to be in trouble — for man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. The single man has some troubles, the married often more. Lack of work — lack of health — lack of skill — lack of proper remuneration for his work — all these are at times sources of trouble. Hard times — hard masters — hard work — hard speeches — these also add to his troubles. There is trouble at the factory, trouble at the mill, trouble in the shop, and trouble in the field. Some troubles come from God — but more are the consequence of our own folly. However, trouble is trouble, come from whatever cause or quarter it may; and the great thing is to know what to do with it, and how to get rid of it.

Well, we are going to look at a poor man in trouble, to point out what he did with his trouble, and how he got rid of it. He lived many years ago, his witness is in Heaven, and his record is in God's book. Hear it! "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalms 34:6). No doubt but he had temporal troubles, perhaps just such as yours:

A large family — and a small income.

Hard work — and a weak body.

Little employment — and many demands.

Providence seemed to frown upon him — and many things to go wrong with him.

Then he had spiritual troubles. A hard heart, a bad memory, a bitter enemy, many fears, distressing doubts, perplexing cogitations, and violent temptations — separate or combined, at times troubled him.

God hid his face.

Unbelief gained strength.

Satan suggested hard thoughts. His own heart bothered him.

He looked back with regret — and forward with foreboding.

He looked within with alarm — and upward without confidence. A cloud covered him, he imagined all things were against him, and he drooped and hung down his head. He felt that he was a poor man. He had no stock in hand. He had nothing of his own with which he could be pleased, or in which he could trust. Tried in body and in mind — tried in his family and in his circumstances. Yet he did not lie down in despair, he did not give way to despondency.

What did he do?

"He cried unto the Lord!" This was the very best, the wisest thing that he could do. Had he cried to creatures — they might have been destitute of sympathy, or unable or unwilling to help. He cried unto the Lord, his father's God, and his own God. He cried unto the Lord, who is full of pity, plenteous in mercy, and pledged to answer prayer. He cried unto the Lord, who is accessible at all times, and in all places. He cried unto the Lord, who had heard millions of poor souls in trouble, and had never refused to deliver one. He cried unto the Lord, who sent or permitted the trouble, to furnish him with a message, give him an occasion, and compel him to apply at his throne.

He cried unto the Lord — he cried from his heart, he cried with his voice. His prayer was simple, earnest, importunate, and therefore successful. He carried his trouble to the Lord — he told his Heavenly Father all about it, and he left it at his throne. He went with all his fears, cares, and sorrows. He opened his heart, he unburdened his soul, he relieved his mind. He cried as one in distress. He cried to one who could help. He cried as one who hoped to be heard and answered. He went again, and again, and again — until he obtained relief. He cried in trouble, he cried because of trouble, he cried to be delivered from trouble, nor did he cry in vain.

Dear reader, are you poor? Are you in trouble? Is your trouble great? Is it spiritual or temporal — or both? Carry it to the Lord! Do as this poor man did. He is set before you as an example. This verse was written on purpose to encourage, comfort, and direct you. Say not that you know not what to do. Cry unto the Lord. Say not that you know not what will be the end. Cry unto the Lord — and he will deliver you from all your troubles.

You have a friend at God's right hand. Jesus is there. He knows what trouble is. He knows what are the effects of trouble on the soul, the spirits, and the animal frame. He has been tried like you are. He was made our High Priest, because he can have compassion on the ignorant, and those who are out of the way. God will hear you — for his sake. He will answer you — when you plead his dear name.

Imitate this poor man, and in doing so, remember that the Lord, "Saved him out of all his troubles." They were numerous. They were painful. Perhaps some of them had been long-continued. They required . . .

an omnipotent helper,

an all-wise deliverer,

a present God! And prayer brought the power, wisdom, and presence of God — o bear upon the poor man's circumstances, and he was saved out of all his troubles!

God loves to save us from our troubles — as well as our sins. He saved Israel from Egypt, David from all his foes, and Jeremiah from the dungeon; he is saving many from trouble now, and he will save us. Many are this day singing their songs of deliverance, to the praise of his glorious grace; and he is saying to us, "Call upon me in the day of trouble — I will deliver you; and you shall glorify me."

Let us not, then, nurse our troubles, encourage our fears, or give way to our foes; but let us go to our God by prayer, let us go in faith, and let us expect that as this poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles, so he will hear, appear for, and deliver us. We have the same promises as he had; our claim upon God is as good as his was; and we have more

to plead than he could have — for we have the dear name, precious blood, finished work, and constant intercession of Jesus, the High Priest of our profession!

Poor, tried, tempted, troubled, tempest-tossed soul — look up! Yield no longer to your fears, listen no longer to Satan, that enemy to God and man; think not of sinking under your load — but "roll your burden on the Lord — and he shall sustain you!" "Cast all your care upon him — for he cares for you!" Cry day and night unto God, this will prove your election and secure your deliverance. Hear what your Savior says, "And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly" (Luke 18:7-8). That trouble will never hurt you — which leads you to the Lord; the pain it causes is beneficial, and the energy it awakens does you good. Carry all your troubles to your God, plead with him to sanctify them to you, and then remove them from you; but seek their sanctification first, and let their removal be a secondary consideration. Be jealous lest you should lose the benefit of an affliction, for no trouble is sent — but with a special object in view, and if the present trouble does not accomplish that object, another and perhaps a heavier trouble may be sent.

Reader, do you know the God of Israel, who delivered this poor man? Has he ever delivered you? We know of no more pitiable object, than a sinner in trouble with no God to go to, no promise to cheer him, no blessed Spirit to soothe and comfort him. We do not wonder that some fly to strong drink, and others to self-destruction. My dear friend, seek the poor man's God, look to the poor man's Savior, read the poor man's book, pray for the poor man's comforter (the Holy Spirit) — and so will you arrive safely at the poor man's home — where toil, trouble, disappointment, perplexity, sin, or sorrow, can never come!

15 The Fear of Death

The Fear of Death "Free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death."
Hebrews 2:15

There is always something solemn, and generally something appalling — in DEATH. We cannot love it. It is the effect of sin. It is the enemy of our nature. All the circumstances connected with it are painful and trying — and then there is the unseen, the unknown, the eternal world beyond it! When we reflect on these things, the thoughts will arise, "What if I am deceived! What if I should be wrong! What if I should find out my mistake too late!" Dwelling upon such thoughts, naturally makes us sad — they weaken our faith, they dim the eye of hope, and they give Satan an occasion against us. To dwell on them is to strengthen them, and to deepen the gloomy impression which they make. Some dwell on them so much, and so frequently — that they can seldom enjoy their present mercies, and can never look forward to their departure from this world without gloom; it embitters life, and renders the idea of death dreadful. This is wrong, decidedly wrong!

We should look from death — to Jesus; and never look at death — but through Jesus. He has conquered death for us, and has deprived the monster of his sting. Nothing can make death dreadful — but sin; and if sin is pardoned, even that cannot. But if we believe in Jesus, if we have committed our souls to him, if we are living to promote his glory — our sins are most certainly pardoned. God has blotted them out in the blood of his dear Son, and he assures us that they shall never be mentioned against us. We have his word for our security, and he has added his oath, that we might have strong consolation. We should trust in God's faithful word, and do honor to the blood of Jesus by believing that it will save us from all condemnation.

"But my faith is weak!" So it may be — and yet weak faith will lay hold on an omnipotent Savior, and bring everlasting salvation to the soul.

"But my fears are strong." Yes, and so they will be — as long as you nurse them, and look at yourself or at death — instead of looking to Jesus.

"But I find it so hard to believe." So it is, while we attempt it in our own strength — but when we seek the Holy Spirit's aid it is easy enough.

"But I have no assurance of a saving interest in Christ." Perhaps not, nor is it likely that you will, while you look into self, at your sins, or at death: nor even if you make assurance your principal object. Faith is giving credit to God's word, exercising confidence in God's faithfulness, and relying on the perfect work of Christ for life and salvation. Out of this grows our assurance of our saving interest in Christ. Now if, instead of giving credit to God's word, placing confidence in God's faithfulness, and relying on the finished work of Christ — you are hunting about for the sense of your interest in Christ, or for what you call assurance — you are not likely to obtain it. You must renounce self, rely simply on Jesus, and expect him to save you, because he has promised to save all who trust in his name; so doing you are safe, you have nothing to fear from death, and you

will be happy. But the moment you look away from Christ to self; place confidence in your evidences; or think of death apart from the infinite sacrifice of Jesus — you get into bondage!

It must be so. It always will be so. Death can do no harm to a believer in Christ. It ought not to be the object of his dread. His sins are pardoned,

God is his Father,

the Lord Jesus is his Advocate,

the Holy Spirit is his Guide, and

Heaven is his Father's house, and his home.

God is always, and everywhere, his Father; no matter, therefore, whether in the body or out of it, whether in this world or another, he is safe! Death cannot affect his state, it can make no alteration in the relationship. Believe, then, in Jesus, look to Jesus, place your entire dependance on Jesus — and never trouble about death until it comes; it is no business of yours today, it belongs to tomorrow; and when death comes, Jesus will come with it — and he will give you grace to die as a Christian, as he has given you grace to live like one. But some, from the weakness of the nerves, or a naturally melancholy temperament, or from bad training — are always in bondage from the fear of death. Some fear dying, and some fear the consequences of death. They never look forward but with gloom, thus making themselves sad, and all around them. Now, such seldom fear death when it comes; it is never found to be what they feared. The fear of death is gone — before they come to it; and the dreaded act of dying is comparatively easy.

I have often known this to be true, and my friend Mrs. Chin, who was lately called home to be forever with the Lord, was a remarkable instance of it. She was always fearing death. In vain I told her that Jesus had conquered death, that he would be with her in it, that she would be disappointed when she came to it. In vain I directed her to look to the cross, and not to the grave; to Jesus, and not death; or assured her that at evening-time, it would be light. A gleam of light would sometimes irradiate her dark mind, a little joy would occasionally drop into her troubled soul; but generally a deep sigh would say, "I am in bondage still."

Nothing that I could say, no prayer that I could offer, would give her more than transient relief. But how was it with her at last? A letter from her daughter, in whose house she died, which now lies before me, says, "The fear of death had been removed from her mind for some time past, and she longed," as she said, "To go home to Heaven!" Often and often had I told her that this would be the case — but she could not believe me; she feared that I had mistaken her character, that all her past experience was a delusion, and that her Christian friends thought too well of her. Sad were her days, and often sorrowful her nights, and all for lack of one thing, and what was that? Just giving Jesus credit for being true to his character, and faithful to his word. But she often feared dying too, and how was it with her in that respect? The same letter says, "She had been ill for nearly a two weeks — but a day or two previous to her decease, we thought her better. She was rising to dress to have her bed made, when she suddenly fell back and said, 'I am faint;' she never spoke after, and in about half an hour after this she ceased to breath, and entered into the presence of that Savior she so many years loved, and whom she so much longed to see."

Reader, are you harassed with the fears of death? Do not encourage them — but confide in the care, kindness, and grace of your Savior, "who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." Live upon him now by faith, live for him, endeavoring to promote his cause — and he will never leave you in the article of death, or allow you to be deceived. Thousands have found their fears groundless, and have realized deliverance from them before called to contend with that last enemy. Satan loves to harass you; it is often his suggestions that direct your attention to death — when you ought to be looking to Jesus, and to be rejoicing in his dear name.

Death is yours, if you are Christ's. It cannot injure you. It will only undress you, that you may be clothed with your house which is from Heaven. It will open the cage-door, and let the bird fly and enjoy its native element. It will knock off every fetter, bring you out of the dungeon of clay, and introduce you to the presence of "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God." Though your faith is weak — it connects you with the Savior, it preserves you from all the terrible consequences of death, and entitles you to everlasting life. If you cannot live without Christ — death will never be allowed to separate you from Christ. If you love Christ here, and long to enjoy his presence and his smile — you will rise to see Christ in glory, and so be forever with him.

Let not death terrify you, you will not find it what you fear; it will not be when near — what it appears in the distance. The grace that sustains you now — will sustain you then, and will make you more than a conqueror over death, through Jesus who has loved you. Jesus, who died for you, will be with you when you are dying, and will give you a glorious and eternal victory over death.

16 An Inquiry for the New Year

An Inquiry for the New Year

Beloved friends, as the Lord has graciously spared us to enter upon another portion of time, it befits us to ask: How shall we begin it? Much often depends on the beginning. It is important to begin well. Let us reflect. Let us inquire. Let us decide. Shall we not begin it in FAITH? This is the stay, the staff, the stimulus of the soul. Let us afresh exercise faith in God as our Father — in Jesus as our Savior — in the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. Let us believe the love which God has to us — that "God is love." Let us take up the promises as the pledges and proofs of his love. He made them to inform us, to cheer us, to draw out our love to him, and our confidence in him. He will fulfill them. He never violated a promise yet. He never will. It is impossible for God to lie, or to prove unfaithful. His throne is not more stable than his promise. Let us therefore believe the word, seek the blessings, and expect the favors. He has promised us . . .

wisdom — to understand our way;

strength — to prosecute our journey;

grace — to subdue our iniquities;

pardon — to pacify our consciences;

righteousness — to justify our persons;

an answer to all our prayers;

and a supply of every want.

Let us therefore enter upon the new year taking up the promises afresh, and exercising faith in the Almighty and never changing Promiser. And in the prospect of the arduous duties, painful trials, determined foes, and bright prospects which are before us, say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours alone" (Psalms 71:16). Shall we not begin this year also in PENITENCE?

How many sins we have committed!

How many duties we have neglected!

How many opportunities for usefulness we have lost!

What evil tempers we have displayed!

What fearful corruptions still work in our hearts!

Let us look to the crucified One — who has borne the punishment of our sins in his own body on the tree — and let us mourn as one mourns for his only son, and be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born. Sorrow, deep and pungent sorrow, for sin, befits us. Our sins have not

been of an ordinary character; they have been sins . . .

against clear light,

against tender love,

against solemn professions, and

against repeated warnings and exhortations.

We have sinned against God — and against man. We have sinned amidst the uncertainties of time — and in prospect of the solemnities of eternity. Let us bow before the throne of grace, and make frank confession. Let us go to Gethsemane and Golgotha — and have fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings. Let us earnestly entreat the Holy Spirit to produce deep compunction, and to give us the grace of repentance, that we may sorrow after a godly manner (2 Corinthians 7:9). Nothing will benefit us more at the beginning of this new year, than deep and profound repentance for sin. But shall we not begin this year also in PRAYER? In special, fervent, and importunate prayer? We need grace, special grace; therefore we should make use of special prayer. Our prayers have been too formal. They have been offered up too much as a matter of course. There has not been that life, that earnestness, or that importunity in them — which there should have been. God is willing to give what we need. He waits to be gracious unto us. He has promised that he will not turn a deaf ear to our prayers. But we must feel our need. We must realize our dependence. We must pray in earnest. We must ask — as if we meant it. Cold prayers will not do. Formal devotion cannot be acceptable. We must stir up ourselves to call upon God.

Let us fix times for special prayer, and keep them. Let us select subjects for prayer, and stick to them. Let us feel our dependence upon the Holy Spirit as the author of prayer, and seek his direct and powerful operations. Our Heavenly Father is saying, "Call upon me, and I will show you great and mighty things." Our exalted Redeemer is saying, "Whatever you shall ask the Father in my name, I will do it." The Holy Spirit is saying, "The fervent, effectual prayer of a righteous man avails much." Let us believe in the efficiency of prayer. Let us try and prove the power of prayer. Let us mix faith and hope with every prayer we present.

Let us begin the year by renewing our CONSECRATION. Let us, with deep devotion, listen to the apostle, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service: and be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:1-2). Let us imitate those spoken of by the prophet, "One shall say, I am the Lord's" (Isaiah 44:5). Let us retire, let us place ourselves before the cross, immediately under the eye of God; and there let us anew solemnly surrender ourselves, our property, our talents, and all that we can command — to God and his service. There, let us consecrate the whole to God, to be his, for his use, and for his glory. And let us endeavor this year to go about our business as consecrated people, let us consider that we are set apart for God, devoted to God, and that every power is to be held sacred to the glory of God. This would be consistent. This would only be honest, for we are not our own, we are bought with a price: and should therefore glorify God in our bodies and spirits which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). We are not hired servants — but the absolute property of the Lord Jesus, ransomed by his blood, redeemed by his power, and placed and kept in this world for his glory.

Let us enter upon this new period of our existence in a spirit of WATCHFULNESS. The times are dangerous.

We are surrounded by snares.

We have traitors within us.

We have hosts of enemies all around us.

We are in an enemy's country, and are every moment exposed to danger.

Let us watch against our foes.

Let us watch the intimations of our Lord's will. Let us be sincere, devotional, active, diligent, peaceable, and upright before God and man.

If we believe — faith will keep us steady;

if we repent — penitence will make us humble;

if we pray — prayer will ensure us supplies;

if we consecrate afresh all our energies to the Lord — consecration will preserve us from a worldly spirit; and

if we are watchful — we shall escape many temptations and snares which overtake and overcome the heedless and unwary.

Beloved, may this year bring you much grace from God; may you live and walk in close and holy fellowship with God; may you be entirely devoted, and bring great glory, to God; and if death should overtake you, may an abundant entrance be administered unto you into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13).

17 PURITY

PURITY "Keep yourself pure." 1 Timothy 5:22

What cleanliness is to the body — holiness is to the soul: essential to its health, happiness, and beauty. But many who have clean bodies — have very filthy souls. They pay attention to the outward man — but altogether neglect the hidden man of the heart. Yet nothing impure can enter Heaven — nothing unholy can enjoy the gracious or glorious presence of God. The thrice holy God cannot hold fellowship with impurity or sin: where iniquity is indulged, communion with God is effectually prevented. Therefore he says, "Wash yourselves. Cleanse yourselves. Remove your evil deeds from my sight. Stop doing evil."

Purity flows from grace. It is the effect of a living faith in Christ. It evidences the indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit of God. Where the Spirit dwells — sin is hated; the defilement of sin causes loathing, mourning, and fervent prayer. Those who are much with God — contract a natural dislike to sin, a love to holiness, and a growing desire for perfection. But "if we say that we have fellowship with God, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth." Light has no fellowship with darkness — but chases it away; God has no fellowship with sin — but condemns it in his law, crushes it by his Spirit, and cleanses it away by his gospel, brought home with power.

He purifies the heart by faith. He sanctifies us through his truth. He washes us in the laver of his word, and effectually cleanses us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Blessed Lord, carry on the purifying process in our hearts! Set our whole hearts against sin, make it the abhorrence of our souls. Fill us with the deepest hatred to it, and make us groan whenever we in any measure indulge in it. Oh, to find sin — the plague of our lives, the loathing of our souls, and holiness our element and delight! But Paul was writing to a holy man: To one who was washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. To one who was serving the Lord with a pure conscience. To his dearly beloved son. To a minister of the gospel of Christ. To one who had received both the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit. To one eminent alike in station, usefulness, and grace. Still to Timothy, he says, "Keep yourself pure." The purest vessels may be soiled. The cleanest garments will contract defilement. The holiest may be overcome by temptation. The best need caution, counsel, and exhortation.

None of us are safe any longer than God keeps us, and we have no right to expect that God will keep us but in the exercise of watchfulness, prayer, and faith. The best of men have fallen — and the best may fall. Those whom we least expected have, in an evil hour — given way to temptation; and what has been — may be again.

There is now very much impurity in the church. Few think that there is such a depth of defilement as there is. The curtain is now and then partially drawn to the side, and we are astonished at what some professors do in the dark. Our young men need the exhortation of the apostle especially, "Keep yourself pure;" but they are not the only parties on whom it should be enforced.

"Keep yourself pure" from mental uncleanness. Some seem to revel in mental debauchery and filthiness. Their speech at times betrays them, and their actions at others. Sin is very generally acted over in the mind, first. Men do in thought — what they would not do in deed; they become familiarized with the evil, and then, by-and-bye, it is acted out in the conduct. Sin always hardens the heart, brutalizes the passions, and sears the conscience. It is by degrees, that we are led into open transgression. The world within — is far worse than the world without — as bad as it is. The eye of God sees what would make us ashamed to lift up our heads among our fellows, if it was known to them.

Some do not seem to realize the evil there is in mental impurity. They yield to temptation, give way to folly, and perpetrate crimes in the chamber of their imagery; and do not feel ashamed, because no eye but God sees it; nor do they humble themselves, just because men are unacquainted with it. Some have reason to say with Solomon, though in a different sense to that in which he used the words, "I have come to the brink of utter ruin, and now I must face public disgrace." Oh, what does God's eye behold of impurity, even in his own house, and among his own professed people! If the pulpit was exposed to the pews, or the pews to the pulpit — we would not be able to endure the presence of each other!

"Keep yourself pure" from actual uncleanness. He who indulges in unclean thoughts, will soon use unclean words, and then fall into unclean practices. God only knows the vast amount of impurity which is practiced by professors of religion in the present day. We dare not write what we know, or even whisper to others what has been communicated to us. Beloved, let us cultivate purity of thought, purpose, speech, and action. Let us live under the impression that everything impure is odious in the sight of God; and that while he hates uncleanness anywhere, he especially hates it in his own people.

Young men, who live in large towns and cities, who are thrown into the company of loose professors particularly — be cautious! Keep a tender conscience. Realize that the ever-waking eye of a sin-hating, sin-punishing God is upon you — and fear. But especially realize the tenderness and greatness of God's love to you in Jesus, and that nothing can offend or grieve him but sin; and so from love, keep yourselves pure.

Impurity weakens faith, confuses the judgment, degrades the affections, hardens the heart, alienates the soul from God, and renders our efforts to do good ineffectual. Many wonder that their work is not successful; but the real secret of the lack of success, often lies in the lack of holiness. We are not fit for God's hands to touch. We are not fit for the Holy Spirit to sanction. The apostle, referring to evil men, evil principles, and evil practices, says, "If a man therefore purges himself from these — he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and fit for the master's use, prepared unto every good work." Then he immediately adds, "Flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Timothy 2:21-22.)

We need . . .

more holiness;

more entire consecration to God;

more inward hatred to all sin;

more self-denial in all its thousand forms;

more non-conformity to the world;

and a more exact copying of the example of our blessed and beloved Lord and Master.

We must not expect much success without this; nor must we expect this until we are thoroughly broken and humbled before God, and take this word for our guide, "Keep yourself pure!" No holiness — no Heaven! "Without holiness — no one will see the Lord!"

Before we can have power with God, we must be reconciled to him. By nature we are enemies. We are rebels up in arms against him. We are opposed to him, and can have no power with him. When the Holy Spirit convinces us of sin, burdens us with a sense of guilt, alarms us with an apprehension of everlasting destruction — we then feel the sad consequences of alienation from God. We try various means to make peace with him — but all fail. At length he leads us to the cross, unfolds to us the wondrous love of God, explains to us the nature of the Savior's work, and fixes the eye of the mind upon the Crucified One! And then the heart softens, the tears begin to flow, enmity is subdued, hope springs up, reliance is placed on the glorious sacrifice, God appears a friend, and reconciliation is effected. The love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and the sinner heartily loves God as the effect of it. Friendship for eternity commences. God and man are upon the best possible terms. It was the righteous Judge meeting with the guilty criminal; it is now the gracious Father meeting with his tenderly beloved child. The soul has "power with God," it asks and receives, that its joy may be full.

There must be faith in God. We must give a warm-hearted credit to God's word, and exercise confidence in God's veracity and faithfulness. We must endeavor to understand just what God means in his promises and proclamations, and give credit to them; and we must go to God, expecting that he will prove himself true and faithful to his word. Without faith it is impossible to please God, therefore we can have no power with God. Neglect or disbelief of his word, pours contempt upon him; but attention to it, and confidence in it, does him honor. And when he sees us struggling with unbelief, fighting against the vile insinuations of Satan, and endeavoring to confide in his truthfulness — he looks upon us with approbation, sympathizes with us in our conflicts, and receives us at his throne with pleasure. Crediting his testimony, and confiding in his faithfulness, we have "power with God."

There must be an abiding sense of our own weakness. It was not until the patriarch felt himself unable to combat, and was broken down before God, that he prevailed. Weak Jacob, overcomes the omnipotent angel. Nothing has such an influence upon our covenant God — as the sighs, groans, and tears of his weak and humbled children. The weak believer takes hold upon God's strength, when, with the promise in his hand, the cross in his eye, ardent desires in his heart, and the plaintive language of supplication on his lips — he bows before the throne of mercy, and appeals to a Father's love. When we are weak — then are we strong. When we feel that we have no power to go against the great army of our foes, and our eyes are up unto our God — then victory is certain. Out of weakness — we are made strong. The Lord fights for us and we hold our peace. Oh, to see the Lord's people thoroughly emptied, and stripped of the last rag of their own righteousness; to see them broken down before God's throne, under a deep sense of their

weakness and insufficiency — for then we may expect that great good will be done! But so long as we imagine that we are strong, boast of our native powers, and rejoice in our own resources — we shall be weak, feeble, and easily overcome!

There must be earnest application to the Lord for his blessing. Prayer is conceived in the depth of a believer's heart, under the prolific influences of the Holy Spirit — and is poured out before God's gracious throne in the dear Redeemer's name. The deeper our feeling of the importance and necessity of what we ask — the more earnest will be our prayers before God, and the greater our "power with God." A cold acquiescence in divine statements, a formal confession of our needs, and a matter-of-course application to God — will do no good. We must feel, and we must feel deeply — before we shall be powerful on our knees. Too many talk before God — rather than plead with God. They pray from custom — not from necessity. Oh, if we realized that we were the friends of God, if we had strong faith in God, if we were deeply sensible of our weakness before God, if we with downright earnestness applied to God — it would soon be seen that we had "power with God."

There must be an habitual hatred of all sin. For if we indulge iniquity in our hearts — the Lord will not hear our prayers. The 'idol that provokes to jealousy' set up in our hearts, be it what it may, will deprive us of all power with God. He will ask, "Do you provoke the Lord to jealousy?" He will say, "Put away every man his idols from before my eyes."

If we indulge covetousness, gluttony, uncleanness, worldly conformity, deceit, intemperance, hatred, strife, evil speaking, frivolity, or any other sin in our hearts — we cannot have power with God. His word to us is, "Wash — and be clean; put away the evil of your doings, cease to do evil, learn to do well." One cherished sin, let it be what it may — will effectually prevent our having "power with God." This accounts for so many prayers being offered in vain. They are scriptural in form, suited to our circumstances, earnestly expressed, and devoutly presented — but secret sin indulged prevents their success.

Beloved, if we have power with God, we shall have power over SELF. Energetic prayer will bring the arm of God to bear . . .

on our corruptions — and subdue them;

on our tempers — and control them;

on our improper habits — and we shall conquer them. No power short of Divine, can really conquer one sin, or effectually subdue one corruption of the heart!

If we have power with God, we shall have power with men — with good men to influence them, with bad men to benefit or silence them.

Power with God brings a secret energy into the soul, by which we conquer and accomplish what would otherwise be impossible.

If we have power with God — we shall have power over Satan. What an awful description is given of him in the Apocalypse, "That old serpent, the devil, which deceives the whole world." How astonishing is his power! How amazing his influence! And this power and influence is opposed to, and brought to bear upon, the church of God. How many professors are deceived by him. How

many are led captive by him at his will. The head laid on Delilah's lap, has been shorn of its locks — and our Samsons are now, many of them, the sport of the infernal Philistines! Satan has proved himself too powerful and too crafty for thousands of professors; he has induced them to settle down in a mere form of religion, or to indulge in some secret sin, or to substitute external services for the internal experience of the power of God's truth, and they have no power with God. Nothing will conquer Satan — but power from God. He cares for no foot, but that which crushed his head on Golgotha!

We can never conquer self, succeed in our efforts to do lasting good to men, or overcome Satan who overcomes such millions — but as we have power with God. Oh, Holy Spirit, the Spirit of power, break us down before God, set our hearts against all sin, give us faith in God, indulge us with a vivid sense of our reconciliation to God, and enable us to pray with fervor, that so we may have power with God!

18 The Word of Command

The Word of Command "Go forward!" Exodus 14:15 This supposes that you are in the right way, for if you are not, the command would be, "Stop, turn around!" We do not say to the careless sinner, "go forward," for he is in the road to Hell, and every step brings him nearer to that awful place! To urge him forward would be a cruelty, and prove that we were hardened in sin. But if you have entered in at the strait gate — if you are in the narrow way — if you have professed faith in Jesus — if you are united to the Lord's people — if you are engaged in the Lord's work — if you are going to the land of promise which flows with milk and honey, then "Go Forward!"

Let us notice —

1. Some of the INDUCEMENTS to go forward. Your Head, your beloved Savior, is before you. He has traveled the path; and, if you notice as you go on, you may observe his foot-prints. He ran the race. He marked out the road. He conquered the foe. He went first as the Captain of salvation, and he now says to every soldier in his army, "Follow me! Do as I have done." Would you be like him? Would you win his approbation? Would you see him as he is? Would you hear him say, "Well done!" Then "Go Forward!" Your work is before you. The foe is to be conquered. The land is to be possessed. The witness is to be borne. The enemies are to be reconciled. The truth is to be circulated. The command is to be obeyed. The predictions are to be fulfilled. And to you the voice cries, as to Lot when he came out of Sodom, "Run for your lives! And don't look back or stop anywhere in the valley!"

Before you are your brethren at labor; before you is the spot you are to cultivate; before you are the souls you are to win; therefore if you love your work — if you would please your Master — if you would serve your generation, "Go Forward!" Your examples are before you. In the distance you may see patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, reformers, and the great cloud of witnesses. They have borne their testimony — they have spread God's truth, they conquered the combined host of enemies — they performed the will of God from their hearts — they suffered in his righteous cause — they have left you an example — that you should follow in his steps. "Be you also followers of those who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises." If you would arrive safely where they are now — if you would leave behind you a good name, as they have done — if you would not have their example lost upon you, then "Go Forward." Your eternal home and reward are before you. This poor world is not your rest: it is not your father's home. Your brethren are hastening through this desert, they are fast arriving at the better country, they are passing into the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. And, if you would not be left in this howling wilderness — if you would not be overtaken by the "floods of great waters," if you would not be the laughing-stock of your enemies — if you would not belie your profession, "Go Forward!"

2. You are under SOLEMN OBLIGATIONS to "go forward." Your God commands you to go forward; and his command is law. But not only is there authority — there is love. He is not only your Sovereign — but your Father. And as he bids you "go forward," he will go with you. He does

not send you alone, or under the convoy of angels — but he says, "I will go with you." He is just before you, and he says, "Follow me!" He sees some professors loiter and linger, and he says, "Whoever does not bear his cross, and come after me — cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). The times demand that you go forward. Everything around you is in motion — all is going forward. Commerce, politics, useful inventions, the arts and sciences — all things are moving onward. And shall the Christian, or the Christian church — alone stand still or go backward? The Lord forbid it. Forward, beloved friends, or your heels will be trodden upon by those behind you, and those will pass you who have not half so much to animate them and stimulate them as you have. The TIMES in which we live are peculiar; they are stirring times; everything is awake, and most things appear to be more wide awake than the church of Christ. Brethren, let us not sleep as do others; but let us wake up, watch, work, and "go forward" with courage and determination. The state of the WORLD requires it. Popery is going forward. Other erroneous systems are going forward. Infidelity marches on. The world is still in darkness — error reigns in it — Satan possesses it — and the dark places of it are still the habitations of cruelty! Hundreds of millions have never heard the gospel. Millions who have heard it — have not believed it. Thousands are falling into Hell every day, and thousands are coming into life to take their places, imitate their folly, and meet their doom. By the ignorance that prevails — by the cruelties that are practiced — by the crimes that are committed — by the millions that are perishing — by the myriads that fall into Hell — we beseech you, "Go Forward!" The condition of the CHURCH calls for it. What shall we say of the church's condition? She is weak and feeble. She is carnal and selfish. She is poor and miserable. Her converts are few. Her soldiers are cowards. Her divisions are many. Her Lord is dishonored. Her enemies triumph. Her rivals make headway against her. If you would see the church arise and put on her beautiful garments; if you would see her united and happy; if you would see her troops disciplined, her officers at their posts, her banners floating in the four winds of Heaven, her enemies retreating, her triumphs increasing, her borders enlarging, and her converts fleeing to her as a cloud, or as doves to their windows, then "Go Forward!"

3. The CONSEQUENCES of not doing so, will be fearful. If you do not go forward — you will go back, for there is no standing still. But to go back is both dangerous and disgraceful. You have no armor for the back. You will give your foes an advantage — who have been watching for your halting, and predicting your fall. You will falsify your profession, for you have said, "I will be yours alone, yours in life, yours in death, and yours forever!"

You will lose your reputation, and be covered with contempt and shame. Go forward, therefore, though difficulties, dangers, and obstructions are in your way!

Go forward — for time is flying!

Go forward — for death is coming!

Go forward — for eternity is at hand!

Go forward — and God will bless you!

Go forward — and Satan will flee from you!

Go forward — and angels will commend you!

Go forward — and usefulness will crown you!

Go forward — and eternal glory awaits you!

Unsaved sinner — go forward to the hope set before you in the gospel! Do not rest until you enter into the refuge, until you obtain your pardon, until reconciled to God, until your bosom is the abode of divine peace.

Anxious soul — go forward to the cross! There it is, just before you — look to it, plead it with God, expect salvation through it, renounce everything besides it as the ground of your acceptance with God. Go, as anxious as you are, as agitated as you are, as vile and sinful as you are — Jesus will receive you, and will save you with an everlasting salvation!

Young believer — go forward to the church! Publicly profess your faith in Jesus by being buried with him by baptism into death! Join the ranks of his army, take your seat at his table, and join his people in every holy exercise, in every praiseworthy enterprise.

Brethren, fellow-heirs of the grace of life! Brethren, fellow-combatants in the field of conflict — go forward to the crown! Wrestle in your Savior's strength! Conquer by his blood, and the word of your testimony! Fail not, faint not, slacken not your pace — until you sit down with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus, in the kingdom of God! Let this be our motto, always and everywhere, "Go Forward!"

19 An Unwise Son

An Unwise Son "He is an unwise son." Hosea 13:13

How many parents are tried in their families. This appears to have been the case from the beginning. Adam had a Cain; Abraham — an Ishmael; Isaac — an Esau; David — an Absalom; Solomon — a Rehoboam; Ezekiel — a Manasseh; and thousands besides had, "an unwise son." This is a source of grief, and a sore trial. But we write not now for parents — but for the young. Let us endeavor to:

Describe a WISE son.

He is one who will listen to instruction. Especially if the instructor is wise, experienced, and affectionate. He will improve the opportunities that offer for increasing his knowledge, improving his character, and using his talents for a good purpose.

He will avoid temptations, particularly temptations to infidelity, worldly amusements, and youthful lusts.

He will select his companions, and choose such as are moral, industrious, and devoted to God.

He will pursue knowledge in every legitimate way, especially the knowledge of himself, of his duty, and of God.

He will set his heart upon a worthy object, an object worthy of an immortal being, of one capable of enjoying the presence and blessing of God forever. Having set his heart upon a worthy object, he will steadily pursue it until he obtains it. In a word, he will live and act as an intelligent, accountable, and responsible creature, who views time as introductory to eternity — the present as preparatory to the future. Let us now,

Glance at the UNWISE son spoken of in the text. "He is an unwise son." How is he known? What are his characteristics?

He has closed his ear to the voice of wisdom, and he treats the book of God with contempt. He has neglected the most favorable opportunities of acquiring sound, spiritual, and useful knowledge.

He has contracted evil habits, so that it is natural for him to sin, dishonor God, and debase his nature.

He has chosen foolish companions, and has allowed them to lead him into folly, sin, and shame.

He has squandered his time and talents, spending his money for that which is not bread, and his labor for that which satisfies not. He has preferred trifles to matters of importance — the trifles of time to the momentous concerns of eternity. He has lost the great end of life, which is to secure deliverance from sin, and a fitness and title to everlasting life.

He is now evidently unwise — but how will his folly appear by-and-bye, when seen in the light of a death-bed, or an awful eternity?

Look at him — torn with conflicting passions, he can have no peace. He is tortured with bitter reflections, which will never end. He is excluded from happiness and from Heaven. He is the sport of devils — and the contempt of Hell. No being in God's universe pities him — but all join to condemn his folly, and justify his doom. He must reap through eternity — the fruits of what he sowed in time. He has no one to blame but himself. He has destroyed himself. His destruction has been his own act and deed. God is simply just, in executing upon him the sentence of his law, and fulfilling in him the threatenings of his word. He was not far from the kingdom of Heaven once — but he is eternally shut out from it now! All that remains for him is bitter reflection, unavailing sorrow, indescribable anguish, eternal despair. Awful condition! Tremendous destiny! Woeful portion!

Reader! are you a wise son? Is your soul set upon obtaining salvation? On obtaining it in God's way? Are you seeking it now? Are you determined to enjoy no rest until you rest in Christ? Salvation is the one object we should pursue, until we enjoy it; and then, being saved, we should endeavor to glorify God to the uttermost, for the salvation he has so freely bestowed. Are you an unwise son? You have had convictions — but have you stifled them? You have felt concern — but have you drowned it in worldly pleasures or cares? You have been urged to repent — but have you rejected the admonition? Have you delayed and lingered? Remember Lot's wife! She lingered on the plain — and perished. Have you become hardened in sin? O fearful state! But think again. You are yet not beyond the reach of hope. You are not yet rejected by mercy. The gospel still calls to you, the strait gate may be passed by you, the way of salvation is open to you, Jesus is willing to save you. Let me beseech you in God's stead, to be reconciled to him. His mercy is great unto the Heavens, and his faithfulness reaches unto the clouds. He will pardon all your iniquities, he will pass by all your transgressions, he will receive you into a father's arms, and press you to a father's heart.

He glorifies his grace, exalts his mercy, and confirms his word in the experience of every coming sinner; and he will do so in you, if you come to him with confession and supplication. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). You have been once more warned — shall it be in vain? You are once more invited to Jesus — will you still refuse? God's testimony has been once more delivered to you — will you again reject it? Have you no fear of Hell? Have you no pity for your own soul? Have you no desire for Heaven? Have you made up your mind to perish in your sin? Do you say there is no hope? But there is hope. There is certainty, for he who believes in Jesus shall be saved, be he who he may; and if you believe in Jesus — you shall be saved without doubt. Trust in him, in him alone, and salvation is yours. Trust in any one, or in anything else, and you are eternally undone!

20 The First Day of the New Year

The First Day of the New Year

What a mercy that we have been spared until now. How many have been cut down during the last year. We might have begun this year in Hell. Oh, if we had! How dreadful the thought! But many who began the last year as we begin this — are in Hell now. They little thought that it would be so — but there they are, and now there is no redemption, there is no way of escape. They are shut up in hopeless despair. Their doom is forever fixed. And why are we spared? To go on in sin? To abuse the mercy that has been shown to us? To aggravate our woe? Oh, no! We are spared that we may escape from the wrath to come, that we may secure the pardon of our sins, and that we may be happy both in this world and in that which is to come. This is the first day of the new year — and what is our first thought? What shall we fix our thoughts upon? Let us think of past mercies — and past sins; let us think of present danger — and present duty; let us think of future probabilities — and certainties. Let us think of our state before God — what is it? Are we pardoned — or condemned? Are we children of wrath — or sons of God? Are we reconciled to God — or living at enmity with God? Do we ever speak to him in prayer, look to him in faith, walk with him in love, work for him with pleasure, or long to be with him in glory? We cannot be in friendship with God if we do not. This is the first day of the new year — and what is our first desire? Is it to be made holy, to be conformed to the image of Christ, and to be used to the glory of God? Do we desire grace from God to make us like God? Do we desire to possess unquestionable evidence that we are born of God, that we are accepted of God, that we are approved of God? Do we desire to please God, and to please him well in all things? Are our desires ascending to Heaven — or are they confined to the present world? The desires show the state of the heart; if they are carnal — so is the heart; if they are spiritual — so is the heart. This is the first day of the new year — and what shall be our first prayer? Shall we pray for a special blessing, asking it of God as a new year's gift? If so, what shall we ask for? Reader, think, what would you wish God to give you to begin this year with? Let us ask . . .

for faith — that we may believe his word;

for repentance — that we may be sorry for our sins;

for love — that we may cleave to Jesus;

for zeal — that we may work in God's cause; and

for thorough consecration to God — that there may be no mistake about our character or destination! This is the first day of the new year — and what shall be our first effort? Shall it be to secure our own salvation, and enjoy the knowledge of it in our own souls; thus securing all temporal good, and escaping all spiritual evil? Let us hear and attend to the admonition of the Savior, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these (temporal good things) shall be added unto you." Let us regard the Savior's direction, "Labor not for the food which perishes — but for that food which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give

unto you." A kingdom may be won — shall we win it? Bread for the soul may be obtained — shall we obtain it?

What shall be our first aim? On what shall we fix the eye, the heart, at the beginning of this year? Shall it be on something temporal or on spiritual blessings? Shall we aim to be great, or to be good? To gratify self, or honor God? To live like the beasts that perish, or as immortal, intelligent, and accountable creatures? Dear friends, let us aim high. Let us aim to be all that God is willing to make us, to obtain all that God has promised to give us, and to enjoy all that God has engaged to confer on those that seek him. Let us aim in all we do to get near to God, to be made like Jesus, to prepare for eternal glory, and to make all about us as happy as we can.

Remember — this may be our last year. The sentence may have gone forth, "This is what the Lord says: I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die!" Jeremiah 28:16.

Let us therefore be ready. Let us make sure that we are in Christ, that we are God's workmanship created anew in Christ Jesus, that Christ is in us the hope of glory, that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, and that we are made fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

21 Real Religion

Real Religion Some people pretend to real religion — who know that they have none at all.

Others imagine that they have real religion — but they are fatally deceived. The great mass of the people do not know what real religion is! Ask the first person you meet, "What is real religion?" Ten to one — that he cannot tell you! Some imagine that it is . . .

going to a place of worship,

believing certain doctrines,

going through a round of church forms, and

performing a number of religious duties. But there may be all this — and yet no real religion.

Others think if there are certain impressions made on the mind, and a reformation takes place in the life — that there is religion. But there may be this — and no true godliness.

WHAT, then, is real religion? In what does it consist?

First, there must be right views of GOD. We must take into our minds the representation which he has given of himself in his word. God is a spirit. God is love. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. God is an infinite being, and he is infinitely holy, just, true, faithful, good, and merciful.

He has clothed himself with our nature, acted in our world, and spoken in our language — to make himself known to our fallen race. We must, therefore, look at the Lord Jesus — as God manifested in the flesh. As giving us an exact, perfect, and complete representation of God. God was in Christ. Christ was God over all, and blessed for evermore.

Men in general have partial, imperfect, and unscriptural views of God; and while this is the case — they cannot be really religious: for "this is life eternal — to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

Secondly, the HEART must be in a right state toward God. By nature, we are alienated from God. We are at enmity against God. We reject the word and government of God. While this is the case, there can be no real religion. There is no confidence in God — no love to God — no zeal for God — no desire to please God — no fear of offending God. Real religion embraces reconciliation to God. Sorrow that we have offended God. Peace with God. Consecration to the service and honor of God. Walking in holy fellowship and communion with God. We love to think of God. We love to hear of God. We love to speak with God. We love to praise God. He is the object of our faith, hope, desire, and affection. We cannot endure the thought of separation from him, or being banished from his presence. The sense and enjoyment of his presence would constitute a Heaven anywhere. This is real religion.

Thirdly, it includes OBEDIENCE to God. The obedience of the heart — and the obedience of the life. Obedience that flows from love — and is performed willingly and cheerfully. He who does not practically conform to God's will — makes it manifest that his heart is not in a right state toward God. We cannot know God as revealed in Jesus — and not love him; we cannot love him — and not yield hearty obedience to him. When obedience flows from love — it is pleasant, it is hearty, it is thorough, it is constant. It is conformity to the whole revealed will of God, both in reference to moral precepts, and positive institutions. Such obedience is practical holiness, and proves that the sanctification of the Holy Spirit is realized and enjoyed in the soul.

Such is real religion. It is not Scripture light without feeling, or feeling without obedience. But it is light, love, and holiness. It is . . .

right views of God,

a right state of heart towards God, and

the practical conformity of the life to the will of God.

Reader, are you really religious? Knowledge without power will not do. Impressions without dedication to God are not enough. There must be the knowledge of God, love to God, and likeness to the moral image of God. We must know his name, love his perfections, and do his will — or we are not really religious.

God must be seen in Christ, the enmity of the heart must be slain, thorough reconciliation to God must be effected, and the whole person be devoted unreservedly to his praise and glory.

If this is the true state of the case (and what careful reader of the bible can doubt it?), then how very few, comparatively, are really religious. My reader, are you? How long have you been so? Of every mere talker, of every unholy walker — however orthodox his creed, or profound his knowledge of doctrine may be — it will be said at the day of judgment: "That man's religion is vain!" It does not please God. It does not bring peace of conscience. It does not reflect God's image. It does not save its possessor from Hell. God rejects it. Satan encourages it. Man is not benefitted by it. It is vain and worthless. May the Lord preserve us from such a religion, and put us in possession of that which is divine, powerful, pure, and practical.

22 Are You a Christian?

Are You a Christian? This is a momentous question, and ought to be decided. The rule of decision is God's holy word, and that alone, for the same shall judge us at the last day (John 12:48). Many imagine that they are Christians — but are not. Many profess to be Christians — but they are deceived. The foolish virgins made a profession; they were not suspected; they thought they were right; they persevered until the bridegroom came, and then they found that their "lamps were gone out." Awful state! Fearful discovery! My friend, inquire in time. Examine yourself impartially. Take the lamp of God's word, and thoroughly investigate your condition. It is for life or death. Eternity depends on the outcome. God of truth, search our inmost souls! God of grace, thoroughly sanctify our natures! A Christian is Born of God. There is no real religion without this. For real religion is a new life flowing from a new nature. We may change our opinions, we may alter our course — but God alone can change our hearts; and unless our hearts are changed — we are not Christians. The Holy Spirit, in regeneration — convinces us of sin, humbles us before God, makes us cry out for mercy, leads us to the Lord Jesus Christ, breaks our hearts in contrition, turns our souls against sin, and makes us long, pant, and pray, for holiness. All this springs from a new life, or a new nature produced within us; so that it is all natural. We have not to force ourselves to think, or to feel, or to act — we do so naturally, and without any discernible effort.

We see things in a different light, we feel differently toward them, and are in a new world. Old things pass away, and all things become new. Christ is our hope, our peace, our pattern, and our joy. We rest on his sacrifice, rely on his work, rejoice in his grace, and glory in his holy name. We wonder that we did not see his beauty before; we grieve that we ever offended him; and we long to glorify him in every thought, word, and action. The world loses its charms, Satan his power, and death its sting. Our eyes are enlightened, our hearts are renewed, our wills are changed, our consciences are cleansed, and our course is the opposite of what it was. We were going to Hell — we are now going to Heaven.

Reader, are you a Christian? A Christian has the Spirit of Christ. For if any man has not the Spirit of Christ — he is none of his. The Holy Spirit takes possession in the name of Christ, to make us like Christ. He changes the bent of the mind. He turns the whole course of the soul. He effectually alters the disposition. He sets Christ before us as our model. He stirs up desires after conformity to him. He leads us to aim at an exact resemblance. He teaches us to pray for grace, that we may live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. As a Spirit of faith — he leads us to believe God's word, and exercise confidence in God's faithfulness. As a Spirit of prayer — he leads us to God's throne, and helps our infirmities in prayer. As a Spirit of love — he inflames our hearts with love to God, to the Savior, to the saints, and to sinners around us. As a Spirit of power — he enables us to resist Satan, overcome the world, crucify the flesh with its passions and lusts, and to plead and prevail with God. He dwells in us, works in us, sanctifies us, and devotes us to the Savior's praise. Reader, are you a Christian? A Christian is like Christ. He is anointed with the Spirit of God. He is the temple of God. He is formed to show forth the praises of God. He lives for God. He walks with God. He does the works of God. Jesus is his pattern and perfect example. He

often compares himself with Christ, deploring his defects, seeking grace that he may more exactly conform himself to his will, and desiring to copy his example in all things. He lives in Christ, and Christ lives in him. The word of Christ is his law, the frown of Christ is his Hell, the smile of Christ is his Heaven, and the glory of Christ is his end. He is a living epistle of Christ for all to read, and a copy of Christ for all to admire. He delights to honor Christ, rejoices to hear him exalted, and can never be satisfied until he is exactly like Christ in body, soul, and spirit. He is crucified with Christ to the world. He is risen with Christ to newness of life. He has ascended with Christ, in spirit, to the Father. He bears about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus, and seeks that the life also of Jesus should be manifest in his mortal flesh (2 Corinthians 4:10-11). He is a man of another nature, walking by another rule, living for another end, and traveling to another country than what others are. Reader, are you a Christian?

Let no man deceive himself; conviction is not conversion, reformation is not sanctification, profession is not possession. The doctrines of Christianity may be embraced — and Christ himself be rejected. A change may take place in a man's conduct — and yet there may be no change in his heart. We may be moral — but not spiritual. We may be amiable — but not holy. We may be other creatures than we were — but not new creatures in Christ Jesus. We are either for Christ — or for ourselves. We are either saints — or sinners. We are either believers — or infidels. We either have the life of God within us — or we are dead in trespasses and sins. We have either passed from death unto life — or we are under condemnation. Either Christ is in us — or we are reprobates. Which is it? Ah! which is it? Eternity may depend on the reply. Lord, search us as with candles; and do what you will with us, only make us Christians indeed!

23 Family Prayer

Family Prayer "Praying with all prayer." Ephesians 6:18 As there are different kinds of prayer — private, public, social, and domestic — the Christian is exhorted to pray always with all prayer. Whatever leads us to God does us good — and the seasons when we approach him are our best seasons. Pray we must, if we are born of God, for prayer is then the breath of the soul. And pray we should, alone, or with others, as opportunity may offer. We cannot go to God too often — or be with God too much. We have many needs — and prayer will obtain a supply for them. We have many temptations — and prayer will prove a preservative against them. Are we private individuals? We should pray as such. Are we public characters? We should pray as such. Are we at the head of a family? We should pray in that situation. Let us reflect for a few minutes upon family prayer.

It is necessary, for we should acknowledge God in our social relations, we should say by our conduct, without fear or shame, "I am the Lord's!" It is included in bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Our children and servants should hear us pray. The daily, devout, and scriptural prayers of the head of a family — are the best lessons that can be given on prayer. It is beautiful, for what sight is more lovely than to see the master of the family with all his domestics around him, first reading God's word to them, and then praying for God's blessing upon them. They all hear the same truth, bow before the same throne, and are led to the same good and gracious God. Oh, it is a lovely sight!

It is beneficial, it is the means which God often employs to produce beneficial impressions, which issue in a sound conversion. Many have had to bless the day they ever went into a praying family.

Then, it often prevents disagreements, and works out a reconciliation where parties have disagreed. It is also God's ordinance, through which he sends down innumerable blessings upon them. God is specially present when a family meets for prayer — he receives the confessions, listens to the needs, pardons the sins, grants the requests and imparts his blessing to the favored group. A family without prayer is a family exposed to ten thousand dangers. A house without a family altar is only imperfectly furnished. To profess Christ and have no family prayer — is beneath the poor heathens who have, and worship, their worthless household gods!

Prayer in the family should be short; long prayers are never acceptable in the presence of others — but they are very injurious in families where there are children or unconverted servants.

Prayer in the family should be simple; it should be a simple confession of sin, acknowledgment of mercies, application for blessings, and pleading for pardon. The less of are and the more of nature in family prayer the better.

Prayer in the family should be spiritual; with too many it is a mere form. The party conducting it does not live near to God, so as to imbibe the Spirit of God, and, therefore, cannot pour out spiritual thoughts, desires, hopes, thanksgivings, and intercessions to God. We shall be pretty much in the family — what we are in the prayer closet: if familiar with God when alone, we shall be

spiritual when we pray before others.

Prayer in the family should be varied, sameness always tires; and with so many needs to be supplied, so many mercies to be acknowledged, so many parties to be remembered, so many promises to plead — there can be no reason why there should be a tiresome sameness. Variety generally interests, engages, and pleases, therefore aim at variety in family prayer.

Prayer in the family should be regular; some have family prayer only on Lord's-days, and some only on particular occasions. Supper parties appear to be the invention of Satan to set aside family prayer, and do mischief in the families of professors, and his scheme too frequently succeeds. He who wishes to bring up his family for God, or to set an example which is likely to make a beneficial impression on his domestics — should avoid all parties or meetings which are prolonged to a late hour. They have done, and in some places are doing incalculable mischief.

Many professors have no family prayer; reader, have you? If not, what is the reason? Do you plead the lack of gifts? Allow me to ask you, have you ever made the trial? Have you ever sought the gift from God? Many people who can talk very fluently before their families upon matters of business, or politics, or other subjects of conversation — pretend that they cannot pray with their families. They can talk to them, or to others about them — but they cannot go upon their knees and talk to God for them. There is something radically wrong here, and it is to be feared that it lies in the state of the heart — and not in the lack of talent. The gift of prayer, like every other gift, grows by a judicious use of it. Those who have found great difficulty in commencing family prayer, have soon found the difficulty vanish by use. The devil hates family prayer, and will do all he can to keep us from it, or to make us weary of it.

Many who have family prayer may almost as well have none. They drive it off to such a late hour, that all are thoroughly tired out and cannot enjoy it. Or, they read over a lifeless, tiresome, barren form. Or, they pray in such a dull, monotonous, formal manner — that no one feels an interest, or derives any benefit from it. Or, they act so inconsistently in the business, or the family, when they are off their knees — that their domestics do not believe what they say when they do pray. The actions of the day — and the devotions of the evening, should agree. A man is really what he is customarily. A spiritual man will be spiritual in all places; and a devout man will always be more or less devotional. Lively, devoted and zealous Christians, always approve of and practice family prayer. They could not be happy without it. They enjoy it, and, generally speaking, their domestics enjoy it with them. They exercise their judgment, and adapt their devotions to times, persons, and circumstances. They throw their hearts into their prayers. Their affections are engaged, and show themselves. They manifest that they know God, are in friendship with him, and feel at home in his presence.

Reader, is there a family altar in your house? Do you collect your household regularly around it? Do you aim so to conduct family prayer, as to make a good, a pleasing, a profitable impression? Is there incense on your altar twice in the day — or only once; every day — or only occasionally? Is there a sweet perfume of devotion, grateful alike to spiritual people and to God?

Beloved, family prayer will never be what it ought to be — until we live nearer to God. When our fellowship with God is close, intimate, and filial — then all our mercies, whether in the sanctuary, the sick room, or the family — will be savory, beneficial, and impressive. There will be a power, a

sweetness, and a spirituality wholeness about them — which must be realized to be known, and even then cannot be described.

Alas! we are so worldly, so carnal, so cold — that the difference between us and the world is very slight. Oh, that God would pour down his Holy Spirit upon us, and fill us with love, zeal, and power; that so we may worship him in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Lord Jesus, send the blessed Comforter into our hearts and homes — that we may reflect your praise, and that our families may be consecrated to your service! Holy Spirit, come and preside in our households, bring every member into union with Christ, and enable us to preside over them to your glory!

Gracious God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — we worship you, and desire that all that are under our influence may be the temples of God, the epistles of Christ, the habitation of the Comforter. Take, oh, take them, and consecrate them to yourself forever!

24 A Word to Servants

A Word to Servants

(Editor's note: this article was written when many employed "servants" in their homes. Though we do not have servants today — this article applies to all Christian employees.)

We always consider good servants, very honorable characters. They are a comfort to the family in which they live, and a blessing to all by whom they are surrounded. But none can be really good servants — but such as make the precepts of God's word their rule. Every good servant will often read over the directions of holy scriptures, and earnestly pray for grace to reduce them to practice. A good servant will obey his employers for the Lord's sake; he will perceive that God has appointed him to be a servant, and he can glorify God best, at present, in that character. To professing Christian servants, we now write. It is their welfare we especially seek. The character of God's cause is to a certain extent in their hands. Their employers will judge of religion — by the tempers they manifest, the course they pursue, and the virtues or vices which they display. It is not what you say — but what you do, which will impress and affect your employers. Your life should preach the gospel to them. They ought to see that religion makes you more patient, industrious, submissive, obliging, and cheerful than other servants. That you have another spirit in you. That you walk by another rule. That you act as under the eye of God. That you have that precept continually before you, "Servants, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free." (Ephesians 6:5-8) But the subject to which we wish especially to call your attention, is your duty to your unconverted fellow-servants. Most servants have unconverted fellow-servants associated with them; over these they must exercise an influence, either good or bad. They are daily making some impression upon them — but the question is: Is it the right impression? You ought to set your heart upon bringing your fellow-servants to God. Their speedy conversion to God should be kept constantly before your eye. With a view to this, you should avoid whatever would needlessly offend them, and endeavor by all lawful means to win their affections. Kind words and little attentions will often do this. If you are willing to oblige them, as far and as frequently as you can, without sin, you will soon win their hearts; for kindness is almost omnipotent. Do not be always talking to them about religion — but watch for opportunities. Walk religiously always — but only talk of religion occasionally. Make them feel that you wish to do them good. Speak a word for God whenever you have a good opportunity. Speak kindly as a friend, not as if you felt yourself superior. Invite them to accompany you to the house of God, when you can get out together. Say what you can to commend your minister to them, and to awaken in them a desire to hear him. Talk after the services, of the sermons you have heard, repeat short striking passages. Tell them of any interesting anecdotes you hear. Let them see that religion with you is not a form — but a living reality; that it makes you happy, and that you wish them to be as happy as yourself.

Every now and then give, or lay in their way, some suitable religious tract or little book. Be determined to leave no stone unturned, or neglect the use of any means, until you see them decided believers on the Son of God. Say, both by your words and deeds, "If you perish in your sins — it shall not be through any neglect of mine. If you will go to Hell — I will not be accessory to your destruction!" Set apart special times to pray for them, and pray for their immediate conversion. Pray for them by name. Pray as if you were really in earnest for their salvation, as if your heart's desire and prayer to God was, that they might be saved. Pray for them when you sit by them in the house of God. Pray for them when you know that they are gone out carousing, and are running into temptation. Never despair of doing them good. Never give way to the thought that God will not use such a poor instrument as you are. God does use just such, and will most probably use you, if you really wish him to do so.

I knew a young woman, of no particular talent, who though not exactly a servant at the time, had been; and who, at the time referred to, gained her living by needlework. She went to hear a sermon one week-day evening, the preacher took for his text, Psalms 30:5, and the sermon was an experimental one: the impression made upon her heart was, "If that is real religion, I am a stranger to it." By that sermon the Holy Spirit converted her soul. When she began to enjoy religion herself, she became intensely interested in, and concerned for, the salvation of her old acquaintances. She was living with a widow, who attended the village church, was a stranger to godliness, and deeply prejudiced against Dissenters. She endeavored to induce her to accompany her to the chapel — but in vain: at length one Sunday evening, she continued pleading with her so long, that at last she prevailed; but having two miles to go, they were so late that the sermon was begun. What the widow heard she very much disliked, and made up her mind that nothing should induce her to leave her "dear church" in future. However, kind importunity prevailed again; she came in time to hear the prayer; her eyes and her heart were opened; while the minister was praying, the thought rushed into her mind, "Why, that is spiritual prayer." She listened to the sermon, went home, and became a new creature in Christ Jesus.

She had three daughters and one son; in process of time they were all brought to God. She had a sister with four daughters and a son; and they were all led to the Savior. A number of others from the same village were turned from darkness to light, and a considerable number regularly attended all the means of grace, of whom we cannot speak decidedly.

Here, then, was one young woman, of no extraordinary attainments, in humble circumstances, brought to the knowledge of the truth. Her heart glows with love to Christ. She travails in birth for souls. She labors to bring others under the means, and the result is two whole families are made happy in the Lord, others are consecrated to God, and who shall say where it will end!

Other cases might be mentioned — but I introduce this, because I knew all the parties, many of whom are now living, and can attest its truth.

Servants, set your heart upon the conversion of souls, especially the souls of those who live and labor with you. Let nothing satisfy you but bringing souls to Christ. Live for this. Labor for this. Pray for this. It cannot be in vain; you will reap a rich reward in your own soul, even if you do not witness the success you wish. Our members, who are servants, should be our home missionaries, they should carry the gospel where we cannot go. They should fill the pews, which we cannot do. Beloved friends, we beseech you to help us in the Lord. LIVE the gospel in your situations; show

the power, purity, and happiness of religion to all around you; and oblige your unconverted fellow-servants to confess that the Christian religion must be a reality. As I heard a person say the other day, referring to the conversion and consistent life of a near relative, "I know that there is something in religion, by the change which it has made in him."

If an unconverted servant should read this, I would say to such a one, Be not prejudiced against religion by any inconsistencies which you see in some who profess it. There always have been mere professors; we are not prejudiced against a good sovereign because there are counterfeits; but we try to distinguish between them. Do so yourselves.

We tell you that there is such a thing as spiritual religion, and that it is a source of peace, joy, and satisfaction; all we ask of you is, to try and see if what we say is true or false. Take God's invitation, go to his throne, ask for his grace, seek his blessing, exercise confidence in Jesus, persevere in your application — and as sure as you read these words, as sure as there is anything like truth in the world — you shall find acceptance with God, obtain the pardon of your sins, be happy in the present world, and glorious in the world to come. May the Lord bless every servant who reads these lines, and make every one what every Christian should be. Amen.

25 Why Was I Born?

Why Was I Born? This is a simple question, and yet, perhaps, some have never proposed it to themselves; or, if they have, they have not sought for a satisfactory answer. We cannot think that we were born merely to eat, drink, work, laugh, suffer pain, and die. God created us for a noble end; we were born for important purposes. Let us notice a few things for which we were born.

First — To display God's POWER. How glorious must the power of God be, to conceive the thought, and produce such a noble creature as man. A being partly animal — and partly spiritual. Allied to both worlds. Like Himself, and yet like His lower creatures. It takes Omnipotence to make a man. And when God creates an intelligent creature, it is to display His power. We begin to be — but we shall never cease to be; for the power that made us at first, will sustain us in existence forever. What a thought is this — I must live forever and ever live to display the power of God!

Secondly — To learn and do God's WILL. We are capable of acting, of acting as God bids us — or in opposition to His will. He intended that we should be active — but that His will should be the rule of our actions. He has revealed His will at different times, in different ways. But now we have all His will — in His word. Here He tells us what to do and what to avoid — what will please Him, and what will expose us to His anger. Anyone who wishes and seeks, may know what is God's will. We were born to learn and do God's will.

Thirdly — To see God's BLESSING. His blessing is the source of wealth and happiness. We cannot be happy except God blesses us, and we have no right to expect God's blessing — except we seek for it. He blesses all who forsake sin, rely on the sacrifice of His Son, and seek His face by prayer. We were born — that we might know God, seek the blessing of God, do the will of God, and receive happiness from God.

Fourthly — To enjoy God's FAVOR. His favor is the life of the soul. It is the happiness of every intelligent creature. The greatest thing that we can possess or enjoy — is God's favor. To be the favorite of God, is to be among the most honorable of His creatures. We may know that we are in God's favor, and enjoy all the effects of it. We are capable of this, and the means of doing so are presented to us in the word of God, the means of grace, and the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fifthly — To dwell in God's PRESENCE. He is always with us, though often unperceived by us. He fills the world we inhabit, and we ought to realize: wherever we are — God is here;

whatever we do — God sees me;

whatever we say — God hears me;

whatever we think — God reads my thoughts. Our one design therefore should be, to please God; and our one aim, to commend ourselves to Him. If we dwell in God's presence on earth — we shall do so in Heaven. He who walks with wise men — will be wise; and he who walks with God — will be godlike. If God is our friend and companion now, at death we shall change our place; but not

our company.

Sixthly — To reflect God's GLORY, and praise His name forever. God created us for His own glory, and He will glorify Himself in us. He will glorify His grace in our salvation — or His justice in our condemnation. God will not lose His end; His purpose cannot be frustrated. If you will not glorify Him by receiving His word, embracing His Son, and doing His will — He will glorify His justice, holiness, and equity, in your punishment forever! Which will it be?

Reader, you are the creature of God's power; do you realize it?

You were born to learn and do God's will; do you make this the business of your life?

You are exhorted to seek God's blessing; do you attend to it?

You are invited to enjoy God's favor; will you accept of it?

You may dwell in God's glorious presence to all eternity! but will you?

God must be glorified in you; shall it be . . .

in your salvation — or damnation;

in your songs — or your sighs;

in your joys — or your torments;

in your hallelujahs — or your endless wailings?

Think! Decide. Pray. Let your life declare.

26 Suppose I Should Die Suddenly

Suppose I Should Die Suddenly A sudden death has recently taken place here.

Sudden death is a very solemn event.

Death has a voice — it is sent with a message to us. It says, "I am coming for you soon! Be ready!"

Sudden death reminds us . . .

that time is short,

that life is uncertain,

that death is always near,

that we may be die at any moment,

that there is only a thin veil between us and eternity, that dying is going to an eternal abode, from whence we shall never return!

Death is always solemn! SUDDEN death is peculiarly so. It should make as serious. It should lead to reflection. Let me, then, direct my thoughts to it for a few minutes.

Suppose I should die suddenly? I may. There is no security against it. It is possible, if not probable:

"Dangers stand thick all around,

To push us to the tomb!"

Any one of these dangers may push me down, and in a moment the body and soul may part. Well, suppose it should be so — am I ready? Is sudden death an event to be dreaded on my own account, or only on account of others? To the true Christian, sudden death — is sudden glory! The soul departs to be with Christ — which is far better than remaining here on this poor earth. But would this be my case? Am I in Christ? Is Christ found in my heart, as the hope of glory? Is my body the temple of the Holy Spirit? Am I born again? Solemn inquiries these! Without a new birth, there can be no salvation. Jesus has most distinctly and positively declared it. His words are peculiarly solemn and striking. May they sink down deep into our hearts. "Truly, truly, I say unto you — unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This is true of all people, of every person. Therefore it is true of me. I must be born again — or I cannot see, I cannot enter into, the kingdom of God.

Ought I not, then, to examine myself very closely? To compare the state of my heart, and the course of my life — with the word of God. If I should imagine that I am born again when I am not, and then if, while deceived by such a vain hope, I should die suddenly — what dreadful consequences would follow! Such a mistake could never be rectified. The effects of it must be

endured forever! How very strange it is that we can rest satisfied one hour, without good evidence that we are born again — when we know that we may die suddenly, and that after death our state is fixed forever!

Suppose I should die suddenly today! I may! And if I do, where will I spend this night? Where will I be tomorrow?

What will be my portion forever?

Jesus tells us of one who in this life, had everything his heart could wish, and to warn us against neglecting the soul, while feasting the body, he utters these solemn words: "The rich man died and was buried; and in Hell he lift up his eyes being in torments!" Most likely, he was taken by surprise — he never thought that he would sink into Hell!

I dare say, that none of his friends judged so uncharitably, or rather so justly — as to suppose that he was lifting up his eyes in Hell, being in torments. But it was so, and he is in torments now — and in these torments he will remain forever!

O fearful case! But will it be mine? Is it possible that it may be my doom, or that of any one nearly related to me? Oh, it is possible — it is more than possible! Who has not a relative on the road to Hell? Who has not a relative already in Hell? What a dreadful meeting it must be to meet near and once dear relatives in Hell — and yet it is constantly taking place!

If I go to Hell — whom shall I meet there? If my relatives go to Hell — can they cast any part of the blame on me? Have I warned them? Have I done all I can to prevent so fearful a doom? Conscience, I charge you to be honest, answer me — have I done all I can to prevent my relatives from going to that place of torment?

I may die suddenly. Then let me see to it at once, that all is right for eternity. Let me make sure work. Let there be no procrastination. Let there be no excuses indulged. Let me never rest satisfied another night without faith in Christ, repentance toward God, and that holiness, without which no man can see the Lord. Let me ask of God to give me his Holy Spirit, to renew my mind, to take away the stony heart, and to give me a heart of flesh. Then if I die suddenly — how glorious the transition will be. How wonderful, to be one hour in a poor world like this — engaged in its difficult duties, enduring its sore trials, and suffering from its evil habits and customs; and the next moment to be in the presence of God, suddenly free from sin, sorrow, care, and trouble; beyond the reach of doubt, fear, and the devil; and to enjoy safety, satisfaction, and the fullness of joy forever. But the alternative! Ah, the alternative! If I die suddenly, and die outside of Christ, if I die unholy and unsaved — how dreadful even the supposition! But what must the reality be? To be one hour in comfort, surrounded by relatives and friends, in the land of hope and mercy — and the next in the regions of despair, filled with anguish, bitter regrets, and hopeless misery!

Reader, you may die suddenly! You may die today — and if you do, your state will be fixed forever. Do not conclude that you are safe, without a thorough examination. Let nothing decide your case, but God's unerring word. There is but one foundation for a sinner's hope, and that is Christ Jesus. There is no certainty of life beyond the present moment. Therefore make your calling and your election sure.

Seize the kind promise while it waits, And march to Zion's Heavenly gates;

Believe — and take the promised rest, Obey — and be forever blessed.

27 Prepared for the Worst!

Prepared for the Worst!

"I am prepared for the worst!" said a young man, as he went off on a journey, with his heavy coat and umbrella. And in the sense in which he used the words, he was, as he only referred to a little cold or rain. But the words may be taken in a much more important sense, and even then, there are some who can say, "I am prepared for the worst!" What is the worst? and what is it to be prepared for the worst? These are very important, interesting, and solemn questions. Let us look at them for a few moments.

DEATH! Is that the worst? So perhaps some would think. It is the most solemn event that can happen to us in this world. It has been called "the king of terrors," and of all terrible things — it has been said to be "the most terrible." Well, death, in one view of it, is a bad thing. It is the enemy of our nature. We cannot love it. It makes wives widows, children fatherless, and affectionate husbands unhappy. It has caused floods of tears to flow, and human nature to shudder. But it is most terrible to its victim. It terminates his mortal course. It ends his existence in the present state. It introduces him to an unseen world, to an unknown state of existence. It terminates his plans, schemes, and pleasures — and puts his purposes and pretensions to the test. It is very solemn. Are we prepared for death? Unless our sins are pardoned, our natures are renewed, and our souls are reconciled to God — we cannot be. Sin is the sting of death. It gives it power to injure us, to wound us, to destroy our brightest hopes. If sin reigns in us — it will ruin us. If death finds us in an unpardoned state — it will be dreadful to us. But if, through faith in Jesus, our sins are all forgiven — if, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the stony heart has been taken away, and the heart of flesh given — if we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, and are at peace with him — we are prepared for death. It may seize us — but it cannot hold us; it may lay the body in the grave — but it cannot touch the soul. Its very nature is changed to us, and instead of injuring, it only lays the body to sleep in the grave, and introduces the soul to God and glory!

JUDGMENT! Is that the worst? Is standing before the infinite God to be judged the worst? So some would say. It is enough to awaken the most serious thoughts, and arouse ten thousand fears. To appear before Divine justice, represented by the Son of God, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, to give an account of our conduct, or rather misconduct, for twenty, or forty, or sixty years — how solemn! How fearful is this! To account for sins against the best of beings, against the plainest precepts — for so many years, and to feel that we have not the least excuse to offer for our conduct! How fearful is this!

He never provoked us by his conduct towards us, or injured us in his dealings with us. We sinned — just because we would sin, and we persevered in sin — just because we perversely preferred doing so, to obeying his wise and holy precepts. He has commanded us to prepare to give an account in his word; he will apprehend us by his officer death; and he will summon us to appear before his judgement. Are we prepared for this? We may be — but are we?

If so, we have embraced the Savior, and are justified through his finished work. We have sought and received the Holy Spirit, and are sanctified by his power, grace, and indwelling. We have come to the Father through his Son, and he has blotted out all our sins in his precious blood. But is this the case?

If we have only one sin to answer for — we are undone. We might have obtained a pardon — we were promised one, if we applied for it while Jesus was on the throne of grace; but we neglected or refused, and now the door of hope is shut, the throne of grace is vacated — and mercy has given place to justice. That we have one sin laid to our charge, to be accounted for by ourselves, is wholly and entirely our own fault. God was ready to pardon. Jesus was exalted to give repentance and the remission of sins. We were assured again and again, that by him, all who believe are justified from all things. But if we would not go unto him that we might have life — if we refused to receive the pardon presented, or to seek the reconciliation promised — then who is to blame? We might have been pardoned — but we would not stoop to accept it. We might have been justified from all things, in the finished work of the Lord Jesus — but we would not embrace that work; and now our pride and self-sufficiency have brought us low. If one sin is charged up on us, it is because Christ Jesus has been rejected by us.

HELL! Is that the worst? Yes, this is the worst thing! Nothing can be compared to Hell. What is it, but the wrath of God endured, the endless lashings of a guilty conscience experienced, the desert of sin inflicted upon the sinner? In Hell, black despair reigns, remorse is eternally felt, and pain and agony must be eternally endured. In Hell, justice appears in all its terrible majesty, mercy is forever excluded, and sinners are left to torment themselves, and to be tormented by Satan and his demons without end.

Reader, are you prepared for this? Can your heart endure, and can your hands be strong, in the day that God shall deal with you? Will you go to Hell? This question is proposed to you every time you hear the gospel. Will you go to Hell? This question I most solemnly ask you now.

You need not, for there is a way of escape. You need not, for God is good and ready to forgive. You need not, for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. You need not, for the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come, and take of the fountain of the water of life freely." But if you refuse to come, I assure you that you shall surely perish. If you reject the Savior, I ask you in his own words, "How shall you escape the damnation of Hell?" Are you prepared to suffer eternally in endless pains? Are you prepared to dwell with devouring fire, to languish in everlasting burnings? Are you? Can you be?

Let me beseech you with all earnestness, with all tenderness, to lay these things to heart. Flee, flee at once to Jesus! Receive him into your heart by faith. Renounce all your refuges of lies, give up yourself to him, and spend your remaining days for Him; so will you be prepared for the worst. Yes, then you may look through time and all its changes, and into eternity with all its solemnities, and sing —

Now let the wildest storms arise,

Let tempests mingle earth and skies

I'm safe in Christ, the ark of grace.

And soon shall see him face to face!
Death will to me be life and peace,
A rest from sin, a sweet release;
For I through Jesus' precious blood,
Shall rise from death, to live with God!

28 What Is My Business?

What Is My Business? This is a question of importance. It requires consideration. It deserves an answer. Unless we know our business — we cannot attend to it; and unless we attend to our proper business — we cannot gain a good character. Certainly we were not intended to live in idleness. We were created for activity. We are placed in the world to get good and do good.

What, then, is my proper business as MAN?

It is to ascertain God's will — and do it. To learn what will glorify God — and aim at it. To live as in God's sight. To work for God's honor. To seek God's company. To reverence God's majesty. To prefer God's will to everything beside.

It is my business to serve my generation, to try and benefit all around me, and to prove that I do not love anyone less than I love myself. In one word, my business is to do all the good I can — and prevent all the evil that I can.

Now, have I learned my business? Do I love my business? Do I follow my business?

Am I a good hand at my business?

Alas! few consider this their business — and the few that do, often lose sight of it. We have all sinned, and in so doing, have come short of the glory of God.

What, then, is my proper business as a SINNER? It is to confess my sins to God, and seek pardon from God. Reconciliation to God, acceptance with God, and restoration to the image of God — should daily occupy our thoughts, engage our minds, and be the end of our pursuits. Our business is, to ascertain how man can be just with God, and obtain that privilege; how man can enjoy peace with God, and enjoy that blessing; how man can be fitted for the presence and service of God, and be prepared for the same. Our business as sinners is neglected or unfinished — until we receive the atonement, have access to God with confidence, walk with God in holy fellowship, and find the presence of God our chief joy. Have we attended to this business? Have we learned it? Are we reaping the fruit of it? If so, we are saints — we are the children of God — we are heirs of immortal life.

What, then, is my proper business as a SAINT? It is to admire, adore, and adorn the free and sovereign grace of God, which has distinguished me from so many around me. All are sinners. Only a few become saints. And all saints do not learn and follow their proper business as they should. What should a saint do?

He should carefully copy the example of his Savior, for Jesus has said, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done." His example is bright, beautiful, and perfect. It is just what God requires, and what the saint in his best moments desires to be.

He should go about doing good. He should sympathize with human misery in every form and wherever discovered. He should aim to spread the knowledge of Christ, and endeavor to make

everyone happy, by leading him to Christ. Every talent should be employed. Every opportunity for doing good, even upon the smallest scale, should be embraced. It is our business to "teach every one his neighbor, and every one his brother, saying, Know the Lord." To oppose sin, to banish ignorance, to relieve indigence, and to endeavor to introduce happiness into every circle and every place. Every morning we should ask, Can I do good to any one today? Can I make anyone happy? Can I spread the knowledge of Jesus? Can I lead a soul to God? Shall I not try? Ought I not to attempt it? May not God honor any feeble, well-meant endeavor to accomplish so glorious a work? But we are mortal, we shall soon die, we must exchange time — for eternity.

What, then, is my proper business as a traveler to eternity? It is daily to keep my end in view — to live as one that must give an account, and who may be called very soon, very suddenly, to do so. My business is to keep short accounts, putting off nothing until tomorrow which I can do today; and daily getting my sins blotted out in the precious blood of Jesus. Never let me lie down at night with guilt on my conscience, or carry the guilt of today into the business of tomorrow. I ought to keep my loins girt, my lamp clean, my vessel full of oil, my evidences bright, and my affairs all in readiness for the sudden coming of the Lord.

Dying will be found quite work enough for the last day, without leaving anything to finish then. Let us, therefore, "die daily;" let us do every day's work in the day; and "so an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior."

Beloved, let us ask, "What is my business?" And let us attend to it carefully, cheerfully, and constantly; that so, when the Master comes, he may say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord." For What End Have I Lived?

We are all living for some end, either right or wrong; and the end for which we live is decided by the course we pursue. If we live in the gratification of our passions, in the practice of sin, and indulging wicked propensities — we are only living to dishonor God, degrade our natures, and eternally ruin our souls! Many men never ask, "What should I have in view in my conduct?" They live in a careless, thoughtless, indifferent state. One would think that the only end of life with them was to eat, drink, work, take a little carnal pleasure — and then die. They seem seldom to raise their thoughts higher. They lose sight of the capabilities of their nature. They never reflect on the greatness and glory of God. They drive from them all thoughts of eternity. They satisfy themselves with the idea, "I dare say I shall fare as well as thousands of my fellows." Or, perhaps, they indulge the vague hope, that because God is merciful — therefore all will be well with them at last. Whereas, nothing can be more fallacious. No course of conduct can display greater folly.

Reader, what have you been living for? Do you know? Have you been living as an immortal, intelligent being — or like the beasts that perish? Have you ever steadily fixed your eye on eternity, and asked, with due seriousness: "What shall I be — when time is no more? What will be my employment in the eternal world?"

If not, it is quite time that you did. You must live eternally — whether you will or not. You have no choice as to existence. You are destined to live forever. Your soul can never die. Is it not a serious thought, "I must exist, I must live forever!" Will you not dwell upon it, and ask, "Where shall I exist? In what state shall I be? In what company shall I dwell? How will God treat me?"

Oh, if you should be fixed in a state of unchangeable woe! If you should be doomed to dwell with devils and lost souls forever! If you should, at death, be plunged into black despair — where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! But if you are — it will be your own fault. Just think over this idea, "If I go to Hell — it will be my own fault!" God sends no one to Hell, but for sin. Christ dooms no one to suffer eternal punishment — but those who refuse to be saved by his merit and mercy. If you, therefore, go to Hell, it will be because you love sin, and live in the practice of it, and because you refuse to be saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you, then, should perish, will you not richly deserve it? Can you blame anyone but yourself? You have a bible — or you may have one if you desire. You hear the gospel — or you can hear it if you please. In the gospel, the gate of life is set wide open, and anyone may enter it; the road to glory is plainly marked out — and you are invited to walk in it; the way to Hell is clearly set forth, and you are warned to forsake it, and go in the way to everlasting life.

What, then, are you living for? What end do you propose to yourself in your daily walk? What do you aim at? If you wrong your own soul by losing sight of its best interests — if you perish in your sins by neglecting the great salvation — if you are condemned at last for rejecting the Lord Jesus — whom can you blame? What excuse can you make? How will you bear your own bitter reflections, or endure the endless lashings of an honest but guilty conscience? My dear friend, do listen to one who wishes you well; to one who desires to see you happy in this world, and happy in that which is to come. Do reflect upon the life you are living, the course you are pursuing, and the end that you are likely to make. To you a Savior is made known — to you his invitation is given — for you his blood will avail — by you all the blessings of salvation may be enjoyed — and on you endless glory may yet be conferred! And you must be either happy beyond description, as the result of receiving Christ; or be miserable beyond conception, as the consequence of rejecting him! There is no alternative — one or the other it must be.

29 The Love of Christ

The Love of Christ

Nothing is as powerful as love — but it can only influence us through faith. However much a person may love me, it would have no influence except I believe it. Just so it is with sinners. They read of the love of Jesus, they hear of that love — but it does not affect them, just because they do not believe that it applies to them. The love of Jesus is the most wonderful subject known in the universe — and yet it has no influence upon thousands, because they do not believe it. The apostle John could say, "We have known and believed the love which God has to us; God is love." But very few can honestly say this. The Lord Jesus himself said, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish — but have everlasting life." Paul could say, "The love of Christ constrains us."

Now, suppose the working classes did really believe that the Lord Jesus Christ loved them — that he realized their misery and read their doom — and in order to save them therefrom, took their nature, and died in their stead — must it not powerfully affect them? Would they not hear of him with reverence, think of him with gratitude, trust in him with confidence, speak of him with feeling, and obey him with cheerfulness? Surely they would. If, therefore, they are not affected with the love of Christ — it is because they do not believe it. How important, then, is faith? And if Jesus loves us, if he tells us so in his word, and if he has proved it by dying in our stead, must it not grieve him when we refuse to believe the love which he has to us? Without faith it is impossible to please him; for until we believe him, we treat him as if his word was not worthy of credit, or, to use the apostle's strong language, we "make him a liar."

Reader, if Jesus had no love for you — would he send his servants to warn you, and his witnesses to assure you? And if he has thus proved his love, ought you not to believe it? And if you do not love him, are you not guilty of a great crime? A crime for which you can find no excuse, and for which you can never answer at his judgment-seat where you must appear! What ingratitude to treat his love with contempt! What folly to expose oneself to his wrath for despising his loving word! What criminality must that be which made even the loving Paul to say, "If any man loves not our Lord Jesus Christ — let him be accursed when the Lord comes!" But if I believe that Jesus loves me — if I receive his precious invitations — if I believe his faithful promises — if I rest upon the truthfulness of his word — have I not enough to make me happy? Suppose my fellow-sinners hate me — suppose their persecute me — suppose they sneer at me — suppose they affect to pity me — what then? If the King of kings loves me — if the Son of God manifests himself to me — all must be well; and he says, "I love those who love me." The love of Jesus is like the rainbow in the cloud in the day of storms — it assures me of safety; it is like the flowing fountain in the dreary desert — it assures me of supply; it is like the bright sun in a dark world — it enlightens, enlivens, and warms me; it is like the harmony of Heaven — brought to cheer the solitude and gloom of earth.

Love of Jesus! fill my heart, occupy my thoughts, feast my intellect, inflame my zeal, animate my hopes, brighten my prospects, and fill me to overflowing with holiness and love to him in return! Reader, I can wish you nothing better than that you may "know the love of Christ which passes knowledge," and so be "filled with all the fullness of God."

30 Your Keeper!

Your Keeper!

"The Lord is your keeper" Psalms 121:5 Our safety and happiness lie in what the Lord is to us. In darkness — he is our light;

in weakness — he is our strength;

in danger — he is our refuge;

at all times — he is our keeper.

He never trusts his people in any hands but his own. "Indeed, he loves his people; all his holy ones are in his hands!" (Deuteronomy 33:3). The Great Shepherd has said, "No one shall pluck them out of my hand." Let us notice —

1. The OBJECTS of the divine care. His people — his children — his sheep — the whole of them. To each it may be said, "The Lord is your keeper." But how are they known? How shall we know that the Lord is our keeper? He keeps all those who feel that they cannot keep themselves. And the Holy Spirit teaches every believer that he needs a keeper — that he has neither wisdom nor power to keep himself — that he must be kept by one greater and wiser than himself — or he is undone.

Those whom the Lord keeps, perceive . . .

that they are exposed to innumerable foes and dangers;

that they are never safe for one moment — if left to themselves;

that they must fall — except an omnipotent hand upholds them;

that their enemies will triumph over them — except the Lord is a wall of fire round about them. Therefore, they put themselves into the Lord's hands for protection. They commit themselves unto him, as unto a refuge of defense, to save them. They daily cry unto him to keep them. Their prayer is, "Keep me as the apple of the eye: hide me under the shadow of your wings." "O keep my soul and deliver me, for I trust in you." To them, the name of the Lord is a strong tower, and they run into it and are safe. The Lord always keeps those who are busily employed in his work. The diligent servant is safe. The obedient child is sure of protection.

If we feel that we cannot keep ourselves;

if we perceive that we are surrounded by dangers and foes;

if we put ourselves into the hands of God for protection;

if we daily call upon him to keep us;

if we exercise faith in his word of promise; and

if we are actively engaged in his service

— no doubt but the Lord will keep us!

Let us, therefore, consider —

2. Our omnipotent PROTECTOR. Believer, "Jehovah is your keeper." Jehovah, in all his infinite being and perfections — is engaged for your protection. "He keeps the feet of his saints." He commands us to cheer his weak, fearful, and drooping people with a song. He says, "In that day, sing about the fruitful vineyard. I, the Lord, will watch over it, watering it carefully. Day and night I will watch so no one can harm it." (Isaiah 27:2-3). But WHEN does the Lord keep us? Always, every moment. But especially in times of peculiar trial. He is always nearest — when most needed. Often nearest — when he is least perceived.

He keeps his people — in seasons of heavy trouble. He does not keep us from trouble; but he keeps us in trouble, and he keeps us by trouble. "The Lord tries the righteous." He keeps us in the midst of many fears. Our fears dishonor him. They distress us. But in the midst of them — he keeps us, and whispers to us, "Do not be afraid — for I am with you. Do not be discouraged — for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand!" (Isaiah 41:10). And when the night grows darker, and the storm beats more fiercely, and our fears grow stronger, and we tremble and are afraid — he again says, "I hold you by your right hand—I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, Do not be afraid. I am here to help you!" (Isaiah 41:13). From WHAT does the Lord keep his people? Not from common calamities. Not from severe afflictions. For they are a poor and an afflicted people. But he keeps them from sinking under their troubles. Good hope makes them buoyant. It keeps the head above water. It points to the rainbow in the clouds — to the distant streak of light, the harbinger of approaching day. The Christian may cry, "Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me!" But he shall also have to say, "He reached down from heaven and rescued me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and were too strong for me."

He will keep them from being overcome and conquered by inward corruption. It will work, and work mightily. It will struggle, and struggle like the drowning man. It may for a season bring them into captivity, and cause them to cry out, "I am carnal, sold under sin. Oh, wretched man that I am!" But sin shall not have dominion over them; for they are not under the law — but under grace.

He will keep them from going back into the world, and apostatizing from the truth. They may be tempted to it. They may feel secretly inclined to do so. They may rashly conclude, under circumstances, that they are apostates. But no one ever did apostatize yet, who had God for his keeper. If God undertakes to keep — he can do it; he will do it.

HOW does he keep them? By angelic powers. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). And as it was promised to the Head, so it is also to every member, "He shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways" (Psalms 91:2). Holy and blessed beings are our keepers in this dangerous world!

He keeps them also by the indwelling and operation of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. He abides and works in every believer. Having claimed us in the Savior's name, he never renounces his claim. Having begun a good work, he never leaves it unfinished — but will complete it in the day of Christ.

He keeps them by his sacred word. This is a light unto their feet, and a lantern unto their paths. It feeds them, and renews their strength. It cheers them, and animates them on their journey. It preserves them from a thousand wiles.

WHY does he keep them? Why! Because he loves and values them. No parent ever loved a child — as he loves the lowest of his people. No miser ever valued his gold — as he values the poorest of his saints. And then he has pledged himself to do so. He has said, "I will keep it." Besides, he can glorify himself by doing so. Oh, what glory will redound to his holy name, when the complete number of his elect — when every lamb of his fold, shall appear perfect before him in Zion! Not one missing. Not one lost. No; not inconsistent Jonah; nor backsliding Peter; nor even the unaccountable Solomon. My Christian friend, we shall need keeping in the future; never let us forget this. Let us make sure that the Lord is our keeper. Let us daily seek his keeping; never going out into the world — until we have put ourselves into his hand, by a solemn act of faith and prayer. Never let us, for one moment, trust to our own vigilance, power, or sagacity; for if we do, we shall certainly fall. Self-dependence always procures a fall.

Young Christian, look to Jesus, cleave to Jesus, trust in Jesus, and he will keep you as a lamb in the fold, as a child in a castle of rocks.

Weak Christian, look to this when Satan tempts you, when your heart misgives you, when fears oppress you, when everything appears to run cross and contrary, "The Lord is your keeper!"

31 The Weaver's Shuttle

The Weaver's Shuttle The weaver's trade is ancient and important. It employs a multitude of people, and adds greatly to our comfort. Weavers are, therefore, a useful and valuable class of men. They increase the wealth of the nation, and add to its prosperity. They ought to be cared for, and their welfare, both spiritual and temporal, should be sought. Let us, therefore, say a few words to weavers. Come, brother, sit down, and for five minutes hear what I have to say. Let me speak to you in love, and try to interest your mind on an important subject. You know more about the shuttle than I do, you are well acquainted with its use, and constantly observe its rapidity. Job had seen it at work, and when speaking of the brevity of life, and the rapidity of time, he said, "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle!" (Job 7:6.)

Life is short! Time soon flies away. We are hastening to an unseen and unchangeable state. Time is given us to prepare for eternity. Life in this world — is only introductory to life in another world. How many weavers die every year. How many die without hope. They live thoughtless lives. If they have plenty of work, good wages, and jolly companions — they care for nothing more. They are careless about their souls — they trifle with eternity! This betrays the greatest folly. They ought to "seek first the kingdom of God," they should "strive to enter in at the strait gate," they should "lay up for themselves treasures in Heaven." Time flies like the shuttle; the last month, the last week, the last day, the last hour, the last minute — will soon come; and "after this the judgment." "Now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation." But it will soon be said to every one of us, to you "there shall be time no longer." As time leaves us — eternity finds us! Oh, then, every time you think of the shuttle — think of the brevity of life, and the rapidity of time! The swiftness of the shuttle, preaches activity. Let us not sleep as do others. Let us be active in securing the salvation of our own souls, and then in doing good to all that are about us. It is no time to loiter. There is much to be done, and few hands to do it. Trade is brisk — and wages are high. Let us therefore be up early and be diligently employed. Let us not rest for one day, while there is any doubt about our own personal salvation — but "let us labor to enter into gospel rest." Let us "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure." Let us rather make assurance doubly sure, than be satisfied with insufficient evidence. And having made our own salvation sure, let us be active, and never lie down to mental slumber, while there is an unconverted weaver in the town, in the county, in Great Britain, or in the world. Up, brother weavers, and show yourselves men. Work while it is called today, for "the night comes when no man can work." The shuttle preaches energy, energetic action. Just such as the Savior recommends for ourselves. "Agonize to enter in at the strait gate." Put forth all your strength, throw all your energy into it. Wrestle with God. Resist Satan. Strive against the spirit, maxims, and customs of the world. "Lay hold on eternal life."

Just such, too, as the Apostle put forth for others. "I labor for this, striving with His strength that works powerfully in me." (Colossians 1:29.) Weavers should be men of energy, and so should Christians. The times require energetic men. The church calls for energetic men. The world will only be moved by men of energy. You godly weavers, go forth among your fellows. Speak for Christ. Set your hearts upon winning their souls for the Savior. By kindness and gentleness, by

activity and energy, by perseverance and prayer, by benevolence and generosity — strive to bring them to the Savior; and as a stimulus often read over the apostle's words, "Let him know, that he who converts a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." My friend, are you a thoughtless weaver? Let me beg of you for once to think, to think seriously for a few moments. If you persevere in your present course — you will perish, you must be lost forever; but you may be saved. No power under Heaven can hinder your being saved. No one can ruin you — but yourself. Only take the right direction, and persevere in the good old way, and you, a poor weaver, shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of your Heavenly Father. You shall exchange the loom — for a harp of gold; the workshop — for a mansion; the dirty streets of the manufacturing town — for the streets of the New Jerusalem, which are of pure gold like unto transparent glass; the company of your work-fellows, whether pleasant or disagreeable — for the company of the Son of God himself. You shall have an inheritance for your own, which "is incorruptible, undefined, and that fades not away," which is reserved in Heaven for all that believe in Jesus and live for his glory. A poor weaver may be exalted above the greatest monarch. What do you say? Will you rise from poverty — to plenty, from toil — to pleasure, from thralldom — to liberty, from what you now complain of — to the possession of what will fully and eternally satisfy you? You may; you are invited to do so. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Acquaint yourself with God in Christ, and be at peace. All the bliss of Heaven, all the glories of eternity — are before you; up and possess the good land. Believe, repent, pray, obey the Savior and all is yours, and yours forever!

32 Affection Baffled

Affection Baffled

I have a great liking to village grave-yards, and seldom do I visit a country village, but one of my first walks is to the grave-yard. The sight leads one's thoughts back to the past — and reflection is profitable; and from the past — one looks forward to the future, when the dead, small and great, shall stand before God. And who can meditate upon that period, without benefit? As we walk over the dust of the dead — we think of what they may have been, and of what we ourselves shall soon be! They lie in silence, and are most of them forgotten; we shall also soon be committed to our mother earth, and, except by a few tenderly attached friends, be remembered no more below. A short time ago I went to preach in a village in Bedfordshire, and, as usual, soon strolled into the churchyard. Nothing particular struck my mind at first — but I felt, as I often do in such places, a seriousness spread over my spirit. I walked among the long, thick grass, and read an inscription here and there; at length I was struck with the number of stones bearing the same family name. Each family seemed to have claimed a separate piece, and each appeared determined to perpetuate its name. But as I went toward one corner of the yard, I saw a number of stones — but not one word was legible on any of them; I tried — but could not decipher a word — time had erased the whole.

Well, thought I, if affection placed these stones here, and the design was to perpetuate the names and good deeds of the departed, affection is completely baffled — for wind and weather have blotted out all. A durable material had been chosen, the letters had been deeply cut — but all was of no avail, the whole inscription was erased. Tradition may have handed down a few meager particulars to a remaining friend or relative; but, with this exception, the name was no more remembered in the village. The family had died out, or had emigrated to some other place, or were sunk into poverty.

Well, thought I, here is a lesson-book, and here are lessons to be learned. Let us be kind and attentive to our relatives while we have them: many, it is to be feared, who fail to perform their duty to their friends while they live, try to make up for this neglect by erecting a grave-stone for them when they are dead. The good that we do to the living will be remembered; but such acts for the dead will pass into oblivion. Let kindness carve our names on the hearts of the living, and they will carry the inscription beyond the bounds of this earth and the limits of time. Acts of kindness shown to God's saints — are recorded in Heaven, and the record will endure through eternal ages. We are always engaged in erecting monuments, either to our honor or disgrace. Every poor Christian that you relieve, every sorrowful soul that you comfort, every widow whose needs you supply, every orphan child whose tears you dry — will become a living monument, having inscribed upon it your good deeds, and there they will be read forever. You need not keep a record of them, such works will follow you, and will be mentioned to your honor before assembled worlds by the Judge of all (Matthew 25:34, Matthew 25:40).

Let everyone remember, that he is raising his own monument, and is writing his own epitaph, and that both will be preserved to all eternity. Whatever we write by our conduct is permanent, nothing can erase a letter, but the blood of Christ, and that only erases the bad, from those to whom it is applied. What appears transient to us — is permanent before God; the volumes written in time — will be read in eternity; the works performed in this world — will be remembered in the next.

Brethren, let us not trouble about a grave-stone, or be anxious to have our names engraved on perishable materials, in characters that may be erased; but let it be our concern to have our names written in Heaven. If written in the Lamb's book of life, if registered by the finger of God as born from above — the entry will remain forever. There are no erasures there. No destructive elements, no mischievous beings, can ever affect them there; they are more durable than the deepest sculpture in the most lasting material; more durable than if written with an iron pen in lead, in the the rock forever.

Let us, then, make our calling and our election sure. Let us never be satisfied until we obtain satisfactory evidence that our names are written on the heart of Jesus, and sculpted on his hands. And if we carry about with us this assurance, we may smile upon the attempts of our foes to mar our fair fame, or cast dishonor on our names; for we know that our God will bring us forth to the light, and we shall behold his righteousness. Let us imitate the conduct of Him who, though rich by nature, honorable by descent, spotless in character, and whose life was crowded with deeds of mercy and of might, lay in a borrowed grave, and never had a tomb-stone. But though he had no sculptured stone to mark the place of his burial, he had what was infinitely better — he had his name engraved on myriads of human hearts, his praises sounded by all the hosts of angelic tongues, and the highest seat in glory awarded him by his righteous and delighted Father.

Like him, let us go about doing good. Like him, let us minister to the poor, the sick, and the broken hearted. Like him, let us be known as the poor man's friend, the brother born for adversity. Like him, let us spend our health, our strength, our wealth, and every talent — to glorify God and do sinners good. Then, though persecuted by bitter foes, though misrepresented by the selfish throng, though cast out as unfit to live, we may cheerfully say with Job, "My witness is in Heaven, and my record is on high."

Let us, then, make it our daily care to do what is worth recording, and leave the recording of it to others. Let us aim to have a name in God's book, a name among God's saints, and a name in God's world, for aiming at his glory, walking by his word, and endeavoring to do the greatest amount of good to his creatures. In our grave-yards we often read what is silly, what is erroneous, and what is false; but if we live for God's glory and the good of our fellow-men, if we live with eternity before us and the love of Christ is our hearts, if we live as those that must give an account, and whose desire is "to do it with joy and not with grief," we shall have an inscription that is wise, correct, and truthful; an inscription which angels will admire and saints read with pleasure; an inscription on which the beams of the Sun of Righteousness will ever rest, one letter of which eternity will never obliterate, and which will be placed before God's throne forever. This will gratify our kindest friends, satisfy our largest desires, and please the benevolent heart of our beneficent Redeemer.

Savior, let my heart be your monument, deeply engrave on it your love; let my life reflect the glory of your grace, and be a close copy of your own; let my death bring honor to your cause, and my

endless employment be praising your name! Blessed be God for a good hope through grace, and the prospect of a glorious immortality.

33 Hindrances to Conversion and Church Membership

Hindrances to Conversion and Church Membership

"Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering!" Luke 11:52 The Lord Jesus never brought an unjust charge against any, nor could he be charged with a lack of charity, or with defective orthodoxy. His views were clear, his heart was kind — and yet he says to some, You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering!" He refers to his kingdom, his church: some were affected, concerned, and thought of coming to him, and joining with him — but they were "hindered." Are any hindered now? Are there in our churches and congregations, those that hinder souls from coming to Christ, or joining with his people? We fear there are, and in every department of the church. Let us look —

First, at the PULPIT. What do we see there? Perhaps, the preacher is cold in his manner, perplexing in his style, and formal in his devotions — this proves an hindrance to many. They want to see warmth, to understand clearly; and to feel that while the preacher is in prayer — he is hearty, earnest, and desirous of their salvation. Unless our doctrine is sound, our manner energetic, our appeals pointed, our prayers fervent, and the whole unite to prove that we are in downright earnest — we shall hinder some. Let us look —

Secondly, at our DEACONS. What do we see there? Are they men full of the Holy Spirit and of faith? Do they say, by their regular and early attendance, by their kind and pleasant manners, by their constant activity and attention to all who attend the place — that they desire the conversion of souls, and the increase of the church? Are they first at the prayer-meetings, first in the public services, making it evident that their hearts are set upon the prosperity of the cause? If not — they will hinder some.

Next to the preacher, people look to the deacons to be serious, temperate, devout, active, and thoroughly devoted to God. But when deacons are worldly-minded, proud, lordly, cold, distant, and patrons of worldly amusements and carnal pleasures, it must be said of them: "You have hindered those who were entering!" We have heard of deacons who give balls, have dances, frequent concerts — and yet often neglect prayer-meetings, church-meetings, and visiting the sick; can it be any wonder, if the churches to which such deacons belong — dwindle, decline, become worldly, formal, and inactive? Let us look —

Thirdly, at the MEMBERS of our churches. And what meets us here? Here is one well known for his love of money and hard dealing; there is another who habitually gives way to his unholy temper; there is another who practices deception in business, because it is the custom of the trade; there is another who is never seen at the prayer meeting; there is another so much like the world that if we did not see him at the Lord's table, we would never imagine that he made any profession of religion; there is another as cold as marble, to sit by whom, is like coming into contact with an iceberg! And there is another . . . but I forbear.

Let everyone look into his own church; yes, let every one look into his own heart, and at his own conduct, and then say, "Is it any wonder that our churches do not flourish?" I fear the professing church of Christ has much to answer for. It will not do to resolve it into the sovereignty of God alone. Prosperous times have been holy times, praying times, acting times. Ours are talking times, giving times — but something more is lacking. We have hosts of undecided people in our congregations, and hosts of half-hearted people in our churches. Many have attended our places for years, and have never been pointedly spoken to by one of our members as to the state of their souls. The minister preaches — but they never second his efforts. They seem to imagine that it is no part of their business. The gospel of Christ is hindered; the question is, who hinders it?

Paul was deeply concerned lest he should (1 Corinthians 9:12); but many professors now have no concern about it. They live, and speak, and conduct themselves — as if it was no concern of theirs. Souls are hindered — but who hinders them? The Jewish "experts in the law" did once — but other classes do now.

There is that marble statue that you see at the sermon — but nowhere else, who speaks to no one, appears to care for no one — he hinders.

There is that covetous man, who never comes to prayer-meeting lest he should miss taking sixpence — he hinders.

There is that grumpy, gloomy, uncouth professor — he hinders.

There is that light, vain, trifling professor — he hinders.

There is that proud, scornful, disdainful-looking character — he hinders.

There is that dressy body, who spends all God's money at the salons and drapers, so that she has none left for God's cause — she hinders.

There is that tittle tattling, tale-bearing, scandalizing woman — she hinders.

There is that inflammatory, fiery, scolding professor, she hinders. But where shall we end! Every inconsistent professor, who has not the mind of Christ, who does not copy his meekness, gentleness, activity, devotion, zeal, self-denial, and intense concern for the salvation of souls — in some measure hinders.

Here is the cool and calculating;

there the dashing and the daring;

here the bold and conceited;

there the fearful and shy;

here the self-willed and lordly;

there the close-fisted and covetous;

and all these hinder, being stumbling blocks in the way. A church composed of such members resembles:

the rocky desert — not the pleasant garden;

a cold ice-bound tundra — not a beautiful sun-lit field;

a barren plot covered with thorns — not a well-cultivated vineyard;

a shabby, rotten, miserable-looking hovel — not the well-built, roomy, cheerful dwelling.

How can we expect people to admire, desire, or seek union with such a church? True, few may be so bad — but in proportion as they, in whole or in part, resemble it — they hinder. Our churches must be happy, and happy-making churches, if they are to flourish. There must be freedom, fellowship, love, unity, peace, individual interest, and united concern felt for all who come into the congregation — or can he be induced to come in, before we can expect them to be what we desire to see them. Ministers may preach, authors may write books, lively Christians may do their best — but something else is lacking. Every church-member must realize his responsibility, must agonize with God, must endeavor to persuade men, must lay aside whatever is forbidding and repulsive; and all must follow "whatever things are true, whatever things are honest or venerable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report," before we can expect our wishes to be fulfilled.

Ministers must be holy, energetic, simple, sound in the faith, with their hearts set upon the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the saints — or, like the "Jewish experts in the law", they will hinder.

Deacons must be spiritually-minded, active, sober, courteous, intent upon the church's prosperity, full of the Holy Spirit, and of faith — or they will more or less hinder.

Church-members must continue steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, every one must take his own place and keep it, every one must ascertain what is his own work and do it; every eye must be fixed on God's glory, every heart must rest on Christ's finished work, every hand must be employed in God's service, and each must esteem others better than himself, no one seeking his own things — but every one the things which are Jesus Christ's — or they will in some degree hinder.

Brethren, are we not more or less guilty? Do not our imperfections stare us in the face? Ought we not to humble ourselves deeply before God? Should we not set about an immediate reformation? Let us realize our sin, confess it before God, get it pardoned through the blood of Jesus, set out afresh in divine strength, purposing most solemnly, that the time past of our lives shall suffice us that we have wrought the will of the Gentiles, and determine that, let others do as they will, we will be very careful lest it should be said of us, "You have hindered those who were entering!"

34 How Shall I Obtain Peace with God?

How Shall I Obtain Peace with God?

I have sinned — and I fear God is angry.

I feel guilty — and I dread the thought of appearing before him.

I am anxious and disquieted — and can obtain no rest.

I try to pray — but am no better.

I read the bible — but it produces no change.

I hear the gospel — but it does me no good.

I know not what to do, which way to look, or how to get relief.

How shall I obtain peace with God? This is an important question; it lies at the root of all our happiness and all our holiness. Peace may be obtained. It may be obtained by any sinner who really desires it. It may be obtained at any time, and in any place. The Lord Jesus Christ was our Substitute. He took our nature, suffered in our stead, and died in our place. His sacrifice was a full and sufficient atonement for all our sins. God is well pleased with him in consequence of it. He has placed him at his own right hand in Heaven. He looks upon him with infinite satisfaction and delight. He has placed him before us in the everlasting gospel — and has bidden us look away from self, from sin, and from all our deserts, to him; and promises everlasting life to all and every one that looks to, and places confidence in him and his perfect work. The way to obtain peace therefore is, to look simply, immediately, and alone — to Jesus; to view him as bearing our sins, suffering our deserts, and doing everything necessary for the salvation of every one that confides in him.

If I want peace with God — I must look to Jesus. I view Him as my Substitute — I see my sins laid upon Him — punished in Him — and put away by Him. He alone is my peace. I will not look at anything, or to any one — but Him. He is enough.

There is infinitely more merit in Christ's atoning blood to save me — than there is in my black sins to condemn me!

I cast my soul upon Him, I rely on Him entirely, and I feel that it is utterly impossible to perish while I do so. His whole worth is placed to the account of every one who believes on Him; and every one who renounces self, confesses sin, and trusts simply in Jesus — stands before God acquitted, justified, and accepted — as really and as fully as if he had done all that Jesus did, and suffered all that Jesus suffered, in his own person! With him — justice is satisfied. For him — the whole law has been fulfilled. To him — the whole work of Christ is imputed.

He has passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. This is the only way to obtain peace with God. But may any sinner obtain peace with God in this way? Yes, any sinner! For He says, "All whom the Father gives Me will come to Me — and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away!" Nothing can induce Him to cast out a coming sinner. No matter how vile, how depraved, how sinful, how old, how hardened, how unworthy, the sinner is — if he comes, he shall be received, and received cheerfully, readily, and certainly!

Every one that comes to Jesus by prayer and faith — is instantly pardoned, perfectly justified, honorably reconciled to God, and put in possession of a title to everlasting life!

Every one who comes to Jesus by prayer and faith, is . . .

instantly pardoned,

perfectly justified,

honorably reconciled to God, and

put in possession of a title to everlasting life!

There must be no reference . . .

to works,

to feelings,

to purposes of amendment,

to the failure of our promises in past times,

or to anything else!

You must look away from everything within you and without you — to the Lord Jesus Christ alone! And the moment you commit your soul, with all its sins, guilt, and dreadful depravity, into His hands, to be saved by Him wholly, freely, and forever — that moment you will have peace with God! This is the way of peace — will you walk in it? This is the path of holiness — will you enter upon it? "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him!" This is the Savior's word, believe it, act upon it, hold him to it, and everlasting life is yours! O Savior,

"Guilty and weak — to you I fly,

On your atoning blood rely,

And on your righteousness depend,

My Lord, my Savior, and my Friend! Be all my heart, be all my days

Devoted to your single praise!

And let my glad obedience prove

How much I owe — how much I love!"

35 An Apostolic Requirement

An Apostolic Requirement "By this time you ought to be teachers." Hebrews 5:12

Many people are not what they ought to be, either in state, qualifications, or practice. Some deny this — and, therefore, we cannot expect them to improve. Others admit it — but they make no effort to alter it, and consequently, are none the better for the admission. Truth is to spread through human instrumentality; and by the spread of truth, Christ is to be made known, sinners converted, and God glorified. For the spread of truth, teachers are required; and the church of God is to furnish the required instructors. In many quarters we hear the complaint that teachers are needed; and in many congregations we see professors sitting idle who "ought to be teachers." Let us, therefore, look very seriously at this declaration of the apostle.

Some of you ought to be qualified to teach, who are not. You have long professed Christ. You have had plenty of means at hand. You have had time to spare for other pursuits. Others, with no more means, with no more time — are qualified, and why should not you be? Are you so very dull? Is it so very difficult for you to acquire knowledge, or to acquire the ability to communicate what you know? Or, rather, is it not the love of ease, the indulgence of the flesh, and the prevalence of a selfish disposition — which has prevented you? You ought to be teachers, because you might have been qualified to teach. Why are you not? Let conscience answer this question as before God, and in the light of eternity.

You ought to be willing to teach. Many have the ability — but they have not the will — they are educated — they profess Christ — they are members of the church — they are respectable in society — they have a good degree of influence — but they are not teachers. Why? Ah! why? The Lord Jesus has commissioned his church to go and teach the nations. The commission is to the whole church, and applies to every member, according to his station, talent, and ability. Every Christian should teach. You are entrusted with the truth to preserve it, to spread it, to practice it, and to enjoy it. You ought to teach it, why do you not? Just because you lack the will. There are people ignorant of the truth to whom you could communicate it. They cannot be sanctified or saved without it. If they live and die ignorant of it — are you guiltless? Can you be guiltless?

You ought to be a teacher. By your daily conduct, by your general conversation, by your special efforts — you ought to teach. And you ought to hold yourself responsible, up to a certain point, for the ignorance that is in the world. Does not the apostle teach this, when he says, "Some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Corinthians 15:34)?

You ought to be anxious to teach. Not perhaps in the pulpit; you may not be qualified for that. Not to teach your pastor or the aged members; ten to one if you have any fitness for that. But to teach the young, the ignorant in your own neighborhood, and in the villages near where you reside. You should never see a person ignorant of the truth, if it is at all probable that you can instruct him, or if it is consistent to endeavor to gain access to him — but you should be anxious to teach him. How can you be a Christian, and not be anxious to make known the Savior?

How can you be a consistent member of the church, and not be anxious to add to its numbers? How can you be a patriot, and not be anxious to instruct your fellow countrymen in the things which belong to their peace? How can you observe the law, which says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," and not be anxious to lead your neighbor in the good and the right way? How can you obey the gospel, which says, "Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled," "preach the gospel to every creature," if you are not anxious, by teaching, to bring every soul under its influence? If you are not anxious to teach, there is something radically wrong; and if you are anxious to teach, you will seek qualifications, grace, and opportunity to do so.

You ought to be employed in teaching. There need not be a child in Great Britain uneducated, or a person left without an acquaintance with the gospel, if the members of the church of Christ would only do their duty. We ought seriously to think of this; and I am sure, that the more seriously we think of it, and the more closely we examine it, the more thoroughly shall we be convinced of its truth.

Why are children left in ignorance, or handed over to the teaching of Puseyites and Papists, or people ignorant of the gospel? Just because those who ought to be teachers, are not. Why are our villages in darkness, and thousands in our crowded towns strangers to the gospel? Because the members of the church of Christ love ease, indulge the flesh, and many of them are too respectable, that is, too carnal, to be teachers. From every pulpit, from every religious periodical, the sound should be heard, addressed to every professor of religion, "By this time you ought to be teachers" until the drowsy are awakened, and the flesh-loving professor is made ashamed of his course. Beloved, your Savior speaks to you — he speaks in the accents of aggrieved love — he speaks from the throne of his glory. He says, "I wish that you were either hot or cold." He tells you, "It is high time to awake out of sleep."

You ought to be teachers, and you ought to be teaching. Souls are perishing. Error is spreading. Popery is working. Satan is deceiving the nations. Hell is filling. Earth and Hell seem to be moved and stirred to their very depths, and shall "we sit still?" In vain do you cry out against error — if you do not teach the truth. In vain do you protest against the aggressions of the Pope — if you do not spread the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. In vain do you complain of crime, ignorance, or cruelty — if you are not teachers, and if you are not teaching. Teach, then, "every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord" (Hebrews 7:2).

Teachers are needed in many of our Sunday-schools, and you could teach — but will not. What shall we say to you? Rather, what will your Lord say? Teachers are needed in many of our villages, and, perhaps, you could speak of Jesus acceptably, if you would try — but you will not. Teachers are needed in the cottages, cellars, garrets, and other residences, in the courts, lanes, alleys, and streets of our towns, and you could gain access to them, and set Christ before them, if you would — but you will not, and what shall we say? Shall we not say that you are truly guilty concerning your brothers. They are bone of your bone — they are flesh of your flesh — they inhabit the same place — they speak the same language — they need the same Savior — they are traveling to the same solemn eternity — they must, with you, appear before the same solemn judgment-seat — they are in gross ignorance — they are laboring under a fearful delusion — they sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. You could visit them — you could carry the light of the gospel to them — you might be the means of snatching them as brands from the everlasting

burnings, and be instrumental in their everlasting salvation — but you will not. Where is your hatred to sin? Where is your love for souls? Where is your zeal for Christ? Where is your opposition to Satan?

Ah, where!

"By this time you ought to be teachers." You have been long enough in the church — you know more than thousands around you; many would willingly be taught by you; God, in his word, commands you; and the Holy Spirit would work by you. Awake, then, and arise, and go to work in right earnest. Infidels are in earnest spreading infidelity. Jesuits are in earnest spreading Popery. Puseyites are in earnest spreading Puseyism. The devil is in earnest ruining immortal souls. All appear in earnest — but the church of Christ. All are active — but those who should be.

Let us brethren, cast away the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. Let us begin to work for God as we never began before. Let us go right up to the cross — and there entirely and forever consecrate ourselves to God. Let us draw near to the throne of grace, and seek special grace from God for special service in the cause of God.

Let us begin teaching in every way, up to the extent of our power, saying, by our conduct — if any perish in ignorance, it shall not be my fault. Let tracts be circulated by thousands; but let not the tract be a substitute for the living voice; but let the tongue, the hand, the pen, the press, the purse, the head, the heart — let all work, and all work together; and then, when our sincerity, perseverance, and purity of motive, have been tried — great and glorious results will follow. Churches of Jesus, awake, arise, and teach! Believers in the Son of God, go forth, everywhere preaching the word! Trust alone in the sacrifice of Jesus, exercise confidence in God, invoke the assistance of the Holy Spirit — and yet work as if all depended on your working, and a glorious revival will soon be realized and enjoyed.

36 An Address to a Newly Formed Church of Christ

An Address to a Newly Formed Church of Christ

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, as you have covenanted to walk together as a Christian Church, in obedience to his commands — allow the word of exhortation. You profess to be Christians, and if you are so indeed — you possess "the Spirit of Christ," for, "if any man has not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." You are called "The light of the world," "The salt of the earth," "The epistles of Christ," "The temples of the Holy Spirit," "The children of the living God."

You have a relation to God — and a relation to man: you are bound to glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's. You are commanded to "do good unto all men, especially unto those who are of the household of faith;" to "give no offence to any man, neither to the Jew, nor to the Greek, nor to the church of God."

You are united to Jesus, whose fullness is opened to supply you, and who is exalted at God's right hand to bless you. You are united to one another, you have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism;" and have pledged yourselves to seek each other's good. You profess to seek the glory of God, your own edification, and the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, by this your union. Ever keep these things in mind — for your peace, prosperity, and comfort, in a great measure depend thereon.

You are not your own; you are not at liberty to seek your own gratification — but in subordination to the great ends you profess to seek. Jesus bought you with his blood, he claims you as his own, and commands you to walk according to his word. His eye is always upon you, and he is either glorified or dishonored by every action you perform. Your privileges are great, and your duties are many; and ever remember, privileges are to be enjoyed in the performance of the duties required. You have received a kingdom, you are entitled to grace, and you are exhorted to have it, Hebrews 12:28, Hebrews 4:16. You can only serve God acceptably, as you serve him — under the influence of his own grace, according to his word, with a view to his glory. Receive then with meekness, and with a desire to walk according to them, the commands of Jesus.

He bids you to love one another; even as he has loved you. Indulge no evil surmisings in reference to each other; charity thinks no evil. Beware lest you encourage a spirit of jealousy or envy — it will disturb your peace and destroy your usefulness, Guard against speaking evil one of another. Brethren, the Lord says, "Speak evil of no man." Watch against an unforgiving spirit — but as "God for Christ's sake has forgiven you — so also do you." Be ever ready to assist one another, according as God has given you ability, both in temporal and spiritual things. Avoid a censorious, caviling, captious turn of mind; it is the bane of spirituality, and a pestilence in a Church. Love one another, for you are — brethren, the friends of Jesus, the foes of Satan, and the representatives of the Savior to the world.

Jesus bids you to strive together. Strive together in prayer to God for your officers and fellow-members. Strive together to support and extend the cause of God. Strive to exhibit the

Christian character, and to show forth the praises of him who has called you by his grace. Cleave to one another and to the Lord, with full purpose of heart; and provoke one another to love and to good works. Satan will endeavor to disunite you, and sow discord among you; he hates to see saints in union, and employs every stratagem to prevent it.

Guard against a spirit of pride and self-importance — as it will render you miserable, useless, and barren; you will be uncomfortable in yourselves, and a plague to all about you. Endeavor by all means, at all times, to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Never allow yourselves to carry into the world, the concerns of the church; carry them to the Lord in prayer — but never tell them to any other. It is tale-bearing, and a breach of your church-covenant; a disgrace to the person who practices it, and a trouble to the church that permits it. Do all things to edification. When you meet at your houses, or in the house of God, always aim to edify one another. You do one another good or evil — every time you meet; therefore let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, that you may be able to comfort, admonish, and advise one another. Be present if possible when your brethren meet together for prayer and praise, and never absent yourself from any ordinance except lawfully detained. The diligent soul shall be made fat — but the idle soul shall suffer hunger.

Let everything be done with charity. Never put a bad construction on an action — if you can put a good one. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." "Exhort another daily." Imitate God as dear children. "Be clothed with humility." "Let each esteem others better than himself." Put on "affections of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering." "Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, giving honor, one to another." "Let the same mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Consider one another as compassed with like infirmities, exposed to like temptations, and possessing like passions with yourselves. "Receive one another — as Christ also received you to the glory of God." "Receive those who are weak in the faith." You are not at liberty to reject the lambs of the flock; those who through timidity say least, often are the best. A knowledge of sin, faith in Jesus, and a willingness to observe his commands — is all you can consistently require in order to qualify others for membership with your church. Never set your standard too high, or think that the Lord will work by your rule; he is a Sovereign, and does according to his will, requiring you to walk according to his word.

Submit to the discipline prescribed in God's word; never wish to keep any in the church — whose spirit and conduct say they ought to be out of it. Consult the honor of Christ and the good of the gospel upon these matters — not your own feelings. Jesus requires you to pluck out a right eye — if it is an offence, an hindrance, or a stumbling block; and to cut off a right hand. Strive and pray that the church may be kept pure — sound in doctrine and holy in practice. The door out of the church should be exactly of the same dimensions as the door in; and there is sinful partiality if it is not so.

Never make private differences public, except it be absolutely necessary. Observe the rule given by the Savior, Matthew 18:15-20. Never report a quarrel publicly — until you have reproved and prayed for the offender privately. Offences will come, always endeavor to remove them out of the way as quickly as possible. Be sure that you never encourage any fellow member who tattles the saints' faults; the Lord tells you, an angry countenance will drive away a back-biting tongue. If you

refuse to receive their gossip — they will soon leave off their practice. Make all due allowance for your brethren, remember you also have your infirmities, and are exposed to temptations.

If God leaves you — sin will soon appear on you. If you see a brother about to sin — reprove him; if he fell — pray for him; this is the way to convert him, and hide a "multitude of sins" (James 5:18-19). Never sanction sin in any — nor condemn rashly. Strive against a hasty spirit — and study to live a quiet life. Always aim to act in every place and under every circumstance, that observers may be obliged to say: That person is a Christian! Let your light so shine, and your good works be seen — that God may be glorified. Be very careful over your spirit and conduct at church meetings; these are either the honor or disgrace of the church. Remember you are in God's house; you profess to be concerned for his honor; his eye is upon you; and the peace, prosperity, and comfort of the church greatly depend upon your conduct and spirit. Let it be lovely, praiseworthy, and holy. Keep your mouth as with a bridle if you feel your nature rise; crucify the old man; mortify the flesh; follow peace and the things which make for peace. Edification and the growth of spirituality, should be the great object of all church-meetings; if it is not so, they are carnal and will become a curse!

Aim to be useful in the church — sympathize with the poor, the sick, the tempted, the young, the aged, the backsliding, the penitent, your pastor and deacons; all have a claim upon you, and may be benefitted by you. Encourage seekers, exhort the lukewarm, caution the rash, invite the backslider to turn again to the Lord, visit the sick and dying, speak comfortably to the tempted and sorrowful, and pray for all. Bring all whom you can under the word, and beseech God to meet with them when there.

Always bear in mind, you must give an account of yourselves to God. You are accountable for all you that say, do, or occasion to be done; Jesus "will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Your actions are permanent, though they appear but transient. Be not a great talker — aim to be a holy, humble, useful walker. Shun the company of those who sow discord among brethren. Keep a good conscience. Give honor to whom honor is due. Beware of the spirit of the world. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," either by lightness, looseness, or bitterness; but sow the seeds of righteousness, sow to the Spirit and you shall reap life everlasting. Avoid the appearance of evil. "Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise." "Walk worthy of God." "Be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

Endeavor to carry out your principles in your families, let family prayer be regular, serious, and fervent. Recommend religion by your spirit and conduct to your children. They will take more notice of what you do — than of what you say. So walk before them that you may be able to say to them without blushing, Be followers of me, even as I am of Christ.

"Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." They are a trust committed to you, and their sanctification and salvation should lay nearer to your hearts than anything else.

"Husbands love your wives;" are they unconverted? Endeavor to win them by a lovely spirit and holy conduct.

"Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands," study their comfort in all things. Are they unsaved? Strive by kindness, a manifest desire to make them happy, and a word in season — to

bring them to Jesus. "God is able to make all grace to abound toward you, so that you having all sufficiency may abound in every good work."

You who are children — be kind, attentive, and ready to assist your parents; gospel privileges do not dissolve natural relations, or free you from moral obligations.

Servants, let religion shine in your conduct before your fellow servants, your masters and mistresses: they will keep their eyes upon you, and expect great things from you. Be strictly honest; never take away behind your mistress's back, what you would not before her face. Be very industrious; you are hired to work, not to be idle. Be clean; cleanliness is an honor to a Christian, dirt is a disgrace. Never be pert; God's word says, you are not to answer back (Titus 2:9). Guard against eye-service; you are directed to act towards your masters, as you would toward the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 6:5-9). Godly, consistent servants, are very useful members in a church — but idle, gossiping, pert, dirty, talkative ones — are a great mischief and disgrace. The Lord takes notice of all these things, and gives directions about them in his word; therefore they cannot be unimportant. Be particular as to the connections you form; many have been robbed of their simplicity, spirituality, and humility, through associating with proud, censorious, licentious professors; or from going too far and too frequently with the worldly.

If you are single, be very careful to whom you give up your company, or allow to entangle your affections; you are at liberty to marry "only in the Lord." If you dare to unite with an unregenerate person, you despise the authority of God the Father, reject the command of the Lord Jesus Christ, grieve the Holy Spirit, and ensure to yourselves misery and sorrow. Your bodies are "the temples of the Holy Spirit," "the members of Christ," and should not be united to the enemies of God, the servants of Satan. Resist Satan when he comes with such a temptation, for many have been entangled and overcome; and as the consequence have spent their days in misery and their years in sorrow.

Make God's word your guide, keep the Savior's company, imitate the most holy of the saints, and keep yourselves unspotted from the world. Strive to be useful to the world; if you are going to Heaven, and believe it to be a holy happy place, endeavor to take some one or more with you. Be upon the watch for opportunities to do good. Usefulness in God's church is a great honor, uselessness a sad sign: barren fig trees are cumberers of the ground. You will either do good or harm in the church. You will either glorify God or please Satan. Always speak truth, never lie on any account; never allow yourselves to color anything you relate. God's ear listens to every word you speak. Punctually perform your promises, never make positive, unconditional ones; but use caution in all your dealings, that you may preserve a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man. Reverence old age and spirituality, pity weakness, and always loathe sin under every form.

Ever view yourselves as the property of God, for his glory; as the property of the church, for her good. You are debtors to God for his grace, for pardon, righteousness, and eternal life. You owe a debt of gratitude and obedience. You are in debt to the church; she has a right to your presence, your prayers, your sympathies, and your influence. A Christian has no private property, all is lent him with this command, "Occupy until I come." By love, then, serve one another. "Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin," and unto the world; "but alive unto God," and to the interests of his church, "through Jesus Christ our Lord." A Christian spirit is a public spirit; and a

consistent Christian will always aim to lay himself out for the extension of the Redeemer's cause, and the glory of Jehovah's name. Happy must be that church, of whose members it may be said, They have done what they could! They have done what they could to support, establish, and increase the cause: they have done what they could to add to the spirituality, to maintain the peace, and extend the usefulness of the church. Brethren and sisters, have you done what you could? Does the love of Christ constrain you? Does zeal for his glory impel you? Is it your heart's desire that sinners may be saved, that saints may be consistent, and that Zion may be made a praise in the whole earth? If it is, let your conduct and conversation prove it beyond a doubt; and so live and so walk, that you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

Jesus has been grievously wounded in the house of his friends, religion now suffers from the conduct of its professors; if therefore you have any concern for the good of souls, if any love to Christ, if any zeal for God, if any desire to be useful — think on these things, "So speak, and so do — as those who shall be judged by the law of liberty." Show your faith — by your works; the holiness of your principles — by the consistency of your practice. Live not unto yourselves — but unto him who died for you and rose again; and whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do — do all to the glory of God.

View your Pastor as God's servant, sent with the Lord's message to you. Expect to receive from him not only comfort but reproof; not only instruction but exhortation. Never take offence at God's word as delivered by him; he must give an account of what he delivers — you must give an account of the use you make of it. Beware how you apply to others — what belongs to yourself. "Receive with meekness the engrafted word." Look more at the message, than the manner in which it is delivered: take it as coming from God, and be sure to put it to a good use. If Satan can get you to despise, cavil, or quarrel with the preacher — he can effectually prevent your edification. Esteem God's servants "very highly in love for their work's sake, and be at peace among yourselves."

Finally, brethren, endeavor to keep up constant fellowship with God, seek personal holiness, and give yourselves up unreservedly to the Lord. Look upon one another as brethren, united by ties more sacred and more close than any natural bond. View one another in Christ, as members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. Be concerned to know that the Spirit dwells in you and among you, as the glorifier of Christ, the sanctifier of his people, the expounder of the scriptures, and the author of edification and peace. Bring every gift, and talent you possess, and consecrate them to the church's service and the Redeemer's praise. Wrestle with God for his presence in your assemblies, and his blessing on your souls. Realize your responsibility, and let self be denied; while patience, forbearance, and brotherly kindness have their perfect work. And may the God of all grace, who has called you unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that you have suffered awhile, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen!

37 Saul's Question Improved

Saul's Question Improved

"Saul said to his servant: If we go, what can we give the man? The food in our sacks is gone. We have no gift to take to the man of God. What do we have?" 1 Samuel 9:7

Thus inquired Saul, when about to present himself before Samuel, to whom it was customary to make a present; and thus ought we to inquire, who are about to appear before God's just tribunal. We are summoned — and we must obey. The warrant is ready, and nothing is wanting — but for the date of the day when we must appear to be affixed. That may be done at any moment, and then, however short the notice, the messenger sent will insist upon our going with him. We cannot hide from him, we cannot effectually resist him. The surgeon and the physician may try, the prayers of the godly may try — but the warrant once dated, all is over — and we must "appear before the judgment seat of Christ." But how shall we appear? What will be the result of our appearing? "What do we have?" Have we a righteousness which will answer all the claims of God's holy law? If not, what shall we do? God is strictly just. He will by no means clear, or acquit, the guilty. If any one sin is chargeable upon us, he will not acquit us. He cannot consistently with his own word. One sin will sink us to the depths of Hell. We must be righteous — or we shall be eternally condemned. We must present to divine justice all that the law requires — or we are eternally undone. Have we, then, such a righteousness?

If so, how did we come by it? We could not produce it, for our hearts are both wicked and weak. Whatever comes from the heart answers to the nature of the heart from which it comes. Now, our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who, then, can bring a perfect righteousness out of such a polluted heart? Not one! Not one of our works by nature is good — much less every one of our works! But it takes the motives, thoughts, purposes, plans, words, and actions of a whole life — to make up a righteousness which God will accept.

Now, unless every motive that has influenced us,

every thought that has been conceived by us,

every purpose and plan that we have formed,

every word we have spoken, and

every action that we have performed

— has been perfectly holy, spotless as the driven snow — we have not the righteousness which God requires, and without which God cannot justify us!

How, then, can man be just before God? How can we be acquitted before God's bar? Is there a possibility of this? Yes, there is. God has devised a way, and the gospel reveals it. A way in which he can be just — and yet the justifier of any sinner who believes in Jesus. We could not produce the righteousness required — but Jesus could and has done so. His obedience unto death was in

the sinner's stead. His righteousness was wrought as the sinner's substitute — and it was accepted by the Judge of all. It is now called the "righteousness of God," "the gift of righteousness," "the righteousness which is by faith." The gospel presents it to us — and faith receives and appropriates it. It is placed to the account of every one who believes. Have you this righteousness? You cannot be justified without it — you cannot be condemned with it. "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "What do we have?" Have we a holy nature? We cannot enter Heaven without this; and if we could — we would never enjoy it. Sin is a disease — as well as a crime. We must not only be pardoned — but healed. We must be sanctified — as well as justified. Those two blessings are never separated. Nor can they be, for the one would be useless without the other. If only justified — we would be incapable of enjoying spiritual things; just as the sick man, confined to his bed by disease, is incapable of enjoying natural things. If only sanctified — we would have no title to life, or to Heavenly enjoyments; but would be like the healthy man, who stands charged with many crimes, and is consequently confined in a prison, and loaded with irons.

We must be born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. The heart must be turned against sin. The soul must be restored to God's image. Holiness must become our element, our delight, and our health. We must have a new nature, a new heart, a new disposition; for without this, we have no real religion.

We have nothing that will satisfy God's justice — except we have a perfect righteousness; and we have nothing that will please God's holiness — unless we are washed and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

God mercifully saves us — but it is by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;" that is, with comfort and peace. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Have we holiness? Do we hate sin? Do we mourn over sin? Do we watch against sin? Do we humbly confess sin? Do we loathe ourselves on account of sin? Do we feel at times as if we could not bear, or have patience with ourselves, on account of sin? Do we pray for holiness daily, heartily, in downright earnest?

If so, the Spirit of God, as the spirit of holiness, dwells in us. If we have the righteousness of Jesus upon us, and the Spirit of holiness within us — then we may go before God with as little fear as Saul appeared before Samuel; and he will inform us of a kingdom, and confer on us a crown, far superior to that which Saul possessed, or Samuel made known.

38 David's Question Improved

David's Question Improved "What have I done? What is my crime?" 1 Samuel 20:1

Saul sought David's life. David was alarmed and concerned for his safety. Conscious of his innocence, he appeals to Jonathan, and asks the king's son, "What have I done? What is my crime?" In David's case there was good reason for this; but there is a class of sinners who, when the threatenings of God are set before them, when they are told that their present course will terminate in Hell, with a good deal of self — sufficiency, ask, "What have I done? What is my crime? What is so very bad? What have I done that can provoke a good and gracious God? What have I done that can deserve so dreadful a doom of Hell and eternal torments? Why should I be sent to Hell? What, I have lived a moral life! I have been strictly honest! I have attended a place of worship regularly. I have said my prayers with a good deal of punctuality! Me — go to Hell? Who, then, can go to Heaven? What have I done?"

You have done the very worst thing that you could do! You have sinned against God! You have broken His holy law. That law requires you to be holy — perfectly holy. It requires that you should aim at your Creator's glory in everything you do. It requires that self should never be your end in anything. It requires that your motives, thoughts, purposes, plans, words, and actions — should be all for God's honor. It requires that there must be no lust, covetousness, wrath, envy, evil speaking, or irregularity of feeling, desire, or conduct. All must be by God's rule, and flow spontaneously from the heart — or there is sin.

Man was created capable of this, and God still requires it at our hands. If God's law is violated — then God is insulted, punishment is merited, and the sinner is doomed to misery and despair. Thus the law teaches us what God requires, demands exact conformity to its precepts, and threatens all who break any of its commands with eternal death. This is all that the law can do. You are under the law by nature, and as you cannot pretend to absolute perfection, all that the law can do for you is to condemn, and leave you in despair. You, have, therefore, done the worst thing that you could do, and are in the worst position that you can be in, outside of Hell.

But, perhaps, in addition to this, you have rejected God's message of mercy sent to you in the everlasting gospel. The gospel comes to you as a sinner. It comes to you directly from the heart of God. It comes to you in a state of condemnation. It comes to tell you that there is mercy in God's heart — that he finds no pleasure in punishing sinners — that he has devised a way by which sinners may be saved — a way in which the law will get all its due, and the law-breakers be delivered from its tremendous sentence. It comes to tell you that God has given his own, his only beloved Son, to be a substitute and sacrifice for sinners. That he has lived to obey the precepts of the law, and died to pay its awful penalty. That he is both able and willing to save all who come unto God by him. That he simply requires you to believe his message, trust in his atonement, confess your crimes, and consecrate yourself to his service. In so doing, he pledges his word and honor to save you. To deliver you from Hell with all its horrors, from sin with all its consequences — and to reconcile you to his Father, and entitle you to Heaven, and prepare you to shine among

the ranks of the blessed ones above.

Now, have you received this gospel into your heart? Have you sincerely believed it? Have you acted upon it? Do you renounce all other ground of dependance — but Jesus and his precious blood? Do you venture your soul upon this sacrifice alone? Are you heartily sorry for your sins? Do you confess them before God with grief? Do you break off from your old habits, associates, and courses — and consecrate yourself to the service and honor of Jesus? If not, it is in vain for you to ask, "What have I done?" or, "Why should I go to Hell?"

Why, you have not only broken God's law — but you have refused a pardon from his grace! God has sent you a pardon, which was procured at no less a cost than the labor, sufferings, and death of his dear Son — and you have refused it. You did not believe the message. You would not accept the blessing. God told you that you must believe in Jesus; live upon Jesus; be made like Jesus — or be damned. But you would not believe Him, for you have encouraged a hope of going to Heaven — in direct opposition to God's plan, and thus you have made God a liar!

You have said by your conduct, "I do not believe God. I shall not go to Hell — though I go on in my old course. I shall go to Heaven — even though I am not born again by the Spirit of God. What have I done that I should not?" Oh, sinner, sinner, your case is awful! Your state is most dangerous. You are on the very brink of Hell — and yet you do not believe it! The blue flames of the eternal pit almost flash in your face — and yet you cry "Peace, peace!" May the Lord arouse you from your fearful state!

39 The Jailer's Question Improved

The Jailer's Question Improved "What must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:30

All men by nature are asleep in sin. They manifest an awful indifference about the state of their souls. They go on in darkness. Therefore anything that arouses them, and leads them to think — is likely to be beneficial. The Jailer, I suppose, had heard of Christ. He may have heard Paul and Silas preach. But he was careless of his own soul, and cruel to those committed to his custody. Therefore he thrust Paul and Silas into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. But the earthquake aroused him. The fear of his prisoners escaping, filled him with fear. The Holy Spirit set his iniquities before him. He felt deep conviction of sin. He was concerned to escape, not merely from the wrath of men — but from the wrath of God. He saw his danger. He dreaded his doom. He looked out for a way of escape. He cried to his prisoners, who now appeared to him in a new light, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" No question can be more important. It is just the question that every one of us should propose. We need salvation. We may be saved. But how? What must we do? How can we escape our deserved doom? The answer given was most simple. No ceremonies were proposed. No human priest was exalted. No theological system or body called "the Church" was pointed out. No, it was simply, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ — and you shall be saved." Receive into your mind the truth concerning Jesus. Give credit to the testimony of God. Place your confidence in the person and finished work of Christ. Commit your souls into his faithful hands. He will save you. No sin shall condemn you. No power shall destroy you. No evil spirit shall rejoice over you.

He will place his righteousness and blood shedding to your account. His blood will be your atonement, and on the ground of that — you will be pardoned. His obedience will be your righteousness, and on account of that — you will be justified. His power will be your defense — and by that you will be protected. His wisdom will be your guide — and by that you will be conducted. He will undertake to save you, and to present you faultless before the face of his Father, with exceeding joy. No penances, no pilgrimages, no prayers to the virgin Mary, or the saints, will be required. He will save you himself, without any assistance. He will save you without money or price, or anything that will answer to, or may be represented by, such words. Commit the soul to Christ, exercise confidence in Christ, expect to be saved alone by Christ — and salvation is infallibly certain. No duties, no observances, are required as pre-requisites to salvation. We must be saved by free grace first — and then perform duties, and attend to religious observances, in order that we may glorify God for his mercy to us. Faith is the first thing that God requires of us, and "without faith it is impossible to please him." No prayer we can offer, no tears we may shed, no duties we may perform, no ordinances we observe — can please God, until we believe in Jesus. Faith in Christ, or giving credit to the gospel, and relying on what Jesus did and suffered, should go before prayer, and every other religious exercise; nor can anything we do please him until we believe. This is the plain unvarnished declaration of God's most holy word. Faith, prayer, penitence, peace, purity, power, and obedience — is God's order.

We must therefore look to Jesus first, and then we shall find every part of practical religion comparatively easy. The common mistake is, that we must feel deep repentance, or a spirit of prayer, or love to the Savior, or perform certain religious duties — and then exercise confidence in Christ. This is just reversing God's order, and this very thing keeps multitudes in bondage, doubt, fear, and distress. Believe and be saved — be saved by believing, and then go to work; realize salvation by simple faith in Christ, and then you will find liberty in prayer, power to repent, pleasure in duties, and fellowship with God in his own ordinances.

Reader, as a sinner, you are in as great danger as the Jailor was. Do you feel it? Have you been alarmed at it? Have you seriously and heartily inquired how you may be saved? Or, are you like he was before the earthquake aroused him? The way of salvation is most simple, if we take God's word for our directory. But if we listen to men, and neglect God's word — then ten to one that we shall be misled, bewildered, and confused.

Some will send you to the Church, some to the crucifix, some to baptism, some to the law, some to one thing, and some to another; but the gospel sends you directly to Christ. Some will say, repent; some, pray; some, do penance; some, try to do your best, and expect Christ in mercy to do the rest; but the gospel says, "Believe, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ;" and without asking who you are, or what you are — assures you in most plain and positive terms, that "you shall be saved." Do you doubt? Do you ask, "How may I know which is the right way?" Put the matter out of doubt by putting it to the proof. Do you ask, "How shall I go to Jesus?" Go, saying,

"Not the labors of my hands

Can fulfill your law's demands:

Could my zeal no respite know,

Could my tears forever flow,

All for sin could not atone;

You must save, and You alone!

Nothing in my hand I bring,

Simply to your cross I cling;

Naked, come to you for dress;

Helpless, look to you for grace;

Black, I to the fountain fly;

Wash me, Savior — or I die!"

40 The Prayer of Faith

The Prayer of Faith "All things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing — you shall receive."
Matthew 21:22

Some have supposed that this promise is to be confined to miracles — but this is a mistake. It is as much intended for us as it was for the first disciples. Look at the parallel passage in Mark 11:22-26. Jesus directs his disciples to exercise "faith in God," assures them that the prayer of faith shall be answered; and requires them to exercise a forgiving spirit, as they would hope to be forgiven; which is as much binding on us as on them. He says, "Whatever things you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them."

Look also at Luke 11:5-18. He delivers a parable to show the power of importunate prayer, and then says, "Ask — and it shall be given you; seek — and you shall find; knock — and it shall be opened," etc. Here he positively promises that every one that heartily asks, honestly seeks, and importunately knocks — shall be attended to; but faith is supposed, and is necessary to such asking, seeking, and knocking.

Once more, look at James 1:5-7. "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does." Here you see that faith is required, and without faith we are told not to expect an answer to our prayer. What the Lord may please to do in his sovereignty over and above what he has promised, is one thing; and what his word warrants us to expect, is another and very different thing. God will never be worse than his word; but he may do more than he has promised. The prayer of faith supposes that the person praying is a believer, that he believes that God is, and is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. That he is united to Christ, and abides in fellowship with Christ, as it is written, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you — you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Also, that his heart is set against all sin; for if one sin is indulged, if one idol is spared — God is dishonored and provoked to jealousy; and it is not to be expected that he will indulge those who violate his commands and encourage his foes. Hence the Psalmist, in so many words, says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart — the Lord will not hear me" (Psalms 66:18). But if we believe in God as revealed in Jesus — if we are united to Christ and abide in communion with him — if our hearts are weaned from, and set against all sin — we are prepared to pray in faith. In order to exercise faith in prayer, we must only pray for what we really need. God has promised to supply our necessities — but not to gratify our fancies. If we sincerely need what we ask of God, we shall not talk before him, or offer compliments to him — but we shall heartily plead with him. Or we must heartily desire the blessings which we seek, for desire is the soul of prayer, and to the desire — the promise is made, as you read (Psalms 145:19), "He will fulfill the desire of those who fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them." Much is said in prayer to God, which is anything but pleading with God, or

the utterance of heartfelt desire to God. "The desire of the righteous shall be granted."

We must only pray for what God has promised. I cannot consistently believe that God will give me anything, except what he has promised in his word to give. If, therefore, I desire anything for myself, my family, the church, my country, or the world, I must first ask — Is there any particular promise in which God has said that he will give it? If there is not, then — Is the blessing I desire included in any of the more general promises? Again — Does the promise refer to any particular circumstance? If so, are the circumstances present? Or is it made to the exercise of any particular grace, or peculiar state of mind? If so, have I that grace in exercise, or is my mind in the state required? Attention to these particulars will prevent many mistakes, and painful disappointments. For instance, I pray for some blessing — but I have enmity in my heart against someone; or there is a disagreement between me and a fellow-Christian, and I refuse to go and seek to be reconciled to my brother; now, God will not hear me. I thought that if I prayed loud and long he would; he does not; I am grieved, irritated, and disappointed. But I ought not to be, for God has said, "First be reconciled to your brother — and then come" (Matthew 5:24); this I have neglected; in so doing, I have regarded "iniquity in my heart," and under such circumstances God could not hear my prayer.

If we would have faith in prayer, we must, when praying — realize God as present with us, and listening to us. It is often the case that we seem to be praying in an empty room, or to a being at a great distance from us. This is wrong. We address a present God. One who stands before us in all his glorious perfections, and who is waiting to receive our petitions and bless our souls. The heart is never right in prayer, except we realize that we are alone with God, or, that God is attending to us — as if he had nothing else to attend to. We must solemnly prostrate ourselves before God — not so much the body as the soul. Thus did Abraham, though he was emphatically God's friend — though God stood before him in a human form — yet he prostrated all his powers before God, and was filled with solemn awe; hence he says, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak." "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord — I who am but dust and ashes," etc. (Genesis 18:27.) When faith is strongest, our solemnity before God will be deepest; and when indulged most, we shall lie lowest.

We must also steadily rely, for the acceptance of our persons and prayers, on the sacrifice of Christ. There is no coming before God acceptably — but in the name of Jesus; nor will true faith ever venture into God's presence — but with the blood of atonement in its hand. If we . . .

realize God's presence,

prostrate our souls before God's throne,

and rest heartily on Christ's finished work

— then we may pray in faith. The believing intended by our Lord, is confidence in God. We go to him confident that he is "good, ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon him" (Psalms 86:5). We feel certain that his word is true, that he means what he has said in his promises, that he is in the same mind now, as he was when he made them. That having promised to give good things to those who ask him out of pure love, to glorify his own rich grace, and to bring honor to his own name and character — he will not now forfeit his word, or refuse our petitions. We are, therefore, inwardly and powerfully persuaded that he will give us what we ask,

because he is so good, and has promised to do so in his word. Thus we give credit to his word, rely on his veracity, and place confidence in his faithfulness.

We ask in faith. We believe God will give. We have the witness in ourselves, that God will hear and answer us: for our "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;" or "the confident expectation of things hoped for, the perfect persuasion of things not seen." This faith always keeps God's glory in view, attending to the apostolic admonition, "Whether, therefore, you eat, or drink, or whatever you do — do all to the glory of God." The first inquiry, therefore, of a person under the influence of this principle is, when prompted to ask anything in prayer, "Will this honor God? Will it bring glory to his holy name? Will it further his blessed cause? Will it deepen my sanctification?" And if it is clearly seen that it will do so — then the man goes and confidently asks for it.

True faith always consents that the flesh should be mortified. It will not spare the old man — but will put him off with his deeds. It will have the flesh dragged to the cross, to which it nailed the Savior, and have it put to shame and pain. It will bring down our pride, self-importance, worldliness, and love of ease; thus purifying the heart, and making us vessels "of honor, sanctified, and fit for the Master's use." It breathes universal benevolence. It harbors no unkind thoughts. It indulges no proud spirit. It feeds no bitter temper. But it loves tenderly and heartily — all who love the Savior; and pities, prays for, and strives to benefit — all who are yet in their sins. This faith will produce earnestness. We shall ask — as if we really desired to possess. We shall plead for the blessing — as if we could not do without it. The desire springing from the depths of the soul — will ascend and enter into the heart of God. It will make us importunate. We shall not only ask — but seek; not only seek — but knock; not only knock — but continue knocking until mercy's door is thrown wide open. Like the woman of Canaan, we shall pray, plead, and persevere — until our Lord says, "Be it unto you even as you will." Like the man who went to his friend at midnight, who would take nothing for an answer but the loaves for which he went — we shall agonize until we prevail. Like the woman who went to seek relief from the unjust judge — we shall go, and remain until we obtain what we seek. God's elect cry day and night unto him, until he arises and has mercy upon him. This faith will awaken expectation. We shall wait, watch, and expect that the Lord will do as he has said, give as he has promised, and answer prayer according to his word. Earnest, importunate pleaders with God, always expect to be answered, and they are never disappointed.

Faith honors God, for it commits the soul to him, and seeks every blessing from him. It leaves the time when, the place where, and the means by which — the answer shall be given to the Lord. It never . . .

dictates to infinite wisdom,

complains of infinite love, or

doubts the faithfulness of the Most High God.

It leaves everything for him, or holds everything loosely, ready to surrender it as his command; and when all is gone for Christ and his cause, it rises like the lark from its torn nest and sings, "Doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

and be found in him" (Php 3:8-9).

God honors faith — by conferring much upon it. Indeed he never says nay. The Savior has put a blank into the hand of faith signed with his own name; he says, "Fill it up, ask for what you please, and go to my Father for it, and I give you my word that he will bestow it." "Whatever you shall ask the Father in my name — he will give it to you" (John 16:23). Yes, he engages to give it himself, that his father may be honored by his so doing; hence we read, "I go unto my Father, and whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do — that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:12-13).

God ascribes much to faith. Yes, he ascribes more to faith, than to any exercise of the human mind, any work wrought by any of his creatures, or any other grace of his Holy Spirit. It is faith which has power with God and prevails. Faith . . .

opens Heaven,

unlocks God's treasury,

presents God's promises for payment,

and brings numerous, invaluable, and everlasting blessings unto our possession!

Lord, increase our faith! Holy Spirit, help us to pray in faith; and may it be said of us, as it was of Abraham, "Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." (Romans 4:20-21).

41 The Object to Be Pursued

The Object to Be Pursued "Follow after love" 1 Corinthians 14:1 The religion of Jesus — is the religion of love. It originated in the love of God to us — his free, infinite, and eternal love; and it produces love in us first toward himself, and then toward his beloved people. Love is the standard of real religion, and we have just as much religion — as we have love. Love is the bond of union in the church of Christ, and should, therefore, be zealously cultivated, and carefully guarded. The peace, the purity, and the prosperity of the church — depends very much upon the love of its members. A loving church is sure to be a peaceful, prosperous, and happy church; but if they have not love, though there may be members, wealth, and quietness — there is no true prosperity. The Corinthian church abounded in gifts — but it was deficient in love; hence its divisions, and the cry, "I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ." To cure this sad state of things, and bring the whole church into a truly healthy condition, Paul proposes that every man should set his eye and his heart upon love. That this should be the object of pursuit. This he calls the more excellent way, and would lead the Lord's people to prefer it to gifts, however splendid, useful, or valuable they may be. Brethren, nothing is to be preferred — to love in the church of Christ; and one of our greatest defects in the present day — is the lack of love. Many rest satisfied if there are no strifes, or divisions, or gross immoralities; they think the church is in a good state, though there is little or no warm-hearted, zealous, self-denying love. But this is a mistake. Let us briefly consider Paul's kind exhortation, and let us endeavor to reduce it to practice.

WHAT are we to seek? Love to the brethren. Love, similar to that which Jesus felt. Love, strong, active, and determined, as displayed by the apostle himself. Love to all saints for Jesus' sake, and love to all saints under all circumstances. Love to the poorest, the weakest, and the most imperfect of the Lord's family. Though they differ from us in doctrine, in discipline, in many other things — yet if they belong to Christ, we should love them. Every one should have a place in the warm affections of our hearts, if they prove that they have a place in the heart of Christ. To live in the neglect of love — is to live in sin. To be cold and indifferent toward one another, is contrary to the law of Christ. He says, "Love one another — as I have loved you." It is practically neglecting the admonition of the Holy Spirit, who says, "See that you love one another, with a pure heart, fervently."

Love adorns the Christian character, silences the church's foes, makes the loving one happy, and brings honor to the Savior's name. Vain is our profession of Christ, vain our costly alms-deeds, vain our mighty faith, vain our painful sufferings, and vain our splendid gifts — if we are destitute of holy love! Let us ponder deeply and prayerfully the testimony of the Holy Spirit, by the apostle, upon this point. Paul places himself before us with all his costly endowments, with all his wondrous works, with all his varied sufferings, and that he may impress and deeply affect our minds, he says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing!"

How solemn, how interesting, how affecting is this statement! Can we wonder that he should urge his beloved friends, and while urging them, urge us — to "follow after love?"

Love sometimes seems to take its flight from the church; it even appears to take its flight from our bosoms. We can look at people whom we believe to be Christians, and feel no love to them. Nay, at times, we have no desire to love them. We can pass them without speaking, or speak without sincere affection. This must be wrong. This never ought to be tolerated by us for one hour. We should go upon our knees, and confess it before God as a sin against the Savior's own commandment. We should plead with God to fill our hearts with his own sweet love, to give us the Spirit of love, power, and of a sound mind. We should carry our unloving and unlovely spirits and tempers to the cross of Jesus — and seek that our old man may be crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed. We should carefully watch against what is opposed to love, realize it as a sin, and deeply deplore it before our Heavenly Father's throne. We should diligently cultivate a loving spirit, remembering that it is the very image of God — and our nearest assimilation to the Lord Jesus Christ. Does love seem to evade us, to fly from us? Let us follow it with determined step, with patient perseverance, with strong cries and tears to God for help. Is it opposed to our natural disposition? Let us yield up ourselves unto God, that he may sanctify us wholly in body, soul, and spirit.

Love is humble; it is never proud of itself, nor will it allow its possessor to boast, or to undervalue others, in order to exalt himself.

Love is patient; it will not fly at every supposed insult, or be provoked by every appearance of neglect.

Love is active; it will do, or give, or go, to comfort, or relieve, or benefit, any of its objects.

Love is self-denying; it looks away from itself, it loses sight of itself, and wishes to do others good, and make others happy.

Love is liberal; it will allow others to think differently, to act differently, without being prejudiced or offended, except God be dishonored, and his cause injured.

"Love," says the Holy Spirit, "is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

Let us, therefore, heartily, earnestly, and constantly follow after love. It is the object of Satan's special hatred, consequently, he makes the most determined opposition to its exercise, and endeavors by all means to prevent its cultivation. It is also opposed to all the selfish principles of our fallen nature, and is, therefore, opposed by them all. But we should ever remember that God requires it, not only in his law — but also in his gospel. Nor can he be pleased with us, if we neglect, or trifle, or run counter to this his holy and necessary commandment. He sent his own Son to set us the example, to show us that love may be cultivated, and constantly manifested even in a world like ours, and under the most unfavorable circumstances. The church deeply needs the exercise of love. Her many imperfections — her unseemly divisions — the unfounded prejudices of one part of the body against the other — her low condition — her sorrows and sufferings — all

these call for love. They unite, and with one strong, energetic, and solemn voice they cry, "Follow after love!"

All admire love. It is the most powerful instrument we can wield. Would we spread the truth? Would we conquer the enemies of the gospel? Would we win over the young to the cause of God? Would we silence gainsayers? Would we close the mouths of infidels? Would we effectually conquer Rome? In one word, would we honor God, exalt Jesus, sow to the Spirit, heal the wounds of the church, make a good impression on the world, or be really happy ourselves — it must be effected by love! We must, one and all, in public and private, by searching the heart, by pleading with God, by denying self, by using all the means which God has appointed, or the gospel furnished, "follow after love."

Reader, is love an object of admiration with you? Does it appear as most desirable, not only in others — but also in yourself? Do you sigh, cry, pray, and pant for it? Are you mourning over the lack of it in others — but especially in yourself? Is it the object of your pursuit? Or, can you indulge in unlovely tempers, use and sanction harsh and uncharitable expressions, and live in a state of alienation from God's people because they have at some time offended you? Is this the case? If so, how does the love of God dwell in you? How can you expect to enjoy nearness to God, or sweet communion with God! How can you wonder, if thus grieving the Holy Spirit, he leaves you to yourself, and your heart grows hard, your evidences are beclouded, and your religion dwindles into a mere form? Would the Scriptures be true if it were otherwise?

You are a backslider in heart, and unless you repent, the Lord will leave you to be filled with your own ways. You are sowing the seeds of wormwood, and it will be bitterness in the latter end. True religion is love. Love to God and love to man. We have just so much religion — as we have love, and no more. If we have no love — we have no true religion. May the Holy Spirit shed abroad the love of God in our hearts, and lead us to love every one who loves God with tender affection; and to love all others with pity and compassion. Then shall we prove that we are the children of God, by loving him and keeping his commandments; then shall we adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things; then shall we allure sinners from the paths of sin and death; and then shall we be the ornaments of the church, and the glory of Christ. Let us, therefore, "follow after love!"

42 May and Must; Or,

May and Must; Or,

Present and Future The present differs very materially from the future. There are many things which we may do now — and there are many which we must do by and bye.

We may refuse to come to the Lord Jesus Christ now, that we may have eternal life; but if we do, we must suffer the bitter pangs of eternal death, and forever reap the due desert of such wickedness and folly!

We may refuse to come to God's mercy-seat as invited by his mercy now; but we must stand before Christ's judgment-seat, when summoned by his justice by and bye.

We may refuse to confess our sins, that they may be pardoned; but we must give an account and suffer the just punishment of them, if we do.

We may refuse to humble ourselves before God's feet; but we must be humbled under his power, if we do.

We may refuse to receive what free grace presents to us in the gospel; but we must endure what his justice awards in eternity, if we do. He who will not be saved by free grace — must be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

We may be saved now; but if we are not, we must be lost forever.

We may become the friends of God now; but if we do not, we must be treated as his enemies forever.

We may be united to the person of Jesus here; but if we are not, we must be banished from his presence in eternity. The future depends on the present. As we sow — we reap. As we treat God now — he will treat us through eternity. He bears with us as at present, he is loath to punish us; but mercy has its bounds, and forbearance has its limits. When these are reached — then all is over, for then nothing remains but "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!" When once God gives us up — all is over. When he says, "Let him alone!" then our destiny is eternally fixed. But this is never done until justice requires it. If a man will not be saved — ought he not to be left to the consequences of his own choice and determination? If he refuses to hear God's voice, to listen to his solemn warnings, or to accept his loving invitations — what can be done? God himself asks, "What can I do more than I have done?"

Reader, what can God do more for you? When Israel would not hearken to his voice, he gave them up (Psalms 81:11-12). And shall God act differently toward you, to what he did toward his own favored people? You stand on solemn ground. Your situation requires the most serious thought. Death, judgment, and eternity are just before you — an eternal Hell, an eternal Heaven — and one of them must be your portion.

You may go to Heaven — but if you will not, you must go to Hell. If you go to Hell, it will be because you chose to walk in the way to it! and chose to do so in preference to walking in the way to Heaven. God will never send you to Hell — except death finds you in the way to it; and if it does, what can you expect — but to arrive at the place to which you have been journeying by choice? What can you expect from a just and holy God — but to receive the wages for which you have been laboring? "The wages of sin are death," eternal death; or the separation of both soul and body from God, from holiness, from happiness, forever. This must be dreadful — but who can say that it will not be just? What! work hard in the ways of sin for twenty, forty, or sixty years, with the express understanding that the wages of sin are death — and then say it is not just to be paid the wages for which you have so long, so diligently, and so determinedly labored! Is this consistent? If you will do the work — then you must expect the wages. If you will travel the road — then you expect to arrive at the end to which it leads. If you will live as God's enemy — then you must not expect to be treated as if you had been his friend. No, no, be consistent. If you wish to go to Heaven — take the road that leads to it, and be sure you take the right road. If you wish to dwell with God in eternity — be reconciled to him in this. If you wish to be happy in eternity — then seek to be holy in time.

Well, friend, how is it to be with you? You may go on in sin — or you may repent and turn to God. You may reject the Savior — or you may receive him as God's free gift. You may come to Jesus and have life — or you may refuse to do so, and sink into eternal death. God has set before you in his word — the way of life, and the way of death; therefore choose life that you may live. He has opened a way for sinners, by the sacrifice of his dear Son; and He is willing to give his Holy Spirit to sinners, if they ask him, in fervent prayer. You may be happy in Heaven — but if you will not, you must be forever miserable in Hell.

You may, this is of pure mercy; you must, that is of strict justice. You may, this lays you under great responsibility; you must, and this calls for the most solemn consideration. You may, and therefore should bless God for his kindness; you must, and therefore beware how you trifle with his grace. You may, oh, seize and improve the opportunity! you must, oh, flee, flee from the wrath to come! You may, oh, lose not one moment, for there is no time to spare! you must, oh, delay not, for delays have landed thousands in Hell! "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." The Scriptures must be fulfilled. God must be faithful. We must repent of sin, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and come unto God by him, or we are undone forever!

43 An Important Question:

An Important Question:

What Have I Done to Save a Soul Today?

Thousands are perishing around me! Hell is enlarging itself! God saves souls by human instrumentality. He saves by the simplest means. He points to some just on the verge of Hell, and says, "Save them with fear, plucking them out of the fire." Paul's object was by all means to save some. He became all things to all men, that he might save the more. What have I done this day in order to save a soul from death? Have I pleaded with God, as one should plead for the deliverance of a never-dying soul from eternal flames? Have I spoken kindly and affectionately to anyone about sin, and the salvation which is in the Lord Jesus? Have I given a tract, or a little booklet, accompanying it with fervent prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to attend it? "A tract may save a soul." God may speak by it — it may suggest a thought, which may work, and work, until the Savior be sought and found. And can I, believing this, neglect to give away tracts? A word spoken, or a passage quoted, may save a soul. God has often used such simple means as these. And shall I neglect to speak to those about me, or fear to set God's word before them. A letter written to a friend, has saved a soul. God works by letters written out of love to his name, with zeal for his glory, in order to bring sinners to his throne. And shall I fail to write, when I cannot speak to my friends — to warn them to flee from the wrath to come.

Oh, if we all prayed for sinners, realizing their great danger, and dreadful doom — if we took advantage of the opportunities that offer, to speak of Jesus, to those who are perishing around us — if we gave tracts and little books to those we meet, praying God to bless them — if once a week, or oftener, we wrote a letter to some friend, to direct attention to eternal things — how much more good might be done, how much evil might be prevented, how many souls may be saved, how greatly our congregations may be increased, how the Lord Jesus would be honored, and what glory we should bring to our God, and HIS cause! This would prove, that we really believe God's word, that we sympathize with sinners in their danger, that we are in downright earnest to save souls from death, that we wish to see God's church flourish, that we realize our obligation and responsibility. Then God, even our God, would bless us.

Doubts and fears would leave us, joy and peace would be enjoyed by us, and all Christians would confess that we are the seed which the Lord has blessed. O, my brethren, let us examine ourselves daily! Let us ask ourselves every night, What have I done to save a soul this day? If I do nothing, can I be guiltless? If I do nothing, can I be honest to my profession? If I do nothing, is it possible that I can understand the gospel? If I do nothing, can I be living in fellowship with God? If I do nothing, ought I to be a member of a church of Christ? If I do nothing, ought I not to give up all profession of religion at once and forever? Conscience, be honest, and speak!

How few realize the value of the soul! How few make any hearty, direct, and daily attempts to save souls from eternal death! And yet this is the most important business in which we can be engaged.

Nothing will be reflected on with such pleasure on a death-bed, nothing will be reviewed with such delight from the judgment-seat of Christ. He answers not the end of his existence, who does not habitually seek to honor God, by leading souls to the Savior. He does not drink into the Spirit of Christ, who does not strive to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Of course we can only do so instrumentally. But it is thus that God brings men to repentance and faith. He is the great agent, but he uses human instruments, and he will use us if we are fit for his work, and desirous to be employed for his glory. He puts honor upon us by employing us. He meets us, blesses us, and makes us happy when we are so employed: and thus we prove the truth of his word, that in keeping his commandments there is a great reward. If, therefore, we would be happy in our Christian profession — if we would win honors to be worn before the throne of God and of the Lamb — if we would escape the snares of Satan, and the delusions of the world — if we would adorn the doctrine of our Lord and Savior — if we would make a good impression upon the present generation, and secure a good name in that which follows — if we would live like saints, and die like conquerors — let us daily do something to save souls from death. The work is most important, our opportunities daily become less, the honor is unspeakably glorious, and the reward is as lasting as eternity — let us therefore daily endeavor to save souls from death. Let us speak to those we can, and write to those we cannot. Let us make it our business, and follow it as our pleasure; nor rest satisfied until we can say with our beloved Lord, "My work is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work." Truly we have been guilty; let us feel it, confess it, obtain pardon for the past, and plead for grace for the future. Oh, that every member of the Church of Christ would act thus, then the Church of Jesus would soon look "forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Thus says the Lord, "He who converts a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

44 Another Important Question:

Another Important Question:

What Have I Done this Day to Make Sure My Own Salvation?

Time is introductory to eternity. Time is given to us to prepare for an eternal, an unchangeable state of existence. The eternal future — depends on the present. What we sow in this world — we shall reap in the next. As we live — we may expect to die. And as we die — so we shall remain forever. We are by nature and by practice, sinners; as such we deserve punishment, and are exposed to never-ending suffering. But we need not perish, for God has sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. That our sins may be pardoned through his precious blood, and we may be justified by his perfect obedience. All that he did on earth — he did for sinners; and all that he suffered on earth — he suffered for sinners. His blood is our all-sufficient atonement, and his obedience is our justifying righteousness. But HOW does the atonement and obedience of Jesus become ours? By faith alone. And what is faith? It is giving credit to God's word; placing confidence in his work; and depending solely upon him for pardon, peace, purity, and acceptance with God. But is faith alone sufficient to give us an interest in the perfect work of Jesus, and to entitle us to everlasting life? It is quite sufficient, for his own word declares, "He who believes on the Son has everlasting life." He has also declared with his own mouth, "He who believes on me has everlasting life." But true faith will never exist alone, it always:

produces repentance towards God;

generates love to the Savior; and

leads to the performance of good works.

Every true believer is sorry for his sins; he confesses them before God with shame; pleads the blood of Jesus, that they may be pardoned; and strives to conquer his bad habits in the strength of the Lord.

Every real Christian loves the Savior who died for him, and prays most heartily to be consecrated entirely with all he has to the Redeemer's service and praise. He wishes to do whatever the Lord requires of him; to go wherever the Lord will send him; and if he lives — to live unto the Lord; or if he dies — to die unto the Lord. He places no dependence on his own works — but relies altogether on the service and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for salvation; and then does all he can to honor his Savior, and to benefit his fellow-men. He lives by faith in Christ, or by believing the word of Jesus, trusting in the merits of Jesus, and exercising confidence in the veracity of Jesus; but while he thus lives by faith in Christ, he is careful to maintain good works. His object, from day to day, is, to make his calling and election sure; so that no one may justly doubt the truth of his profession, and that he may have no reason to doubt himself — but that he is saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. Is this the true state of the case? It is. Then let me ask, What have I done this day to make sure my own salvation? Have I exercised faith in Christ? Have I confessed

my sins before God? Have I prayed for grace to obey the commands of God? Have I been striving against sin? Have I sought to bring honor to the Savior's name? Have I pitied sinners, and set my heart upon rescuing some of them from eternal flames? Have I endeavored to subdue some lust — to mortify some corruption — to conquer some bad habit — and to be more assimilated to the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ? Have I mourned over sin, sighed for holiness, and kept my eye steadily fixed on glorifying God?

Or, have I lost sight of eternity, neglected my duty, and been living to myself? Has there been no communion with Jesus, no zeal for God, no pity for sinners? If so, is there not reason to doubt, that my religion is but a form, my profession a pretense, and my danger of eternal death imminent? Faith without works is dead. Can such faith save us? Never. It is utterly impossible. If, therefore, we would not deceive our own souls, if we would not plant thorns in our dying pillow, if we would not sink into Hell under a profession of religion — let us examine ourselves carefully, let us reform our lives thoroughly, and let us give all diligence to make our calling and election sure! Every morning let us ask, "What course shall I pursue this day, to put the reality of my religion beyond doubt?" And every evening let us inquire, "What have I done this day to make sure my own salvation?" May the words of the Holy Spirit sink down deep into our hearts, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows — that shall he also reap."

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