

WORKS OF JOHN C. RYLE

by J.C. Ryle

A collection of works by Bishop J.C. Ryle, the first Anglican Bishop of Liverpool. Includes his penetrating call to prayer and other writings marked by plain language, scriptural fidelity, and earnest evangelical conviction.

10 Chapters

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A Call to Prayer

A Call to Prayer

by J. C. Ryle("../index.htm")

I have a question to offer you. It is contained in three words, Do you pray?

The question is one that none but you can answer. Whether you attend public worship or not, your minister knows. Whether you have family prayers in your house or not, your relations know. But whether you pray in private or not, is a matter between yourself and God.

I beseech you in all affection to attend to the subject I bring before you. Do not say that my question is too close. If your heart is right in the sight of God, there is nothing in it to make you afraid. Do not turn off my question by replying that you say your prayers. It is one thing to say your prayers and another to pray. Do not tell me that my question is unnecessary. Listen to me for a few minutes, and I will show you good reasons for asking it.

I ask whether you pray, because prayer is absolutely needful to a man's salvation.

I say, absolutely needful, and I say so advisedly. I am not speaking now of infants or idiots. I am not settling the state of the heathen. I know that where little is given, there little will be required. I speak especially of those who call themselves Christians, in a land like our own. And of such I say, no man or woman can expect to be saved who does not pray.

I hold salvation by grace as strongly as any one. I would gladly offer a free and full pardon to the greatest sinner that ever lived. I would not hesitate to stand by his dying bed, and say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ even now, and you shall be saved." But that a man can have salvation without asking for it, I cannot see in the Bible. That a man will receive pardon of his sins, who will not so much as lift up his heart inwardly, and say, "Lord Jesus, give it to me," this I cannot find. I can find that nobody will be saved by his prayers, but I cannot find that without prayer anybody will be saved.

It is not absolutely needful to salvation that a man should read the Bible. A man may have no learning, or be blind, and yet have Christ in his heart. It is not absolutely needful that a man should hear public preaching of the gospel. He may live where the gospel is not preached, or he may be bedridden, or deaf. But the same thing cannot be said about prayer. It is absolutely needful to salvation that a man should pray.

There is no royal road either to health or learning. Princes and kings, poor men and peasants, all alike must attend to the wants of their own bodies and their own minds. No man can eat, drink, or sleep by proxy. No man can get the alphabet learned for him by another. All these are things which everybody must do for himself, or they will not be done at all.

Just as it is with the mind and body, so it is with the soul. There are certain things absolutely needful to the soul's health and well-being. Each must attend to these things for himself. Each

must repent for himself. Each must apply to Christ for himself. And for himself each must speak to God and pray. You must do it for yourself, for by nobody else can it be done.

To be prayerless is to be without God, without Christ, without grace, without hope, and without heaven. It is to be on the road to hell. Now can you wonder that I ask the question, Do you pray?

I ask again whether you pray, because a habit of prayer is one of the surest marks of a true Christian.

All the children of God on earth are alike in this respect. From the moment there is any life and reality about their religion, they pray. Just as the first sign of life in an infant when born into the world is the act of breathing, so the first act of men and women when they are born again is praying.

This is one of the common marks of all the elect of God, "They cry unto him day and night" (Luke 18:1). The Holy Spirit, who makes them new creatures, works in them the feeling of adoption, and makes them cry, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). The Lord Jesus, when he quickens them, gives them a voice and a tongue, and says to them, "Be dumb no more." God has no dumb children. It is as much a part of their new nature to pray, as it is of a child to cry. They see their need of mercy and grace. They feel their emptiness and weakness. They can not do otherwise than they do. They must pray.

I have looked carefully over the lives of God's saints in the Bible. I cannot find one of whose history much is told us, from Genesis to Revelation, who was not a man of prayer. I find it mentioned as a characteristic of the godly, that "they call on the Father" (1 Peter 1:17), or "the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:2). Recorded as a characteristic of the wicked is the fact that "they call not upon the Lord" (Psalms 14:4).

I have read the lives of many eminent Christians who have been on earth since the Bible days. Some of them, I see, were rich, and some poor. Some were learned, and some unlearned. Some of them were Episcopalians, and some Christians of other names. Some were Calvinists, and some were Arminians. Some have loved to use a liturgy, and some to use none. But one thing, I see, they all had in common. They have all been men of prayer.

I study the reports of missionary societies in our own times. I see with joy that heathen men and women are receiving the gospel in various parts of the globe. There are conversions in Africa, in New Zealand, in Hindustan, in China. The people converted are naturally unlike one another in every respect. But one striking thing I observe at all the missionary stations: the converted people always pray.

I do not deny that a man may pray without heart and without sincerity. I do not for a moment pretend to say that the mere fact of a person's praying proves is everything about his soul. As in every other part of religion, so also in this, there may be deception and hypocrisy.

But this I do say, that not praying is a clear proof that a man is not yet a true Christian. He cannot really feel his sins. He cannot love God. He cannot feel himself a debtor to Christ. He cannot long after holiness. He cannot desire heaven. He has yet to be born again. He has yet to be made a new creature. He may boast confidently of election, grace, faith, hope, and knowledge, and deceive ignorant people. But you may rest assured it is all vain talk if he does not pray.

And I say, furthermore, that of all the evidences of the real work of the Spirit, a habit of hearty private prayer is one of the most satisfactory that can be named. A man may preach from false motives. A man may write books and make fine speeches and seem diligent in good works, and yet be a Judas Iscariot. But a man seldom goes into his closet, and pours out his soul before God in secret, unless he is in earnest. The Lord himself has set his stamp on prayer as the best proof of a true conversion. When he sent Ananias to Saul in Damascus, he gave him no other evidence of his change of heart than this, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11).

I know that much may go on in a man's mind before he is brought to pray. He may have many convictions, desires, wishes, feelings, intentions, resolutions, hopes, and fears. But all these things are very uncertain evidences. They are to be found in ungodly people, and often come to nothing. In many a case they are not more lasting than the morning cloud, and the dew that passeth away. A real, hearty prayer, coming from a broken and contrite spirit, is worth all these things put together.

I know that the Holy Spirit, who calls sinners from their evil ways, does in many instances lead them by very slow degrees to acquaintance with Christ. But the eye of man can only judge by what it sees. I cannot call any one justified until he believes. I dare not say that any one believes until he prays. I cannot understand a dumb faith. The first act of faith will be to speak to God. Faith is to the soul what life is to the body. Prayer is to faith what breath is to life. How a man can live and not breathe is past my comprehension, and how a man can believe and not pray is past my comprehension too.

Never be surprised if you hear ministers of the gospel dwelling much on the importance of prayer. This is the point we want to bring you to; we want to know that you pray. Your views of doctrine may be correct. Your love of Protestantism may be warm and unmistakable. But still this may be nothing more than head knowledge and party spirit. We want to know whether you are actually acquainted with the throne of grace, and whether you can speak to God as well as speak about God.

Do you wish to find out whether you are a true Christian? Then rest assured that my question is of the very first importance - Do you pray?

I ask whether you pray, because there is no duty in religion so neglected as private prayer.

We live in days of abounding religious profession. There are more places of public worship now than there ever were before. There are more persons attending them than there ever were before. And yet in spite of all this public religion, I believe there is a vast neglect of private prayer. It is one of those private transactions between God and our souls which no eye sees, and therefore one which men are tempted to pass over and leave undone. I believe that thousands never utter a word of prayer at all. They eat. They drink. They sleep. They rise. They go forth to their labor. They return to their homes. They breathe God's air. They see God's sun. They walk on God's earth. They enjoy God's mercies. They have dying bodies. They have judgment and eternity before them. But they never speak to God. They live like the beasts that perish. They behave like creatures without souls. They have not one word to say to Him in whose hand are their life and breath, and all things, and from whose mouth they must one day receive their everlasting sentence. How dreadful this seems; but if the secrets of men were only known, how common.

I believe there are tens of thousands whose prayers are nothing but a mere form, a set of words repeated by rote, without a thought about their meaning.

Some say over a few hasty sentences picked up in the nursery when they were children. Some content themselves with repeating the Creed, forgetting that there is not a request in it. Some add the Lord's Prayer, but without the slightest desire that its solemn petitions may be granted.

Many, even of those who use good forms, mutter their prayers after they have gotten into bed, or while they wash or dress in the morning. Men may think what they please, but they may depend upon it that in the sight of God this is not praying. Words said without heart are as utterly useless to our souls as the drum beating of the poor heathen before their idols. Where there is no heart, there may be lip work and tongue work, but there is nothing that God listens to; there is no prayer. Saul, I have no doubt, said many a long prayer before the Lord met him on the way to Damascus. But it was not till his heart was broken that the Lord said, "He prayeth."

Does this surprise you? Listen to me, and I will show you that I am not speaking as I do without reason. Do you think that my assertions are extravagant and unwarrantable? Give me your attention, and I will soon show you that I am only telling you the truth.

Have you forgotten that it is not natural to any one to pray? "The carnal mind is enmity against God." The desire of man's heart is to get far away from God, and have nothing to do with him. His feeling towards him is not love, but fear. Why then should a man pray when he has no real sense of sin, no real feeling of spiritual wants, no thorough belief in unseen things, no desire after holiness and heaven? Of all these things the vast majority of men know and feel nothing. The multitude walk in the broad way. I cannot forget this. Therefore I say boldly, I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten that it is not fashionable to pray? It is one of the things that many would be rather ashamed to own. There are hundreds who would sooner storm a breach, or lead a forlorn hope, than confess publicly that they make a habit of prayer. There are thousands who, if obliged to sleep in the same room with a stranger, would lie down in bed without a prayer. To dress well, to go to theaters, to be thought clever and agreeable, all this is fashionable, but not to pray. I cannot forget this. I cannot think a habit is common which so many seem ashamed to own. I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten the lives that many live? Can we really believe that people are praying against sin night and day, when we see them plunging into it? Can we suppose they pray against the world, when they are entirely absorbed and taken up with its pursuits? Can we think they really ask God for grace to serve him, when they do not show the slightest desire to serve him at all? Oh, no, it is plain as daylight that the great majority of men either ask nothing of God or do not mean what they say when they do ask, which is just the same thing. Praying and sinning will never live together in the same heart. Prayer will consume sin, or sin will choke prayer. I cannot forget this. I look at men's lives. I believe that few pray.

Have you forgotten the deaths that many die? How many, when they draw near death, seem entirely strangers to God. Not only are they sadly ignorant of his gospel, but sadly wanting in the power of speaking to him. There is a terrible awkwardness and shyness in their endeavors to approach him. They seem to be taking up a fresh thing. They appear as if they wanted an introduction to God, and as if they had never talked with him before. I remember having heard of a

lady who was anxious to have a minister to visit her in her last illness. She desired that he would pray with her. He asked her what he should pray for. She did not know, and could not tell. She was utterly unable to name any one thing which she wished him to ask God for her soul. All she seemed to want was the form of a minister's prayers. I can quite understand this. Death beds are great revealers of secrets. I cannot forget what I have seen of sick and dying people. This also leads me to believe that few pray.

I cannot see your heart. I do not know your private history in spiritual things. But from what I see in the Bible and in the world I am certain I cannot ask you a more necessary question than that before you - Do you pray?

I ask whether you pray, because prayer is an act in religion to which there is great encouragement.

There is everything on God's part to make prayer easy, if men will only attempt it. All things are ready on his side. Every objection is anticipated. Every difficulty is provided for. The crooked places are made straight and the rough places are made smooth. There is no excuse left for the prayerless man.

There is a way by which any man, however sinful and unworthy, may draw near to God the Father. Jesus Christ has opened that way by the sacrifice he made for us upon the cross. The holiness and justice of God need not frighten sinners and keep them back. Only let them cry to God in the name of Jesus, only let them plead the atoning blood of Jesus, and they shall find God upon a throne of grace, willing and ready to hear. The name of Jesus is a never-failing passport for our prayers. In that name a man may draw near to God with boldness, and ask with confidence. God has engaged to hear him. Think of this. Is not this encouragement?

There is an Advocate and Intercessor always waiting to present the prayers of those who come to God through him. That advocate is Jesus Christ. He mingles our prayers with the incense of his own almighty intercession. So mingled, they go up as a sweet savor before the throne of God. Poor as they are in themselves, they are mighty and powerful in the hand of our High Priest and Elder Brother. The bank note without a signature at the bottom is nothing but a worthless piece of paper. The stroke of a pen confers on it all its value. The prayer of a poor child of Adam is a feeble thing in itself, but once endorsed by the hand of the Lord Jesus it availeth much. There was an officer in the city of Rome who was appointed to have his doors always open, in order to receive any Roman citizen who applied to him for help. just so the ear of the Lord Jesus is ever open to the cry of all who want mercy and grace. It is his office to help them. Their prayer is his delight. Think of this. Is not this encouragement?

There is the Holy Spirit ever ready to help our infirmities in prayer. It is one part of his special office to assist us in our endeavors to speak with God. We need not be cast down and distressed by the fear of not knowing what to say. The Spirit will give us words if we seek his aid. The prayers of the Lord's people are the inspiration of the Lord's Spirit, the work of the Holy Ghost who dwells within them as the Spirit of grace and supplication. Surely the Lord's people may well hope to be heard. It is not they merely that pray, but the Holy Ghost pleading in them. Reader, think of this. Is not this encouragement?

There are exceeding great and precious promises to those who pray. What did the Lord Jesus mean when he spoke such words as these: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find;

knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22). "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). What did the Lord mean when he spoke the parables of the friend 'at midnight and the importunate widow (Luke 11:5; Luke 18:1)? Think over these passages. If this is not encouragement to pray, words have no meaning.

There are wonderful examples in Scripture of the power of prayer. Nothing seems to be too great, too hard, or too difficult for prayer to do. It has obtained things that seemed impossible and out of reach. It has won victories over fire, air, earth, and water. Prayer opened the Red Sea. Prayer brought water from the rock and bread from heaven. Prayer made the sun stand still. Prayer brought fire from the sky on Elijah's sacrifice. Prayer turned the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. Prayer overthrew the army of Sennacherib. Well might Mary Queen of Scots say, "I fear John Knox's prayers more than an army of ten thousand men." Prayer has healed the sick. Prayer has raised the dead. Prayer has procured the conversion of souls. "The child of many prayers," said an old Christian to Augustine's mother, "shall never perish." Prayer, pains, and faith can do anything. Nothing seems impossible when a man has the spirit of adoption. "Let me alone," is the remarkable saying of God to Moses when Moses was about to intercede for the children of Israel - the Chaldee version has, "Leave off praying" - (Exodus 32:10). So long as Abraham asked mercy for Sodom, the Lord went on giving. He never ceased to give till Abraham ceased to pray. Think of this. Is not this encouragement?

What more can a man want to lead him to take any step in religion, than the things I have just told him about prayer? What more could be done to make the path to the mercy seat easy, and to remove all occasions of stumbling from the sinner's way? Surely if the devils in hell had such a door set open before them, they would leap for gladness, and make the very pit ring with joy.

But where will the man hide his head at last who neglects such glorious encouragements? What can possibly be said for the man who, after all, dies without prayer? Surely I may feel anxious that you should not be that man. Surely I may well ask - Do you pray?

I ask whether you pray, because diligence in prayer is the secret of eminent holiness:

Without controversy there is a vast difference among true Christians. There is an immense interval between the foremost and the hindermost in the army of God.

They are all fighting the same good fight but how much more valiantly some fight than others. They are all doing the Lord's work but how much more some do than others. They are all light in the Lord; but how much more brightly some shine than others. They are all running the same race; but how much faster some get on than others. They all love the same Lord and Saviour; but how much more some love him than others. I ask any true Christian whether this is not the case. Are not these things so?

There are some of the Lord's people who seem never able to get on from the time of their conversion. They are born again, but they remain babes all their lives. You hear from them the same old experience. You remark in them the same want of spiritual appetite, the same want of interest in any thing beyond their own little circle, which you remarked ten years ago. They are

pilgrims, indeed, but pilgrims like the Gibeonites of old; their bread is always dry and moldy, their shoes always old, and their garments always rent and torn. I say this with sorrow and grief; but I ask any real Christian, Is it not true?

There are others of the Lord's people who seem to be always advancing. They grow like the grass after rain; they increase like Israel in Egypt; they press on like Gideon, though sometimes faint, yet always pursuing. They are ever adding grace to grace, and faith to faith, and strength to strength. Every time you meet them their hearts seem larger, and their spiritual stature taller and stronger. Every year they appear to see more, and know more, and believe more, and feel more in their religion. They not only have good works to prove the reality of their faith, but they are zealous of them. They not only do well, but they are unwearied in well-doing. They attempt great things, and they do great things. When they fail they try again, and when they fall they are soon up again. And all this time they think themselves poor, unprofitable servants, and fancy they do nothing at all. These are those who make religion lovely and beautiful in the eyes of all. They wrest praise even from the unconverted and win golden opinions even from the selfish men of the world. It does one good to see, to be with, and to hear them. When you meet them, you could believe that like Moses, they had just come out from the presence of God. When you part with them you feel warmed by their company, as if your soul had been near a fire. I know such people are rare. I only ask, Are there not many such?

Now how can we account for the difference which I have just described? What is the reason that some believers are so much brighter and holier than others? I believe the difference, in nineteen cases out of twenty, arises from different habits about private prayer. I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray little, and those who are eminently holy pray much.

I dare say this opinion will startle some readers. I have little doubt that many look on eminent holiness as a kind of special gift, which none but a few must pretend to aim at. They admire it at a distance in books. They think it beautiful when they see an example near themselves. But as to its being a thing within the reach of any but a very few, such a notion never seems to enter their minds. In short, they consider it a kind of monopoly granted to a few favored believers, but certainly not to all.

Now I believe that this is a most dangerous mistake. I believe that spiritual as well as natural greatness depends in a high degree on the faithful use of means within everybody's reach. Of course I do not say we have a right to expect a miraculous grant of intellectual gifts; but this I do say, that when a man is once converted to God, his progress in holiness will be much in accordance with his own diligence in the use of God's appointed means. And I assert confidently that the principal means by which most believers have become great in the church of Christ is the habit of diligent private prayer.

Look through the lives of the brightest and best of God's servants, whether in the Bible or not. See what is written of Moses and David and Daniel and Paul. Mark what is recorded of Luther and Bradford the Reformers. Observe what is related of the private devotions of Whitefield and Cecil and Venn and Bickersteth and M'Cheyne. Tell me of one of all the goodly fellowship of saints and martyrs, who has not had this mark most prominently - he was a man of prayer. Depend upon it, prayer is power.

Prayer obtains fresh and continued outpourings of the Spirit. He alone begins the work of grace in a man's heart. He alone can carry it forward and make it prosper. But the good Spirit loves to be entreated. And those who ask most will have most of his influence.

Prayer is the surest remedy. Against the devil and besetting sins. That sin will never stand firm which is heartily prayed against. That devil will never long keep dominion over us which we beseech the Lord to cast forth. But then we must spread out all our cage before our heavenly Physician, if he is to give us daily relief.

Do you wish to grow in grace and be a devoted Christian? Be very sure, if you wish it, you could not have a more important question than this - Do you pray?

I ask whether you pray, because neglect of prayer is one great cause of backsliding.

There is such a thing as going back in religion after making a good profession. Men may run well for a season, like the Galatians, and then turn aside after false teachers. Men may profess loudly while their feelings are warm, as Peter did, and then in the hour of trial deny their Lord. Men may lose their first love as the Ephesians did. Men may cool down in their zeal to do good, like Mark the companion of Paul. Men may follow an apostle for a season, and like Demas go back to the world. All these things men may do.

It is a miserable thing to be a backslider. Of all unhappy things that can befall a man, I suppose it is the worst. A stranded ship, a brokenwinged eagle, a garden overrun with weeds, a harp without strings, a church in ruins, all these are sad sights, but a backslider is a sadder sight still. A wounded conscience - a mind sick of itself - a memory full of self-reproach - a heart pierced through with the Lord's arrows - a spirit broken with a load of inward accusation - all this is a taste of hell. It is a hell on earth. Truly that saying of the wise man is solemn and weighty, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Proverbs 14:14).

Now what is the cause of most backslidings? I believe, as a general rule, one of the chief causes is neglect of private prayer. Of course the secret history of falls will not be known till the last day. I can only give my opinion as a minister of Christ and a student of the heart. That opinion is, I repeat distinctly, that backsliding generally first begins with neglect of private prayer.

Bibles read without prayer; sermons heard without prayer; marriages contracted without prayer; journeys undertaken without prayer; residences chosen without prayer; friendships formed without prayer; the daily act of private prayer itself hurried over, or gone through without heart: these are the kind of downward steps by which many a Christian descends to a condition of spiritual palsy, or reaches the point where God allows him to have a tremendous fall. This is the process which forms the lingering Lots, the unstable Samsons, the wife-idolizing Solomons, the inconsistent Asas, the pliable Jehoshaphats, the over-careful Marthas, of whom so many are to be found in the church of Christ. Often the simple history of such cases is this: they became careless about private prayer.

You may be very sure men fall in private long before they fall in public. They are backsliders on their knees long before they backslide openly in the eyes of the world. Like Peter, they first disregard the Lord's warning to watch and pray, and then like Peter, their strength is gone, and in the hour of temptation they deny their Lord.

The world takes notice of their fall, and scoffs loudly. But the world knows nothing of the real reason. The heathen succeeded in making a well-known Christian offer incense to an idol, by threatening him with a punishment worse than death. They then triumphed greatly at the sight of his cowardice and apostasy. But the heathen did not know the fact of which history informs us, that on that very morning he had left his bed chamber hastily, and without finishing his usual prayers.

If you are a Christian indeed, I trust you will never be a backslider. But if you do not wish to be a backsliding Christian, remember the question I ask you: Do you pray?

I ask, lastly, whether you pray because prayer is one of the best means of happiness and contentment.

We live in a world where sorrow abounds. This has always been its state since sin came in. There cannot be sin without sorrow. And until sin is driven out from the world, it is vain for any one to suppose he can escape sorrow.

Some without doubt have a larger cup of sorrow to drink than others. But few are to be found who live long without sorrows or cares of one sort or another. Our bodies, our property, our families, our children, our relations, our servants, our friends, our neighbors, our worldly callings, each and all of these are fountains of care. Sickesses, deaths, losses, disappointments, partings, separations, ingratitude, slander, all these are common things. We cannot get through life without them. Some day or other they find us out. The greater are our affections the deeper are our afflictions, and the more we love the more we have to weep.

And what is the best means of cheerfulness in such a world as this? How shall we get through this valley of tears with least pain? I know no better means than the regular, habitual practice of taking everything to God in prayer. This is the plain advice that the Bible gives, both in the Old Testament and the New. What says the psalmist? "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalms 50:15). "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalms 55:22). What says the apostle Paul? "Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God: and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Php_4:6-7). What says the apostle James? "Is any afflicted among you? let him pray" (James 5:13).

This was the practice of all the saints whose history we have recorded in the Scriptures. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. This is what Moses did when the people were ready to stone him in the wilderness. This is what Joshua did when Israel was defeated before the men of Ai. This is what David did when he was in danger at Keilah. This is what Hezekiah did when he received the letter from Sennacherib. This is what the church did when Peter was put in prison. This is what Paul did when he was cast into the dungeon at Philippi.

The only way to be really happy in such a world as this, is to be ever casting all our cares on God. It is trying to carry their own burdens which so often makes believers sad. If they will tell their troubles to God, he will enable them to bear them as easily as Samson did the gates of Gaza. If they are resolved to keep them to themselves, they will find one day that the very grasshopper is a burden.

There is a friend ever waiting to help us, if we will unbosom to him our sorrow - a friend who pitied the poor and sick and sorrowful, when he was upon earth - a friend who knows the heart of man, for he lived thirty-three years as a man among us - a friend who can weep with the weepers, for he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief - a friend who is able to help us, for there never was earthly pain he could not cure. That friend is Jesus Christ. The way to be happy is to be always opening our hearts to him. Oh that we were all like that poor Christian who only answered, when threatened and punished, "I must tell the Lord."

Jesus can make those happy who trust him and call on him, whatever be their outward condition. He can give them peace of heart in a prison, contentment in the midst of poverty, comfort in the midst of bereavements, joy on the brink of the grave. There is a mighty fulness in him for all his believing members - a fulness that is ready to be poured out on every one that will ask in prayer. Oh that men would understand that happiness, does not depend on outward circumstances, but on the state of the heart.

Prayer can lighten crosses for us however heavy. It can bring down to our side One who will help us to bear them. Prayer can open a door for us when our way seems hedged up. It can bring down One who will say, "This is the way, walk in it." Prayer can let in a ray of hope when all our earthly prospects seem darkened. It can bring down One who will say, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Prayer can obtain relief for us when those we love most are taken away, and the world feels empty. It can bring down One who can fill the gap in our hearts with himself, and say to the waves within, "Peace; be still." Oh that men were not so like Hagar in the wilderness, blind to the well of living waters close beside them.

I want you to be happy. I know I cannot ask you a more useful question than this: Do you pray?

And now it is high time for me to bring this tract to an end. I trust I have brought before you things that will be seriously considered. I heartily pray God that this consideration may be blessed to your soul.

Let me speak a parting word to those who do not pray. I dare not suppose that all who read these pages are praying people. If you are a prayerless person, suffer me to speak to you this day on God's behalf.

Prayerless reader, I can only warn you, but I do warn you most solemnly. I warn you that you are in a position of fearful danger. If you die in your present state, you are a lost soul. You will only rise again to be eternally miserable. I warn you that of all professing Christians you are most utterly without excuse. There is not a single good reason that you can show for living without prayer.

It is useless to say you know not how to pray. Prayer is the simplest act in all religion. It is simply speaking to God. It needs neither learning nor wisdom nor book knowledge to begin it. It needs nothing but heart and will. The weakest infant can cry when he is hungry. The poorest beggar can hold out his hand for alms, and does not wait to find fine words. The most ignorant man will find something to say to God, if he has only a mind.

It is useless to say you have no convenient place to pray in. Any man can find a place private enough, if he is disposed. Our Lord prayed on a mountain; Peter on the housetop; Isaac in the field; Nathanael under the fig tree; Jonah in the whale's belly. Any place may become a closet, an

oratory, and a Bethel, and be to us the presence of God.

It is useless to say you have no time. There is plenty of time, if men will employ it. Time may be short, but time is always long enough for prayer. Daniel had the affairs of a kingdom on his hands, and yet he prayed three times a day. David was ruler over a mighty nation, and yet he says, "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray" (Psalms 55:17). When time is really wanted, time can always be found.

It is useless to say you cannot pray till you have faith and a new heart, and that you must sit still and wait for them. This is to add sin to sin. It is bad enough to be unconverted and going to hell. It is even worse to say, "I know it, but will not cry for mercy." This is a kind of argument for which there is no warrant in Scripture. "Call ye upon the Lord," saith Isaiah, "while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6). "Take with you words, and turn unto the Lord," says Hosea (Hosea 14:1). "Repent and pray," says Peter to Simon Magus (Acts 8:22). If you want faith and a new heart, go and cry to the Lord for them. The very attempt to pray has often been the quickening of a dead soul.

Oh, prayerless reader, who and what are you that you will not ask anything of God? Have you made a covenant with death and hell? Are you at peace with the worm and the fire? Have you no sins to be pardoned? Have you no fear of eternal torment? Have you no desire after heaven? Oh that you would awake from your present folly. Oh that you would consider your latter end. Oh that you would arise and call upon God. Alas, there is a day coming when many shall pray loudly, "Lord, Lord, open to us," but all too late; when many shall cry to the rocks to fall on them and the hills to cover them, who would never cry to God. In all affection, I warn you, beware lest this be the end of your soul. Salvation is very near you. Do not lose heaven for want of asking.

Let me speak to those who have real desires for salvation, but know not what steps to take, or where to- begin. I cannot but hope that some readers may be in this state of mind, and if there be but one such I must offer him affectionate counsel.

In every journey there must be a first step. There must be a change from sitting still to moving forward. The journeyings of Israel from Egypt to Canaan were long and wearisome. Forty years pass away before they crossed Jordan. Yet there was some one who moved first when they marched from Ramah to Succoth. When does a man really take his first step in coming out from sin and the world? He does it in the day when he first prays with his heart.

In every building the first stone must be laid, and the first blow must be struck. The ark was one hundred and twenty years in building. Yet there was a day when Noah laid his axe to the first tree he cut down to form it. The temple of Solomon was a glorious building. But there was a day when the first huge stone was laid deep in mount Moriah. When does the building of the Spirit really begin to appear in a man's heart? It begins, so far as we can judge, when he first pours out his heart to God in prayer.

If you desire salvation, and want to know what to do, I advise you to go this very day to the Lord Jesus Christ, in the first private place you can find, and earnestly and heartily entreat him in prayer to save your soul.

Tell him that you have heard that he receives sinners, and has said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Tell him that you are a poor vile sinner, and that you come to him on the

faith of his own invitation. Tell him you put yourself wholly and entirely in his hands; that you feel vile and helpless, and hopeless in yourself: and that except he saves you, you have no hope of being saved at all. Beseech him to deliver you from the guilt, the power, and the consequences of sin. Beseech him to pardon you, and wash you in his own blood. Beseech him to give you a new heart, and plant the Holy Spirit in Your Soul. Beseech him to give you grace and faith and will and power to be his disciple and servant from this day forever. Oh, reader, go this very day, and tell these things to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you really are in earnest about your soul.

Tell him in your own way, and your own words. If a doctor came to see you when sick you could tell him where you felt pain. If your soul feels its disease indeed, you can surely find something to tell Christ.

Doubt not his willingness to save you, because you are a sinner. It is Christ's office to save sinners. He says himself, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32).

Wait not because you feel unworthy. Wait for nothing. Wait for nobody. Waiting comes from the devil. Just as you are, go to Christ. The worse you are, the more need you have to apply to him. You will never mend yourself by staying away.

Fear not because your prayer is stammering, your words feeble, and your language poor. Jesus can understand you. Just as a mother understands the first lisping of her infant, so does the blessed Saviour understand sinners. He can read a sigh, and see a meaning in a groan.

Despair not because you do not get an answer immediately. While you are speaking, Jesus is listening. If he delays an answer, it is only for wise reasons, and to try if you are in earnest. The answer will surely come. Though it tarry, wait for it. It will surely come.

Oh, reader, if you have any desire to, be saved, remember the advice I have given you this day. Act upon it honestly and heartily, and you shall be saved.

Let me speak, lastly, to those who do pray. I trust that some who read this tract know well what prayer is, and have the Spirit of adoption. To all such, I offer a few words of brotherly counsel and exhortation. The incense offered in the tabernacle was ordered to be made in a particular way. Not every kind of incense would do. Let us remember this, and be careful about the matter and manner of our prayers.

Brethren who pray, if I know anything of a Christian's heart, you are often sick of your own prayers. You never enter into the apostle's words, "When I would do good, evil is present with me," so thoroughly as you sometimes do upon your knees. You can understand David's words, "I hate vain thoughts." You can sympathize with that poor converted Hottentot who was overheard praying, "Lord, deliver me from all my enemies, and above all, from that bad man myself." There are few children of God who do not often find the season of prayer a season of conflict. The devil has special wrath against us when he sees us on our knees. Yet, I believe that prayers which cost us no trouble should be regarded with great suspicion. I believe we are very poor judges of the goodness of our prayers, and that the prayer which pleases us least, often pleases God most. Suffer me then, as a companion in the Christian warfare, to offer you a few words of exhortation. One thing, at least, we all feel: we must pray. We cannot give it up. We must go on.

I commend then to your attention, the importance of reverence and humility in prayer. Let us never forget what we are, and what a solemn thing it is to speak with God. Let us beware of rushing into his presence with carelessness and levity. Let us say to ourselves: "I am on holy ground. This is no other than the gate of heaven. If I do not mean what I say, I am trifling with God. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Let us keep in mind the words of Solomon, "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and thou on earth" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). When Abraham spoke to God, he said, "I am dust and ashes." When Job spoke to God, he said, "I am vile." Let us do likewise.

I commend to you the importance of praying spiritually. I mean by that, that we should labor always to have the direct help of the Spirit in our prayers, and beware above all things of formality. There is nothing so spiritual but that it may become a form, and this is specially true of private prayer. We may insensibly get into the habit of using the fittest possible words, and offering the most scriptural petitions, and yet do it all by rote without feeling it, and walk daily round an old beaten path. I desire to touch this point with caution and delicacy. I know that there are certain great things we daily want, and that there is nothing necessarily formal in asking for these things in the same words. The world, the devil, and our hearts, are daily the same. Of necessity we must daily go over old ground. But this I say, we must be very careful on this point. If the skeleton and outline of our prayers be by habit almost a form, let us strive that the clothing and filling up of our prayers be as far as possible of the Spirit. As to praying out of a book in our private devotions, it is a habit I cannot praise. If we can tell our doctors the state of our bodies without a book, we ought to be able to tell the state of our souls to God. I have no objection to a man using crutches when he is first recovering from a broken limb. It is better to use crutches, than not to walk at all. But if I saw him all his life on crutches, I should not think it matter for congratulation. I should like to see him strong enough to throw his crutches away.

I commend to you the importance of making prayer a regular business of life. I might say something of the value of regular times in the day for prayer. God is a God of order. The hours for morning and evening sacrifice in the Jewish temple were not fixed as they were without a meaning. Disorder is eminently one of the fruits of sin. But I would not bring any under bondage. This only I say, that it is essential to your soul's health to make praying a part of the business of every twenty four hours in your life. just as you allot time to eating, sleeping, and business, so also allot time to prayer. Choose your own hours and seasons. At the very least, speak with God in the morning, before you speak with the world: and speak with God at night, after you have done with the world. But settle it in your minds, that prayer is one of the great things of every day. Do not drive it into a corner. Do not give it the scraps and parings of your duty. Whatever else you make a business of, make a business of prayer.

I commend to you the importance of perseverance in prayer. Once having begun the habit, never give it up. Your heart will sometimes say, "You have had family prayers: what mighty harm if you leave private prayer undone?" Your body will sometimes say, "You are unwell, or sleepy, or weary; you need not pray." Your mind will sometimes say, "You have important business to attend to today; cut short your prayers." Look on all such suggestions as coming direct from Satan. They are all as good' as saying, "Neglect your soul." I do not maintain that prayers should always be of the same length; but I do say, let no excuse make you give up prayer. Paul said, "Continue in prayer, and, "Pray without ceasing." He did not mean that men should be always on their knees,

but he did mean that our prayers should be, like the continual burnt offering, steadily persevered in every day; that it should be like seed time and harvest, and summer and winter, unceasingly coming round at regular seasons; that it should be like the fire on the altar, not always consuming sacrifices, but never completely going out. Never forget that you may tie together morning and evening devotions, by an endless chain of short ejaculatory prayers throughout the day. Even in company, or business, or in the very streets, you may be silently sending up little winged messengers to God, as Nehemiah did in the very presence of Artaxerxes. And never think that time is wasted which is given to God. A nation does not become poorer because it loses one year of working days in seven, by keeping the Sabbath. A Christian never finds he is a loser, in the long run, by persevering in prayer.

I commend to you the importance of earnestness in prayer. It is not necessary that a man should shout, or scream, or be very loud, in order to prove that he is in earnest. But it is desirable that we should be hearty and fervent and warm, and ask as if we were really interested in what we were doing. It is the "effectual fervent" prayer that "availeth much." This is the lesson that is taught us by the expressions used in Scripture about prayer. It is called, "crying, knocking, wrestling, laboring, striving." This is the lesson taught us by scripture examples. Jacob is one. He said to the angel at Penuel, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Genesis 32:26). Daniel is another. Hear how he pleaded with God: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God" (Daniel 9:19). Our Lord Jesus Christ is another. It is written of him, "In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). Alas, how unlike is this to many of our supplications! How tame and lukewarm they seem by comparison. How truly might God say to many of us, "You do not really want what you pray for." Let us try to amend this fault. Let us knock loudly at the door of grace, like Mercy in Pilgrim's Progress, as if we must perish unless heard. Let us settle it in our minds, that cold prayers are a sacrifice without fire. Let us remember the story of Demosthenes the great orator, when one came to him, and wanted him to plead his cause. He heard him without attention, while he told his story without earnestness. The man saw this, and cried out with anxiety that it was all true. "Ah," said Demosthenes, "I believe you now."

I commend to you the importance of praying with faith. We should endeavor to believe that our prayers are heard, and that if we ask things according to God's will, we shall be answered. This is the plain command of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). Faith is to prayer what the feather is to the arrow: without it prayer will not hit the mark. We should cultivate the habit of pleading promises in our prayers.

We should take with us some promise, and say, "Lord, here is thine own word pledged. Do for us as thou hast said." This was the habit of Jacob and Moses and David. The 119th Psalm is full of things asked, "according to thy word." Above all, we should cultivate the habit of expecting answers to our prayers. We should do like the merchant who sends his ships to sea. We should not be satisfied, unless we see some return. Alas, there are few points on which Christians come short so much as this. The church at Jerusalem made prayer without ceasing for Peter in prison; but when the prayer was answered, they would hardly believe it (Acts 12:15). It is a solemn saying of Traill, "There is no surer mark of trifling in prayer, than when men are careless what they get by prayer."

I commend to you the importance of boldness in prayer. There is an unseemly familiarity in some men's prayers which I cannot praise. But there is such a thing as a holy boldness, which is exceedingly to be desired. I mean such boldness as that of Moses, when he pleads with God not to destroy Israel "Wherefore," says he, "should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains? Turn from thy fierce anger" (Exodus 32:12). I mean such boldness as that of Joshua, when the children of Israel were defeated before men of Ai: "What," says he, "wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Joshua 7:9). This is the boldness for which Luther was remarkable. One who heard him praying said, "What a spirit, what a confidence was in his very expressions. With such a reverence he sued, as one begging of God, and yet with such hope and assurance, as if he spoke with a loving father or friend." This is the boldness which distinguished Bruce, a great Scotch divine of the seventeenth century. His prayers were said to be "like bolts shot up into heaven." Here also I fear we sadly come short. We do not sufficiently realize the believer's privileges. We do not plead as often as we might, "Lord, are we not thine own people? Is it not for thy glory that we should be sanctified? Is it not for thy honor that thy gospel should increase?"

I commend to you the importance of fullness in prayer. I do not forget that our Lord warns us against the example of the Pharisees, who, for pretense, made long prayers; and commands us when we pray not to use vain repetitions. But I cannot forget, on the other hand, that he has given his own sanction to large and long devotions by continuing all night in prayer to God. At all events, we are not likely in this day to err on the side of praying too much. Might it not rather be feared that many believers in this generation pray too little? Is not the actual amount of time that many Christians give to prayer, in the aggregate, very small? I am afraid these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily. I am afraid the private devotions of many are most painfully scanty and limited; just enough to prove they are alive and no more. They really seem to want little from God. They seem to have little to confess, little to ask for, and little to thank him for. Alas, this is altogether wrong. Nothing is more common than to hear believers complaining that they do not get on. They tell us that they do not grow in grace as they could desire. Is it not rather to be suspected that many have quite as much grace as they ask for? Is it not the true account of many, that they have little, because they ask little? The cause of their weakness is to be found in their own stunted, dwarfish, clipped, contracted, hurried, narrow, diminutive prayers. They have not, because they ask not. Oh, we are not straitened in Christ, but in ourselves. The Lord says, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." But we are like the King of Israel who smote on the ground thrice and stayed, when he ought to have smitten five or six times.

I commend to you the importance of particularity in prayer. We ought not to be content with great general petitions. We ought to specify our wants before the throne of grace. It should not be enough to confess we are sinners: we should name the sins of which our conscience tells us we are most guilty. It should not be enough to ask for holiness; we should name the graces in which we feel most deficient. It should not be enough to tell the Lord we are in trouble; we should describe our trouble and all its peculiarities. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. He tells God exactly what it is that he fears (Genesis 32:11). This is what Eliezer did, when he sought a wife for his master's son. He spreads before God precisely what he wants (Genesis 24:12). This is what Paul did when he had a thorn in the flesh. He besought the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:8). This is true faith and confidence. We should believe that nothing is too small to

be named before God. What should we think of the patient who told his doctor he was ill, but never went into particulars? What should we think of the wife who told her husband she was unhappy, but did not specify the cause? What should we think of the child who told his father he was in trouble, but nothing more? Christ is the true bridegroom of the soul, the true physician of the heart, the real father of all his people. Let us show that we feel this by being unreserved in our communications with him. Let us hide no secrets from him. Let us tell him all our hearts.

I commend to you the importance of intercession in our prayers. We are all selfish by nature, and our selfishness is very apt to stick to us, even when we are converted. There is a tendency in us to think only of our own Souls, our own spiritual conflicts, our own progress in religion, and to forget others. Against this tendency we all have need to watch and strive, and not least in our prayers. We should study to be of a public spirit. We should stir ourselves up to name other names besides our own before the throne of grace. We should try to bear in our hearts the whole world, the heathen, the Jews, the Roman Catholics, the body of true believers, the professing Protestant churches, the country in which we live, the congregation to which we belong, the household in which we sojourn, the friends and relations we are connected with. For each and all of these we should plead. This is the highest charity. He loves me best who loves me in his prayers. This is for our soul's health. It enlarges our sympathies and expands our hearts. This is for the benefit of the church. The wheels of all machinery for extending the gospel are moved by prayer. They do as much for the Lord's cause who intercede like Moses on the mount, as they do who fight like Joshua in the thick of the battle. This is to be like Christ. He bears the names of his people, as their High Priest, before the Father. Oh, the privilege of being like Jesus! This is to , be a true helper to ministers. If I must choose a congregation, give me a people that pray.

I commend to you the importance of thankfulness in prayer. I know well that asking God is one thing and praising God is another. But I see so close a connection between prayer and praise in the Bible, that I dare not call that true prayer in which thankfulness has no part. It is not for nothing that Paul says, "By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Php_4:6). "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). It is of mercy that we are not in hell. It is of mercy that we have the hope of heaven. It is of mercy that we live in a land of spiritual light. It is of mercy that we have been called by the Spirit, and not left to reap the fruit of our own ways. It is of mercy that we still live and have opportunities of glorifying God actively or passively. Surely these thoughts should crowd on our minds whenever we speak with God. Surely we should never open our lips in prayer without blessing God for that free grace by which we live, and for that loving kindness which endureth for ever. Never was there an eminent saint who was not full of thankfulness. St. Paul hardly ever writes an epistle without beginning with thankfulness. Men like Whitefield in the last century, and Bickersteth in our time, abounded in thankfulness. Oh, reader, if we would be bright and shining lights in our day, we must cherish a spirit of praise. Let our prayers be thankful prayers.

I commend to you the importance of watchfulness over your prayers. Prayer is that point in religion at which you must be most of all on your guard. Here it is that true religion begins; here it flourishes, and here it decays. Tell me what a man's prayers are, and I will soon tell you the state of his soul. Prayer is the spiritual pulse. By this the spiritual health may be tested. Prayer is the spiritual weatherglass. By this we may know whether it is fair or foul with our hearts. Oh, let us keep an eye continually upon our private devotions. Here is the pith and marrow of our practical

Christianity. Sermons and books and tracts, and committee meetings and the company of good men, are all good in their way, but they will never make up for the neglect of private prayer. Mark well the places and society and companions that unhinge your hearts for communion with God and make your prayers drive heavily. There be on your guard. Observe narrowly what friends and what employments leave your soul in the most spiritual frame, and most ready to speak with God. To these cleave and stick fast. If you will take care of your prayers, nothing shall go very wrong with your soul.

I offer these points for your private consideration. I do it in all humility. I know no one who needs to be reminded of them more than I do myself. But I believe them to be God's own truth, and I desire myself and all I love to feel them more.

I want the times we live in to be praying times. I want the Christians of our day to be praying Christians. I want the church to be a praying church. My heart's desire and prayer in sending forth this tract is to promote a spirit of prayerfulness. I want those who never prayed yet, to arise and call upon God, and I want those who do pray, to see that they are not praying amiss.

Are You Born Again

Are You Born Again?

by J. C. Ryle

Are you born again? This is one of life's most important questions. Jesus Christ said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

It is not enough to reply, "I belong to the church; I suppose I'm a Christian." Thousands of nominal Christians show none of the signs of being born again which the Scriptures have given us—many listed in the First Epistle of John.

No Habitual Sinning

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

A person who has been born again, or regenerated, does not habitually commit sin. He no longer sins with his heart and will and whole inclination. There was probably a time when he did not think about whether his actions were sinful or not, and he did not always feel grieved after doing evil. There was no quarrel between him and sin; they were friends. But the true Christian hates sin, flees from it, fights against it, considers it his greatest plague, resents the burden of its presence, mourns when he falls under its influence, and longs to be completely delivered from it. Sin no longer pleases him, nor is it even a matter of indifference to him; it has become a horrible thing which he hates. However, he cannot eliminate its presence within him.

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

Believing in Christ

Second, John wrote: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1).

A man who is born again, or regenerated, believes that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour who can pardon his soul, that He is the divine person appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, and beside Him there is no Saviour at all. In himself he sees nothing but unworthiness. But he has full confidence in Christ, and trusting in Him, he believes that his sins are all forgiven. He believes that, because he has accepted Christ's finished work and death on the cross, he is considered righteous in God's sight, and he may look forward to death and judgment without alarm.

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

Practicing Righteousness

Third, John wrote: "Every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him" (1 John 2:29).

The man who is born again, or regenerated, is a holy man. He endeavors to live according to God's will, to do the things that please God and to avoid the things that God hates. He wishes to continually look to Christ as his example as well as his Saviour and to prove himself to be Christ's friend by doing whatever He commands. He knows he is not perfect. He is painfully aware of his indwelling corruption. He finds an evil principle within himself that is constantly warring against grace and trying to draw him away from God. But he does not consent to it, though he cannot prevent its presence.

Though he may sometimes feel so low that he questions whether or not he is a Christian at all, he will be able to say with John Newton, "I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be in another world; but still I am not what I once used to be, and by the grace of God I am what I am." What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?

Loving Other Christians

Fourth, John wrote: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

A man who is born again has a special love for all true disciples of Christ. Like his Father in heaven, he loves all men with a great general love, but he has a special love for those who share his faith in Christ. Like his Lord and Saviour, he loves the worst of sinners and could weep over them; but he has a peculiar love for those who are believers. He is never so much at home as when he is in their company.

He feels they are all members of the same family. They are his fellow soldiers, fighting against the same enemy. They are his fellow travelers, journeying along the same road. He understands them, and they understand him. They may be very different from himself in many ways—in rank, in station and in wealth. But that does not matter. They are his Father's sons and daughters and he cannot help loving them. What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?

Overcoming the World

Fifth, John wrote: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world" (1 John 5:4).

A man who is born again does not use the world's opinion as his standard of right and wrong. He does not mind going against the world's ways, ideas and customs. What men think or say no longer concerns him. He overcomes the love of the world. He finds no pleasure in things which seem to bring happiness to most people. To him they seem foolish and unworthy of an immortal being.

He loves God's praise more than man's praise. He fears offending God more than offending man. It is unimportant to him whether he is blamed or praised; his first aim is to please God. What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?

Keeping Oneself Pure

Sixth, John wrote: "He that is begotten of God keepeth himself" (1 John 5:18).

A man who is born again is careful of his own soul. He tries not only to avoid sin but also to avoid everything which may lead to it. He is careful about the company he keeps. He knows that evil communications corrupt the heart and that evil is more catching than good, just as disease is more infectious than health. He is careful about the use of his time; his chief desire is to spend it profitably.

He desires to live like a soldier in an enemy country—to wear his armor continually and to be prepared for temptation. He is diligent to be watchful, humble, prayerful man. What would the apostle say about you? Are you born again?

The Test

These are the six great marks of a born again Christian.

There is a vast difference in the depth and distinctness of these marks in different people. In some they are faint and hardly noticeable. In others they are bold, plain and unmistakable, so anyone may read them. Some of these marks are more visible than others in each individual. Seldom are all equally evident in any one person.

But still, after every allowance, here we find boldly painted six marks of being born of God.

How should we react to these things? We can logically come to only one conclusion—only those who are born again have these six characteristics, and those who do not have these marks are not born again. This seems to be the conclusion to which the apostle intended us to come. Do you have these characteristics? Are you born again?

Free Salvation

http://www.theoldtimegospel.org/home/free_salv.html("http://www.theoldtimegospel.org/home/free_salv.html")

The Free Gift of Salvation: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." — 2 Corinthians 9:15

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." — Revelation 3:20

Free Salvation

Of all the doctrines of the Bible there is none so important as that of free salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. "He that believeth on Jesus is not condemned." "By Him all that believe are justified from all things."

This is the cornerstone of all Christianity. A mistake here is fatal: it is a worm at the root: it is a defect in the foundation. Let a man get wrong on this point, and his whole religion will get into confusion; let a man be right on this point, and he will never wander very far from the path of truth.

This is the doctrine for which we should contend to the very death. We should cling to it for our own soul's peace; we should seek it in the public means of grace we use. Better a thousand times take away the sun from heaven than take out of Christianity free forgiveness by faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the glorious doctrine that was the strength of the Apostles when they went forth to the Gentiles to preach a new religion. They began, a few poor fishermen, in a despised corner of the earth; they turned the world upside down; they changed the face of the Roman empire; they emptied the heathen temples of their worshippers, and made the whole system of idolatry crumble away. And what was the weapon by which they did it all? It was free forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the doctrine which brought light into Europe 300 years ago, at the time of the blessed Reformation, and enabled one solitary monk, Martin Luther, to shake the whole Church of Rome. Through his preaching and writing, the scales fell from men's eyes, and the chains of their souls were loosed. And what was the lever that gave him his power? It was free forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the doctrine that revived our own Church in the middle of last century, when Whitefield, and the Wesleys, and Berridge, and Venn broke the wretched spirit of slumber that had come over the land, and roused men to think. They began a mighty work, with little seeming likelihood of success; they began, few in number, with small encouragement from the rich and great: but they prospered. And why? Because they preached free forgiveness through faith in Christ.

This is the doctrine which is the true strength of any Church on earth at this day. It is not orders, or endowments, or liturgies, or learning, that will keep a Church alive. Let free forgiveness through

Christ be faithfully proclaimed in her pulpits, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her: let it be buried or kept back, and her candlestick shall soon be taken away. When the Saracens invaded the lands where Jerome and Athanasius, Cyprian and Augustine once wrote and preached, they found bishops and liturgies, I make no question; but I fear they found no preaching of free forgiveness of sins: and so they swept the Churches of those lands clean away.

They were a body without a vital principle, and therefore they fell. Let us never forget the brightest days of a Church are those when Christ crucified is most exalted. The dens and caves of the earth, where the early Christians met to hear of the love of Jesus, were more full of glory and beauty in God's sight than ever was St. Peter's at Rome; the meanest barn, at this day, where the true way of pardon is offered to sinners, is a far more honourable place than the Cathedral of Cologne or Milan. A Church is only useful so far as she exalts free forgiveness through Christ.

This is the doctrine which of all others is the mightiest engine for pulling down the kingdom of Satan. The Greenlanders were unmoved so long as the Moravians told them of the creation and the fall of man; but when they heard of redeeming love, their frozen hearts melted like snow in spring. Preach salvation by the sacraments, exalt the Church above Christ, and keep back the doctrine of the atonement, and the devil cares little: his goods are at peace. But preach a full Christ and a free pardon, and then Satan will have great wrath, for he knows he has but a short time.

John Berridge said he went on preaching morality, and nothing else, till he found there was not a moral man in his parish; but when he changed his plan, and began to preach the love of Christ to sinners, then there was a stirring of the dry bones, and a mighty turning to God. This is the only doctrine which will ever bring peace to an uneasy conscience, and rest to a troubled soul. A man may get on pretty well without it, so long as he is asleep about his spiritual condition; but once let him awake from his slumber, and nothing will ever calm him but the blood of atonement, and the peace of Christ.

How any one can undertake to be a minister of religion without a firm grasp of this doctrine, I never can understand; for myself, I can only say, I should think my office a most painful one if I had not the message of free forgiveness to convey. It would be miserable work indeed to visit the sick and dying, if I could not say, "Behold the Lamb of God, -believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The right hand of a Christian minister is the doctrine of free forgiveness through faith in Christ.

Give us this doctrine and we have power: we will never despair of doing good to men's souls. Take away this doctrine, and we are weak as water. We may read the prayers, and go through a round of forms, but we are like Samson with his head shorn; our strength is gone. Souls will not be benefited by us, and good will not be done.

Reader, I commend the things I have been saying to your notice. I am not ashamed of free pardon through faith in Christ, whatever some may say against the doctrine: I am not ashamed of it, for its fruits speak for themselves. It has done things that no other doctrine can do; it has effected moral changes which laws and punishments have failed to work,-which magistrates and policemen have laboured after in vain,-which mechanics' institutes and secular knowledge have proved utterly powerless to produce.

Just as the fiercest lunatics in Bethlehem Hospital became suddenly gentle when kindly treated, even so the worst and most hardened sinners have often become as little children when told of Jesus loving them, and willing to forgive. I can well understand Paul ending his Epistle to the erring Galatians with that solemn burst of feeling: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. vi. 14). The crown has indeed fallen from a Christian's head when he leaves the doctrine of justification by faith.

See now how you should ask yourself whether you have really received the truth which I have been dwelling on, and know it by experience. Jesus, and faith in Him, is the only way to the Father. He that thinks to climb into paradise by some other road, will find himself fearfully mistaken: other foundation can no man lay for an immortal soul than that of which I have been feebly speaking. He that ventures himself here is safe: he that is off this rock has got no standing ground at all.

See too how you should seriously consider what kind of a ministry you are in the habit of attending, supposing you have a choice. You have reason indeed to be careful: it is not all the same where you go, whatever people may say. There are many places of worship, I fear, where you might look long for Christ crucified, and never find Him; He is buried under outward ceremonies,-thrust behind the baptismal font,-lost sight of under the shadow of the Church.

"They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." Take heed where you settle yourself. Try all by this single test: "Is Jesus and free forgiveness proclaimed here?" There may be comfortable pews,-there may be good singing,there may be learned sermons; but if Christ's Gospel is not the sun and centre of the whole place, do not pitch your tent there; say rather with Isaac, "Here is the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb?" Be very sure this is not the place for your soul.

Reader, remember these things, and you will be wise. I have set before you the way of life; I have told you where pardon is to be found. Oh, beware, lest having been told of free forgiveness you should come short of it, and never embrace it yourself! Settle it down in your mind, that if you are willing to partake of this free salvation the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to receive you, and save you.

Does any man suppose that Jesus is not willing to see heaven filled? Do you think He does not desire to bring many sons to glory? Oh, but you little know the depth of His mercy and compassion, if you can think such a thought! He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem; He mourns over the impenitent and the thoughtless in the present day. He sends you invitations by my mouth this hour. He invites you to hear and live, to forsake the way of the foolish, and go in the paths of understanding: "As I live," He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

Oh, reader, if you never came to Christ for life before, come to Him this very day. Come to Him with the penitent's prayer for mercy and grace; come to Him without delay. Come and drink of the water of life; come and be freely saved.

If you are determined to have the world and the things of the world,-its pleasures and its rewards, its follies and its sins; if you must have your own way, and cannot give up anything for Christ and your soul; if this be your case, there is but one end before you. I fairly warn you,-I plainly tell you,-you will sooner or later come to the unquenchable fire of hell.

But if any man is willing to be saved, the Lord Jesus Christ stands ready to save him. "Come unto Me," He says, "weary soul, and I will give you rest. Come, guilty and sinful soul, and I will give you free pardon. Come, lost and ruined soul, and I will give you eternal life. Come and be freely saved."

Oh, reader, let this message be a word in season! Arise and call upon the Lord. Let the angels of God rejoice over one more saved soul; let the courts of heaven hear the good tidings that one more lost sheep is found. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

— By J. C. Ryle

Justification and Sanctification

Justification and Sanctification

How do they Differ?

by J. C. Ryle("../index.htm")

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

This branch of our subject is one of great importance, though I fear it will not seem so to all my readers. I shall handle it briefly, but I dare not pass it over altogether. Too many are apt to look at nothing but the surface of things in religion, and regard nice distinctions in theology as questions of words and names, which are of little real value. But I warn all who are in earnest about their souls, that the discomfort which arises from not distinguishing things that differ in Christian doctrine is very great indeed; and I especially advise them, if they love peace, to seek clear views about the matter before us. Justification and sanctification are two distinct things we must always remember. Yet there are points in which they agree and points in which they differ. Let us try to find out what they are.

In what, then, are justification and sanctification alike?

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

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

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

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

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

Such are the points on which justification and sanctification agree. Let us now reverse the picture, and see wherein they differ.

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

be in a very feeble degree.

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

(c) In justification our own works have no place at all, and simple faith in Christ is the one thing needful.

(d) In sanctification our own works are of vast importance and God bids us fight, and watch, and pray, and strive, and take pains, and labour. Justification is a finished and complete work, and a man is perfectly justified the moment he believes. Sanctification is an imperfect work, comparatively, and will never be perfected until we reach heaven.

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

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

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

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

I commend these distinctions to the attention of all my readers, and I ask them to ponder them well. I am persuaded that one great cause of the darkness and uncomfortable feelings of many well-meaning people in the matter of religion is their habit of confounding, and not distinguishing, justification and sanctification. It can never be too strongly impressed on our minds that they are two separate things. No doubt they cannot be divided, and everyone that is a partaker of either is a partaker of both. But never, never ought they to be confounded, and never ought the distinction between them to be forgotten. It only remains for me now to bring this subject to a conclusion by a few plain words of application. The nature and visible marks of sanctification have been brought before us. What practical reflections ought the whole matter to raise in our minds?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let us feel convinced, whatever others may say, that holiness is happiness, and that the man who gets through life most comfortably is the sanctified man. No doubt there are some true Christians who from ill-health, or family trials, or other secret causes, enjoy little sensible comfort, and go mourning all their days on the way to heaven. But these are exceptional cases. As a general rule, in the long run of life, it will be found true that sanctified people are the happiest people on earth. They have solid comforts which the world can neither give nor take away. The ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness. Great peace has they that love Thy law. It was said by One who cannot lie, My yoke is easy, and my burden is light. But it is also written, There is no peace unto the wicked. (Proverbs 3:17; Psalms 119:165; Matthew 11:30; Isaiah 48:22.)

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

Sermon on Hell

Fire! Fire!

by

J. C. Ryle

(1816-1900)

When a house is on fire, what ought to be done first? We ought to give the alarm and wake the inhabitants. This is true love to our neighbor. this is true charity. Reader, I love your soul, and want it to be saved. I am therefore going to tell you something about hell. There is such a place as hell. Let no one deceive you with vain words. What men do not like, they try hard not to believe. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes to judge the world, he will punish all who are not his disciples with a fearful punishment. All who are found impenitent and unbelieving; all who have clung to sin, stuck to the world, and set their affections on things below; all who are without Christ; all such shall come to an awful end. Whosoever is not written in the book of life shall be "cast into the lake of fire." Revelation 20:15.

The punishment of hell shall be most severe. There is no pain like that of burning. Put your finger in the candle for a moment if you doubt this, and try. Fire is the most destructive and devouring of all elements. Look into the mouth of a blast furnace, and think what it would be to be there. Fire is of all elements most opposed to life. Creatures can live in air, and earth, and water; but nothing can live in fire. Yet fire is the portion to which the Christless and unbelieving will come. they will be "cast into the lake of fire." The punishment of hell will be eternal. Millions of ages will pass away, and the fire will never burn low and become dim. The fuel of that fire will never waste away and be consumed. it is "unquenchable fire." O reader, these are the sad and painful things to speak of. I have no-pleasure in dwelling on them. I could rather say with the apostle Paul, "I have great sorrow." But they are things written for our learning, and it is good to consider them. They are part of that Scripture which is all profitable, and they ought to be heard. Painful as the subject of hell is, it is one about which I dare not, cannot, and must not be silent. Who would desire to speak of hell-fire if God has not spoken of it? When God has spoken of it so plainly, who can safely hold his peace? I dare not shut my eyes to the fact, that a deep rooted infidelity lurks in men's minds on the subject of hell. I see it oozing out in the utter apathy of some: they eat, and drink, and sleep, as if there was no wrath to come. I see it creeping forth in the coldness others about their neighbor's souls: they show little anxiety to awaken the unconverted, and pluck brands from the fire. I desire to denounce such infidelity with all my might. Believing that there are "terrors of the Lord," as well as the "recompense of reward."

I call on all who profess to believe the Bible, to be on their guard. I know that some do not believe there is any hell at all. They think it impossible there can be such a place. They call it inconsistent with the mercy of God. They say it is too awful an idea to be really true. The devil of course, rejoices in the views of such people. They help his kingdom mightily. They are preaching up his

old favorite doctrine, "Ye shall not surely die." I know furthermore, that some do not believe that hell is eternal. They tell us it is incredible that a compassionate God will punish men for ever. He will surely open the prison doors at last. This also is a mighty help to the devil's cause. "Take your ease, "he whispers to sinners-" if you do make a mistake, never mind, it is not for ever." I know also that some believe there is a hell, but never allow that anybody is going there. All people with them are good, as soon as they die, all were sincere, all meant well, and all, they hope, got to heaven. Alas! what a common delusion is this! I can well understand the feeling of the little girl who asked her mother where all the wicked people were buried, for she found no mention on the gravestones of any except of the good.

And I know very well that some believe there is a hell, but never like to hear it spoken of. It is a subject that should always be kept back, in their opinion. They see no profit in bringing it forward, and are rather shocked when it is mentioned. This also is an immense help to the devil. "Hush! hush!" says Satan, "say nothing about hell." The fowler wishes no noise to be made when he has laid his snares. The wolf would like the shepherd to sleep, while he prowls round the fold. The devil rejoices when Christians are silent about hell. reader, all these notions are the opinions of man. What is it to you and me what man thinks of religion? Man will not judge us at the last day. There is but one point to be settled, "what says the word of God?" do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell is real and true. it is as true as heaven, as true as justification by faith, as true as the fact that Christ died upon the cross. There is not a fact or doctrine which you may not lawfully doubt, if you doubt hell. Disbelieve hell, you unscrew, unsettle, and unpin everything in the Scripture. You may as well throw your Bible aside at once. From "no hell" to "no God" is but a series of steps. Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell will have inhabitants. The wicked shall certainly be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God. The same blessed Saviour who now sits on a throne of grace, will one day sit on a throne of judgement, and men will see there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb." The same, lips which now say, Come, come unto me," will one day say, "Depart, ye cursed" Alas! how awful the thought of being condemned by Christ himself, judge by the Saviour, sentenced to misery by the lamb! Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell will be intense and inalterable woe.

It is vain to talk of all the expressions about it being figures of speech, the pit, the prison, the worm, the fire, the thirst, the blackness, the darkness, the weeping, the gnashing of teeth, the second death, all these may be figures of speech if you please. But Bible figures mean something beyond all questions, and here they mean something which man's mind can never fully conceive. O reader, the miseries of mind and conscience are far worse than those of the body. The whole extent of hell, the present suffering, the bitter recollection of the past, the hopeless prospect of the future, will never be thoroughly known except by those who go there.

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell is eternal. It must be eternal, or words have no meaning at all. "For ever and ever," "everlasting," "unquenchable," "never-dying" all these are expressions used about hell, and expressions that cannot be explained away. It must be eternal, or the very foundations of heaven are cast down. If hell has an end, heaven has an end too. They both stand or fall together. It must be eternal, or every doctrine of the gospel is undermined. If a man may escape hell at length without faith in Christ, or sanctification of the Spirit, sin is no longer an infinite evil, and there was no such great need of Christ's making an atonement. And where is the warrant for saying that hell can ever change a heart, or make it fit for heaven? It must be

eternal, or hell would cease to be hell altogether. Give a man hope, and he will bear any thing. Grant a hope of deliverance, however distant, and hell is but a drop of water.

Alas! for that day which will have no tomorrow - that day when men shall seek death and not find it, and shall desire to die but death shall flee from them! Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell is a subject that ought not to be kept back. It is striking, to observe that none say so much about it as our Lord Jesus Christ, that gracious and merciful Saviour, and the apostle John, whose heart seems full of love. Truly it may well be doubted whether we ministers speak of it as much as we ought. I cannot forget the words of a dying hearer of Mr. Newton: "Sir, you often told me of Christ and salvation: why did you not remind me of hell and danger?" Let others hold their peace about hell if they will; I dare not do so. I see it plainly in Scripture, and I must speak of it. I fear that thousands are on the broad, way that leads to it, and I would fain arouse them to a sense of the peril before them.

What would you say of the man who saw his neighbor's house in danger of being burned down, and never raised the cry of "fire?" What ought to be said of us as ministers if we call ourselves watchmen for souls, and yet see fires of hell raging in distance, and never give the alarm?

Call it bad taste, if you like, to speak of hell. Call it charity to make things pleasant, and speak of smoothly, and soothe men with constant lullaby of peace. I have not read my Bible. My notion of charity is to warn men plainly of danger. My notion of taste in the ministerial office, is to declare all the counsel of God.

If I never spoke of hell, I should think I had kept back something that was profitable, and should look on myself as an accomplice of the devil. Reader, I beseech you, in all tender affection, beware of false views of the subject on which I have been dwelling. Beware of new and strange doctrines about hell and the eternity of punishment. Beware of manufacturing a God of your own: a God who is all mercy, but not just; a God who is all love, but not holy; a God who as a heaven for every body, but a hell for none; a God who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time, but will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity. Such a God is an idol of your own, as truly an idol as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple. The hands of your own fancy and sentimentality have made him. He is not the God of the Bible, and beside the God of the Bible there is no God at all.

Your heaven would be no heaven at all. A heaven containing all sorts of characters indiscriminately would be miserable discord indeed. Alas! for the eternity of such a heaven. There would be little difference between it and hell. Ah! reader, there is a hell! There is a fire! Take heed lest you find it out to your cost too late. Beware of being wise above that which is written. Beware of forming fanciful theories of your own, and then trying to make the Bible square with them. Beware of making selections from your Bible to suit your taste. Dare not to say, "I believe this verse, for I like it. I refuse that, for I cannot reconcile it with my views." Nay! but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? By what right do you talk in this way? Surely it were better to say, over every chapter in the word, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Ah! if men would do this, they would never deny the unquenchable fire.

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Sickness

Sickness

by J. C. Ryle

"He whom Thou lovest is sick" (John 11:3).

The chapter from which this text is taken is well known to all Bible readers. In life-like description, in touching interest, in sublime simplicity, there is no writing in existence that will bear comparison with that chapter. A narrative like this is to my own mind one of the great proofs of the inspiration of Scripture. When I read the story of Bethany, I feel "There is something here which the infidel can never account for." - "This is nothing else but the finger of God."

The words which I specially dwell upon in this chapter are singularly affecting and instructive. They record the message which Martha and Mary sent to Jesus when their brother Lazarus was sick: "Lord, behold he whom Thou lovest is sick" That message was short and simple. Yet almost every word is deeply suggestive.

Mark the child-like faith of these holy women. They turned to the Lord Jesus in their hour of need, as the frightened infant turns to its mother, or the compass-needle turns to the Pole. They turned to Him as their Shepherd, their almighty Friend, their Brother born for adversity. Different as they were in natural temperament, the two sisters in this matter were entirely agreed. Christ's help was their first thought in the day of trouble. Christ was the refuge to which they fled in the hour of need. Blessed are all they that do likewise!

Mark the simple humility of their language about Lazarus. They call Him "He whom Thou lovest. They do not say, "He who loves Thee, believes in Thee, serves Thee," but "He whom Thou lovest." Martha and Mary were deeply taught of God. They had learned that Christ's love towards us, and not our love towards Christ, is the true ground of expectation, and true foundation of hope-Blessed,-again, are all they that are taught likewise! To look inward to our love towards Christ is painfully unsatisfying: to look outward to Christ's love towards us is peace.

Mark, lastly, the touching circumstance which the message of Martha and Mary reveals: "He whom Thou lovest is sick.." Lazarus was a good man, converted, believing, renewed, sanctified, a friend of Christ, and an heir of glory. And yet Lazarus was sick! Then sickness is no sign that God is displeased. Sickness is intended to be a blessing to us, and not a curse. "All things work together for good to them that love God, and are called according to His purpose." "All things are yours,-life, death, things present, or things to come: for ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 3:22-23. Blessed, I say again, are they that have learned this! Happy are they who can say, when they are ill, "This is my Father's doing. It must be well."

I invite the attention of my readers to the subject of sickness. The subject is one which we ought frequently to look in the face. We cannot avoid it. It needs no prophet's eye to see sickness coming to each of us in turn one day. "In the midst of life we are in death." Let us turn aside for a few

moments, and consider sickness as Christians. The consideration will not hasten its coming, and by God's blessing may teach us wisdom.

In considering the subject of sickness, three points appear to me to demand attention. On each I shall say a few words.

I. The universal prevalence of sickness and disease.

II. The general benefits which sickness confers on mankind.

III. The special duties to which sickness calls us.

I. The universal prevalence of sickness

I need not dwell long on this point. To elaborate the proof of it would only be multiplying truisms, and heaping up common-places which all allow.

Sickness is everywhere. In Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in America; in hot countries and in cold, in civilized nations and in savage tribes,-men, women, and children sicken and die.

Sickness is among all classes. Grace does not lift a believer above the reach of it. Riches will not buy exemption from it. Rank cannot prevent its assaults. Kings and their subjects, masters and servants, rich men and poor, learned and unlearned, teachers and scholars, doctors and patients, ministers and hearers, all alike go down before this great foe. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city." (Proverbs 18:11.) The Englishman's house is called his castle; but there are no doors and bars which can keep out disease and death.

Sickness is of every sort and description. From the crown of our head to the sole of our foot we are liable to disease. Our capacity of suffering is something fearful to contemplate. Who can count up the ailments by which our bodily frame may be assailed? Who ever visited a museum of morbid anatomy without a shudder? "Strange that a harp of thousand strings should keep in tune so long." It is not, to my mind, so wonderful that men should die so soon, as it is that they should live so long.

Sickness is often one of the most humbling and distressing trials that can come upon man. It can turn the strongest into a little child, and make him feel-"the grasshopper a burden." (Ecclesiastes 12:5.) It can unnerve the boldest, and make him tremble at the fall of a pin. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made." (Psalms 139:14.) The connection between body and mind is curiously close. The influence that some diseases can exercise upon the temper and spirits is immensely great. There are ailments of brain, and liver, and nerves, which can bring down a Solomon in mind to a state little better than that of a babe. He that would know to what depths of humiliation poor man can fall, has only to attend for a short time on sick-beds.

Sickness is not preventable by anything that man can do. The average duration of life may doubtless be somewhat lengthened. The skill of doctors may continually discover new remedies, and effect surprising cures. The enforcement of wise sanitary regulations may greatly lower the death rate in a land. But, after all,-whether in healthy or unhealthy localities,-whether in mild climates or in cold,-whether treated by homeopathy or allopathy,-men will sicken and die. "The days of our years are three-score years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be four-score

years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalms 90:10.) That witness is indeed true. It was true 3300 years ago.-It is true still.

Now what can we make of this great fact,-the universal prevalence of sickness? How shall we account for it? What explanation can we give of it? What answer shall we give to our inquiring children when they ask us, "Father, why do people get ill and die?" These are grave questions. A few words upon them will not be out of place. Can we suppose for a moment that God created sickness and disease at the beginning? Can we imagine that He who formed our world in such perfect order was the Former of needless suffering and pain? Can we think that He who made all things "very good," made Adam's race to sicken and to die? The idea is, to my mind, revolting. It introduces a grand imperfection into the midst of God's perfect works. I must find another solution to satisfy my mind.

The only explanation that satisfies me is that which the Bible gives. Something has come into the world which has dethroned man from his original position, and stripped him of his original privileges. Something has come in, which, like a handful of gravel thrown into the midst of machinery, has marred the perfect order of God's creation. And what is that something? I answer, in one word, It is sin. "Sin has entered into the world, and death by sin." (Romans 5:12.) Sin is the cause of all the sickness, and disease, and pain, and suffering which prevail on the earth. They are all a part of that curse which came into the world when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and fell. There would have been no sickness, if there had been no fall. There would have been no disease, if there had been no sin.

I pause for a moment at this point, and yet in pausing I do not depart from my subject. I pause to remind my readers that there is no ground so untenable as that which is occupied by the Atheist, the Deist, or the unbeliever in the Bible. I advise every young reader of this paper, who is puzzled by the bold and specious arguments of the infidel, to study well that most important subject,-the Difficulties of Infidelity. I say boldly that it requires far more credulity to be a infidel than to be a Christian. I say boldly that there are. great broad patent facts in the condition of mankind, which nothing but the Bible can explain, and that one of the most striking of these facts is the universal prevalence of pain, sickness, and disease. In short, one of the mightiest difficulties in the way of Atheists and Deists, is the body of man.

You have doubtless heard of Atheists. An Atheist is one who professes to believe that there is no God, no Creator, no First Cause, and that all things came together in this world by mere chance.-Now shall we listen to such a doctrine as this? Go, take an Atheist to one of the excellent surgical schools of our land, and ask him to study the wonderful structure of the human body. Show him the matchless skill with which every joint, and vein, and valve, and muscle, and sinew, and nerve, and bone, and limb, has been formed. Show him the perfect adaptation of every part of the human frame to the purpose which it serves. Show him the thousand delicate contrivances for meeting wear and tear, and supplying daily waste of vigor. And then ask this man who denies the being of a God, and a great First Cause, if all this wonderful mechanism is the result of chance? Ask him if it came together at first by luck and accident? Ask him if he so thinks about the watch he looks at, the bread he eats, or the coat he wears? Oh, no! Design is an insuperable difficulty in the Atheist's way. There is a God. You have doubtless heard of Deists. A Deist is one who professes to believe that there is a God, who made the world and all things therein. But He does not believe

the Bible. "A God, but no Bible!-a Creator, but no Christianity!" This is the Deist's creed.-Now, shall we listen to this doctrine? Go again, I say, and take a Deist to an hospital, and show him some of the awful handiwork of disease. Take him to the bed where lies some tender child, scarce knowing good from evil, with an incurable cancer. Send him to the ward where there is a loving mother of a large family in the last state of some excruciating disease. Show him some of the racking pains and agonies to which flesh is heir, and ask him to account for them. Ask this man, who believes there is a great and Wise God who made the world, but cannot believe the Bible,-ask him how he accounts for these traces of disorder and imperfection in his God's creation. Ask this man, who sneers at Christian theology and is too wise to believe the fall of Adam,-ask him upon his theory to explain the universal prevalence of pain and disease in the world. You may ask in vain! You will get no satisfactory answer. Sickness and suffering are insuperable difficulties in the Deist's way. Man has sinned, and therefore man suffers. Adam fell from his first estate, and therefore Adam's children sicken and die.

The universal prevalence of sickness is one of the indirect evidences that the Bible is true. The Bible explains it. The Bible answers the questions about it which will arise in every inquiring mind. No other systems of religion can do this. They all fail here. They are silent. They are confounded. The Bible alone looks the subject in the face. It boldly proclaims the fact that man is a fallen creature, and with equal boldness proclaims a vast remedial system to meet his wants. I feel shut up to the conclusion that the Bible is from God. Christianity is a revelation from heaven. "Thy word is truth." (John 17:17.)

Let us stand fast on the old ground, that the Bible, and the Bible only, is God's revelation of Himself to man. Be not moved by the many new assaults which modern skepticism is making on the inspired volume. Heed not the hard questions which the enemies of the faith are fond of putting about Bible difficulties, and to which perhaps you often feel unable to give an answer. Anchor your soul firmly on this safe principle,-that the whole book is God's truth. Tell the enemies of the Bible that, in spite of all their arguments, there is no book in the world which will bear comparison with the Bible,-none that so thoroughly meets man's want-none that explains so much of the state of mankind. As to the hard things in the Bible, tell them you are content to wait. You find enough plain truth in the book to satisfy your conscience and save your soul. The hard things will be cleared up in one day. What you know not now, you will know hereafter.

II. The second point I propose to consider is the general Benefits which sickness confers on mankind.

I use that word "benefits" advisedly. I feel it of deep importance to see this part of our subject clearly. I know well that sickness is one of the supposed weak points in God's government of the world, on which skeptical minds love to dwell."Can God be a God of love, when He allows pain? Can God be a God of mercy, when He permits disease? He might prevent pain and disease; but He does not. How can these things be?" Such is the reasoning which often comes across the heart of man.

I reply to all such reasoners, that their doubts and questionings are most unreasonable. They might as well doubt the existence of a Creator, because the order of the universe is disturbed by earthquakes, hurricanes, and storms. They might as well doubt the providence of God, because of the horrible massacres of Delhi and Cawnpore. All this would be just as reasonable as to doubt the

mercy of God, because of the presence of sickness in the world.

I ask all who find it hard to reconcile the prevalence of disease and pain with the love of God, to cast their eyes on the world around them, and to mark what is going on. I ask them to observe the extent to which men constantly submit to present loss for the sake of future gain,-present sorrow for the sake of future joy,-present pain for the sake of future health. The seed is thrown into the ground, and rots: but we sow in the hope of a future harvest. The boy is sent to school amidst many tears: but we send him in the hope of his getting future wisdom. The father of a family undergoes some fearful surgical operation: but he bears it, in the hope of future health.-I ask men to apply this great principle to God's government of the world. I ask them to believe that God allows pain, sickness, and disease, not because He loves to vex man, but because He desires to benefit man's heart, and mind, and conscience, and soul, to all eternity. Once more I repeat, that I speak of the "benefits" of sickness on purpose and advisedly. I know the suffering and pain which sickness entails. I admit the misery and wretchedness which it often brings in its train. But I cannot regard it as an unmixed evil. I see in it a wise permission of God. I see in it a useful provision to check the ravages of sin and the devil among men's souls. If man had never sinned I should have been at a loss to discern the benefit of sickness. But since sin is in the world, I can see that sickness is a good. It is a blessing quite as much as a curse. It is a rough schoolmaster, I grant But it is a real friend to man's soul.

(a) Sickness helps to remind men of death. The most live as if they were never going to die. They follow business, or pleasure, or politics, or science, as if earth was their eternal home. They plan and scheme for the future, like the rich fool in the parable, as if they had a long lease of life, and were not, tenants at will. A heavy illness sometimes goes far to dispel these delusions. It awakens men from their day-dreams, and reminds them that they have to die as well as to live. Now this I say emphatically is a mighty good.

(b) Sickness helps to make men think seriously of God, and their souls, and the world to come. The most in their days of health can find no time for such thoughts. They dislike them. They put them away. They count them troublesome and disagreeable. Now a severe disease has sometimes a wonderful power of mustering and rallying these thoughts, and bringing them up before the eyes of a man's soul. Even a wicked king like Benhadad, when sick, could think of Elisha (2 Kings 8:8.) Even heathen sailors, when death was in sight, were afraid, and "cried every man to his god." (Jonah 1:5.) Surely anything that helps to make men think is a good.

(c) Sickness helps to soften men's hearts, and teach them wisdom. The natural heart is as hard as a stone. It can see no good in anything which is not of this life, and no happiness excepting in this world. A long illness sometimes goes far to correct these ideas. It exposes the emptiness and hollowness of what the world calls "good" things, and teaches us to hold them with a loose hand. The man of business finds that money alone is not everything the heart requires. The woman of the world finds that costly apparel, and novel reading, and the reports of balls and operas, are miserable comforters in a sick room. Surely anything that obliges us to alter our weights and measures of earthly things is a real good.

(d) Sickness helps to level and humble us. We are all naturally proud and high-minded. Few, even of the poorest, are free from the infection. Few are to be found who do not look down on somebody else, and secretly flatter themselves that they are "not as other men." A sick bed is a

mighty tamer of such thoughts as these. It forces on us the mighty truth that we are all poor worms, that we "dwell in houses of clay," and are "crushed before the moth." (Job 4:19), and that kings and subjects, masters and servants, rich and poor, are all dying creatures, and will soon stand side by side at the bar of God. In the sight of the coffin and the grave it is not easy to be proud. Surely anything that teaches that lesson is good.

(e) Finally, sickness helps to try men's religion, of what sort it is. There are not many on earth who have no religion at all. Yet few have a religion that will bear inspection. Most are content with traditions received from their fathers, and can render no reason of the hope that is in them. Now disease is sometimes most useful to a man in exposing the utter worthlessness of his soul's foundation. It often shows him that he has nothing solid under his feet, and nothing firm under his hand. It makes him find out that, although he may have had a form of religion, he has been all his life worshipping "an unknown God." Many a creed looks well on the smooth waters of health, which turns out utterly unsound and useless on the rough waves of the sick bed. The storms of winter often bring out the defects in a man's dwelling, and sickness often exposes the gracelessness of a man's soul. Surely anything that makes us find out the real character of our faith is a good. I do not say that sickness confers these benefits on all to whom it comes. Alas, I can say nothing of the kind! Myriads are yearly laid low by illness, and restored to health, who evidently learn no lesson from their sick beds, and return again to the world. Myriads are yearly passing through sickness to the grave, and yet receiving no more spiritual impressions from it than the beasts that perish. While they live they have no feeling, and when they die there are "no bands in their death." (Psalms 73:4.) These are awful things to say. But they are true. The degree of deadness to which man's heart and conscience may attain, is a depth which I cannot pretend to fathom.

But does sickness confer the benefits of which I have been speaking on only a few? I will allow nothing of the kind. I believe that in very many cases sickness produces impressions more or less akin to those of which I have just been speaking. I believe that in many minds sickness is God's "day of visitation," and that feelings are continually aroused on a sick bed which, if improved, might, by God's grace, result in salvation. I believe that in heathen lands sickness often paves the way for the missionary, and makes the poor idolater lend a willing ear to the glad tidings of the Gospel. I believe that in our own land sickness is one of the greatest aids to the minister of the Gospel, and that sermons and counsels are often brought home in the day of disease which we have neglected in the day of health. I believe that sickness is one of God's most important subordinate instruments in the saving of men, and that though the feelings it calls forth are often temporary, it is also often a means whereby the Spirit works effectually on the heart. In short, I believe firmly that the sickness of men's bodies has often led, in God's wonderful providence, to the salvation of men's souls.

I leave this branch of my subject here. It needs no further remark. If sickness can do the things of which I have been speaking (and who will gainsay it?), if sickness in a wicked world can help to make men think of God and their souls, then sickness confers benefits on mankind.

We have no right to murmur at sickness, and repine at its presence in the world. We ought rather to thank God for it. It is God's witness. It is the soul's adviser. It is an awakener to the conscience. It is a purifier to the heart. Surely I have a right to tell you that sickness is a blessing and not a

curse,-a help and not an injury,-a gain and not a loss,-a friend and not a foe to mankind. So long as we have a world wherein there is sin, it is a mercy that it is a world wherein there is sickness.

III. The third and last point which I propose to consider, is the special duties which the prevalence of sickness entails on each one of ourselves.

I should be sorry to leave the subject of sickness without saying something on this point. hold it to be of cardinal importance not to be content with generalities in delivering God's message to souls. I am anxious to impress on each one into whose hands this paper may fall, his own personal responsibility in connection with the subject. would fain have no one lay down this paper unable to answer the questions, "What practical lesson have I learned? What, in a world of disease and death, what ought I to do?"

(a) One paramount duty which the prevalence of sickness entails on man, is that of living habitually prepared to meet God. Sickness is a remembrancer of death. Death is the door through which we must all pass to judgment. Judgment is the time when we must at last see God face to face. Surely the first lesson which the inhabitant of a sick and dying world should learn should be to prepare to meet his God.

When are you prepared to meet God? Never till your iniquities are forgiven, and your sin covered! Never till your heart is renewed, and your will taught to delight in the will of God! You have many sins. If you go to church, your own mouth is taught to confess this every Sunday. The blood of Jesus Christ can alone cleanse those sins away. The righteousness of Christ can alone make you acceptable in the sight of God. Faith, simple childlike faith, can alone give you an interest in Christ and His benefits. Would you know whether you are prepared to meet God? Then where is your faith? Your heart is naturally unmeet for God's company. You have no real pleasure in doing His will. The Holy Ghost must transform you after the image of Christ. Old things must pass away. All things must become new. Would you know whether you are prepared to meet God? Then, where is your grace? Where are the evidences of your conversion and sanctification?

I believe that this, and nothing less than Pardon of sin this, is preparedness to meet God. and meetness for God's presence,-justification by faith and sanctification of the heart,-the blood of Christ sprinkled on us, and the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us,-these are the grand essentials of the Christian religion. These are no mere words and names to furnish bones of contention for wrangling theologians. These are sober, solid, substantial realities. To live in the actual possession of these things, in a world full of sickness and death, is the first duty which I press home upon your soul.

(b) Another paramount duty which the prevalence of sickness entails on you, is that of living habitually ready to bear it patiently. Sickness is no doubt a trying thing to flesh and blood. To feel our nerves unstrung, and our natural force abated,-to be obliged to sit still and be cut off from all our usual avocations,-to see our plans broken off and our purposes disappointed,-to endure long hours, and days, and nights of weariness and pain,-all this is a severe strain on poor sinful human nature. What wonder if peevishness and impatience are brought out by disease! Surely in such a dying world as this we should study patience.

How shall we learn to bear sickness patiently, when sickness comes to our turn? We must lay up stores of grace in the time of health. We must seek for the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost

over our unruly tempers and dispositions. We must make a real business of our prayers, and regularly ask for strength to endure God's will as well as to do it. Such strength is to be had for the asking: "If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it for you." (John 14:14.) I cannot think it needless to dwell on this point. I believe the passive graces of Christianity receive far less notice than they deserve. Meekness, gentleness, longsuffering, faith, patience, are all mentioned in the Word of God as fruits of the Spirit. They are passive graces which specially glorify God. They often make men think, who despise the active side of the Christian character. Never do these graces shine so brightly as they do in the sick room. They enable many a sick person to preach a silent sermon, which those around him never forget. Would you adorn the doctrine you profess? Would you make your Christianity beautiful in the eyes of others? Then take the hint I give you this day. Lay up a store of patience against the time of illness. Then, though your sickness be not to death, it shall be for the "glory of God." (John 11:4.)

(c) One more paramount duty which the prevalence of sickness entails on you, is that of habitual readiness to feel with and help your fellow-man. Sickness is never very far from us. Few are the families who have not some sick relative. Few are the parishes where you will not find some one ill. But wherever there is sickness, there is a call to duty. A little timely assistance in some cases,-a kindly visit in others,-a friendly inquiry,-a mere expression of sympathy, may do a vast good. These are the sort of things which soften asperities, and bring men together, and promote good feeling. These are ways by which you may ultimately lead men to Christ and save their souls. These are good works to which every professing Christian should be ready. In a world full of sickness and disease we ought to "bear one another's burdens," and be "kind one to another." (Galatians 6:2; Ephesians 4:32.)

These things, I dare say, may appear to some little and trifling. They must needs be doing something great, and grand, and striking, and heroic! I take leave to say that conscientious attention to these little acts of brotherly-kindness is one of the clearest evidences of having "the mind of Christ." They are acts in which our blessed Master Himself was abundant. He was ever "going about doing good" to the sick and sorrowful. (Acts 10:38.) They are acts to which He attaches great importance in that most solemn passage of Scripture, the description of the last judgment. He says there: "I was sick, and ye visited Me." (Matthew 25:36.)

Have you any desire to prove the reality of your charity,-that blessed grace which so many talk of, and so few practice? If you have, beware of unfeeling selfishness and neglect of your sick brethren. Search them out. Assist them if they need aid. Show your sympathy with them. Try to lighten their burdens. Above all, strive to do good to their souls. It will do you good if it does no good to them. It will keep your heart from murmuring. It may prove a blessing to your own soul. I firmly believe that God is testing and proving us by every case of sickness within our reach. By permitting suffering, He tries whether Christians have any feeling. Beware, lest you be weighed in the balances and found wanting. If you can live in a sick and dying world and not feel for others, you have yet much to learn.

I leave this branch of my subject here. I throw out the points I have named as suggestions, and I pray God that they may work in many minds. I repeat, that habitual preparedness to meet God,-habitual readiness to suffer patiently,-habitual willingness to sympathize heartily,-are plain duties which sickness entails on all. They are duties within the reach of every one. In naming them

I ask nothing extravagant or unreasonable. I bid no man retire into a monastery and ignore the duties of his station. I only want men to realize that they live in a sick and dying world, and to live accordingly. And I say boldly, that the man who lives the life of faith, and holiness, and patience, and charity, is not only the most true Christian, but the most wise and reasonable man.

And now I conclude all with four words of practical application. I want the subject of this paper to be turned to some spiritual use. My heart's desire and prayer to God in placing it in this volume is to do good to souls.

(1) In the first place, I offer a question to all who read this paper, to which, as God's ambassador, I entreat their serious attention. It is a question which grows naturally out of the subject on which I have been writing. It is a question which concerns all, of every rank, and class, and condition. I ask you, What will you do when you are ill? The time must come when you, as well as others, must go down the dark valley of the shadow of death. The hour must come when you, like all your forefathers, must sicken and die. The time may be near or far off. God only knows. But whenever the time may be, I ask again, What are you going to do? Where do you mean to turn for comfort? On what do you mean to rest your soul? On what do you mean to build your hope? From whence will you fetch your consolations?

I do entreat you not to put these questions away. Suffer them to work on your conscience, and rest not till you can give them a satisfactory answer. Trifle not with that precious gift, an immortal soul. Defer not the consideration of the matter to a more convenient season. Presume not on a death-bed repentance. The greatest business ought surely not to be left to the last. One dying thief was saved that men might not despair, but only one that none might presume. I repeat the question. I am sure it deserves an answer. "What will you do when you are ill ?"

If you were going to live for ever in this world I would not address you as I do. But it cannot be. There is no escaping the common lot of all mankind. Nobody can die in our stead. The day must come when we must each go to our long home. Against that day I want you to be prepared. The body which now takes up so much of your attention-the body which you now clothe, and feed, and warm with so much care,-that body must return again to the dust. Oh, think what an awful thing it would prove at last to have provided for everything except the one thing needful,-to have provided for the body, but to have neglected the soul,-to die, in fact, like Cardinal Beaufort, and "give no sign" of being saved! Once more I press my question on your conscience: "WHAT WILL YOU DO WHEN YOU ARE ILL?"

(2) In the next place, I offer counsel to all who feel they need it and are willing to take it, to all who feel they are not yet prepared to meet God. That counsel is short and simple. Acquaint yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ without delay. Repent, be converted, flee to Christ, and be saved.

Either you have a soul or you have not. You will surely never deny that you have. Then if you have a soul, seek that soul's salvation. Of all gambling in the world, there is none so reckless as that of the man who lives unprepared to meet God, and yet puts off repentance. Either you have sins or you have not. If you have (and who will dare to deny it?), break off from those sins, cast away your transgressions, and turn away from them with-out delay. Either you need a Saviour or you do not. If you do, flee to the only Saviour this very day, and cry mightily to Him to save your soul. Apply to Christ at once. Seek Him by faith. Commit your soul into His keeping. Cry mightily to Him for

pardon and peace with God. Ask Him to pour down the Holy Spirit upon you, and make you a thorough Christian. He will hear you. No matter what you have been, He will not refuse your prayer. He has said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37.) Beware, I beseech you, of a vague and indefinite Christianity. Be not content with a general hope that all is right because you belong to the old Church of England, and that all will be well at last because God is merciful. Rest not, rest not without personal union with Christ Himself. Rest not, rest not till you have the witness of the Spirit in your heart, that you are washed, and sanctified, and Justified, and one with Christ, and Christ in you. Rest not till you can say with the apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." (2 Timothy 1:12.)

Vague, and indefinite, and indistinct religion may do very well in time of health. It will never do in the day of sickness. A mere formal, perfunctory Church membership may carry a man through the sunshine of youth and prosperity. It will break down entirely when death is in sight. Nothing will do then but real heart-union with Christ. Christ interceding for us at God's right hand, Christ known and believed as our Priest, our Physician, our Friend, Christ alone can rob death of its sting and enable us to face sickness without fear. He alone can deliver those who through fear of death are in bondage. I say to every one who wants advice, Be acquainted with Christ. As ever you would have hope and comfort on the bed of sickness, be acquainted with Christ. Seek Christ. Apply to Christ.

Take every care and trouble to Him when you are acquainted with Him. He will keep you and carry you through all. Pour out your heart before Him, when your conscience is burdened. He is the true Confessor. He alone can absolve you and take the burden away. Turn to Him first in the day of sickness, like Martha and Mary. Keep on looking to Him to the last breath of your life. Christ is worth knowing. The more you know Him the better you will love Him. Then be acquainted with Jesus Christ.

(3) In the third place, I exhort all true Christians who read this paper to remember how much they may glorify God in the time of sickness, and to lie quite in God's hand when they are ill. I feel it very important to touch on this point. I know how ready the heart of a believer is to faint, and how busy Satan is in suggesting doubts and questionings, when the body of a Christian is weak. I have seen something of the depression and melancholy which sometimes comes upon the children of God when they are suddenly laid aside by disease, and obliged to sit still. I have marked how prone some good people are to torment themselves with morbid thoughts at such seasons, and to say in their hearts, "God has forsaken me: I am cast out of His sight."

I earnestly entreat all sick believers to remember that they may honour God as much by patient suffering as they can by active work. It often shows more grace to sit still than it does to go to and fro, and perform great exploits. I entreat them to remember that Christ cares for them as much when they are sick as He does when they are well, and that the very chastisement they feel so acutely is sent in love, and not in anger. Above all, I entreat them to recollect the sympathy of Jesus for all His weak members. They are always tenderly cared for by Him, but never so much as in their time of need. Christ has had great experience of sickness. He knows the heart of a sick man. He used to see "all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease" when He was upon earth. He felt specially for the sick in the days of His flesh. He feels for them specially still.

Sickness and suffering, I often think, make believers more like their Lord in experience, than health. "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." (Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 8:17.) The Lord Jesus was a "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." None have such an opportunity of learning the mind of a suffering Saviour as suffering disciples.

(4) I conclude with a word of exhortation to all believers, which I heartily pray God to impress upon their souls. I exhort you to keep up a habit of close communion with Christ, and never to be afraid of "going too far" in your religion. Remember this, if you wish to have "great peace" in your times of sickness.

I observe with regret a tendency in some quarters to lower the standard of practical Christianity, and to denounce what are called "extreme views" about a Christian's daily walk in life. I remark with pain that even religious people will sometimes look coldly on those who withdraw from worldly society, and will censure them as "exclusive, narrow-minded, illiberal, uncharitable, sourspirited," and the like. I warn every believer in Christ who reads this paper to beware of being influenced by such censures. I entreat him, if he wants light in the valley of death, to "keep himself unspotted from the world," to "follow the Lord very fully," and to walk very closely with God. (James 1:27; Numbers 14:24.)

I believe that the want of "thoroughness" about many people's Christianity is one secret of their little comfort, both in health and sickness. I believe that the "half-and-half,"-"keep-in-with everybody" religion, which satisfies many in the present day, is offensive to God, and sows thorns in dying pillows, which hundreds never discover till too late. I believe that the weakness and feebleness of such a religion never comes out so much as it does upon a sick bed.

If you and I want "strong consolation" in our time of need, we must not be content with a bare union with Christ. (Hebrews 6:18.) We must seek to know something of heart-felt, experimental communion with Him. Never, never let us forget, that union" is one thing, and "communion" another. Thousands, I fear, who know what "union" with Christ is, know nothing of "communion."

The day may come when after a long fight with disease, we shall feel that medicine can do no more, and that nothing remains but to die. Friends will be standing by, unable to help us. Hearing, eyesight, even the power of praying, will be fast failing us. The world and its shadows will be melting beneath our feet. Eternity, with its realities, will be looming large before our minds. What shall support us in that trying hour? What shall enable us to feel, "I fear no evil"? (Psalms 23:4.) Nothing, nothing can do it but close communion with Christ. Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith,-Christ putting His right arm under our heads,-Christ felt to be sitting by our side,-Christ can alone give us the complete victory in the last struggle.

Let us cleave to Christ more closely, love Him more heartily, live to Him more thoroughly, copy Him more exactly, confess Him more boldly, follow Him more fully. Religion like this will always bring its own reward. Worldly people may 'Laugh at it. Weak brethren may think it extreme. But it will wear well. At even time it will bring us light. In sickness it will bring us peace. In the world to come it will give us a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

The time is short. The fashion of this world passeth away. A few more sicknesses, and all will be over. A few more funerals, and our own funeral will take place. A few more storms and tossings, and we shall be safe in harbour. We travel towards a world where there is no more

sickness,-where parting, and pain, and crying, and mourning, are done with for evermore. Heaven is becoming every year more full, and earth more empty. The friends ahead are becoming more numerous than the friends astern. "Yet a little time and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Hebrews 10:37.) In His presence shall be fullness of joy. Christ shall wipe away all tears from His people's eyes. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death. But He shall be destroyed. Death himself shall one day die. (Revelation 20:14.) In the meantime let us live the life of faith in the Son of God. Let us lean all our weight on Christ and rejoice in the thought that He lives for evermore.

Yes: blessed be God! Christ lives, though we may die. Christ lives, though friends and families are carried to the grave. He lives who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel. He lives who said, "O death, I will be thy plagues: O grave, I will be thy destruction." (Hosea 13:14.) He lives who will one day change our vile body, and make it like unto His glorious body. In sickness and in health, in life and in death, let us lean confidently on Him. Surely we ought to say daily with one of old, "Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!"

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The Cross - A Call to the Fundamentals of Religion

THE CROSS: A CALL TO THE FUNDAMENTALS OF RELIGION

by J.C. (John Charles) Ryle

"By thy cross and passion, good Lord deliver us."

THE CROSS

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." — Galatians 6:14

Reader,

What do you think and feel about the cross of Christ? You live in a Christian land. You probably attend the worship of a Christian Church. You have perhaps been baptized in the name of Christ. You profess and call yourself a Christian. All this is well. It is more than can be said of millions in the world. But all this is no answer to my question, "What do you think and feel about the cross of Christ?"

I want to tell you what the greatest Christian that ever lived thought of the cross of Christ. He has written down his opinion. He has given his judgment in words that cannot be mistaken. The man I mean is the Apostle Paul. The place where you will find his opinion, is in the letter which the Holy Ghost inspired him to write to the Galatians. And the words in which his judgment is set down, are these, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now what did Paul mean by saying this? He meant to declare strongly, that he trusted in nothing but Jesus Christ crucified for the pardon of his sins and the salvation of his soul. Let others, if they would, look elsewhere for salvation. Let others, if they were so disposed, trust in other things for pardon and peace. For his part, the apostle was determined to rest on nothing, lean on nothing, build his hope on nothing, place confidence in nothing, glory in nothing, except the cross of Jesus Christ.

Reader, let me talk to you about this subject. Believe me, it is one of the deepest importance. This is no mere question of controversy. This is not one of those points on which men may agree to differ, and feel that differences will not shut them out of heaven. A man must be right on this subject, or he is lost forever. Heaven or hell, happiness or misery, life or death, blessing or cursing in the last day, —all hinges on the answer to this question, "What do you think about the cross of Christ?"

I. Let me show you what the Apostle Paul did not glory in.

II. Let me explain to you what he did glory in.

III. Let me show you why all Christians should think and feel about the cross like Paul.

I. What did the Apostle Paul not glory in?

There are many things that Paul might have gloried in, if he had thought as some do in this day. If ever there was one on earth who had something to boast of in himself, that man was the great apostle of the Gentiles. Now, if he did not dare to glory, who shall?

He never gloried in his national privileges. He was a Jew by birth, and as he tells us himself, —"An Hebrew of the Hebrews." He might have said, like many of his brethren, "I have Abraham for my forefather. I am not a dark, unenlightened heathen. I am one of the favored people of God. I have been admitted into covenant with God by circumcision. I am a far better man than the ignorant Gentiles." But he never said so. He never gloried in anything of this kind. Never for one moment!

He never gloried in his own works. None ever worked so hard for God as he did. He was more abundant in labors than any of the apostles. No living man ever preached so much, traveled so much, and endured so many hardships for Christs cause. None ever converted so many souls, did so much good to the world, and made himself so useful to mankind. No father of the early Church, no Reformer, no Missionary, no Minister, no Layman — no one man could ever be named, who did so many good works as the Apostle Paul. But did he ever glory in them, as if they were in the least meritorious, and could save his soul? Never! never for one moment!

He never gloried in his knowledge. He was a man of great gifts naturally, and after he was converted, the Holy Spirit gave him greater gifts still. He was a mighty preacher, and a mighty speaker, and a mighty writer. He was as great with his pen as he was with his tongue. He could reason equally well with Jews and Gentiles. He could argue with infidels at Corinth, or Pharisees at Jerusalem, or self-righteous people in Galatia. He knew many deep things. He had been in the third heaven, and heard unspeakable words. He had received the spirit of prophecy, and could foretell things yet to come. But did he ever glory in his knowledge, as if it could justify him before God? Never! never! never for one moment!

He never gloried in his graces. If ever there was one who abounded in graces, that man was Paul. He was full of love. How tenderly and affectionately he used to write! He could feel for souls like a mother or a nurse feeling for her child. He was a bold man. He cared not whom he opposed when truth was at stake. He cared not what risks he ran when souls were to be won. He was a self-denying man, — in hunger and thirst often, in cold and nakedness, in watchings and fastings. He was a humble man. He thought himself less than the least of all saints, and the chief of sinners. He was a prayerful man. See how it comes out at the beginning of all his Epistles. He was a thankful man. His thanksgivings and his prayers walked side by side. But he never gloried in all this, never valued himself on it, never rested his souls hopes in it. Oh! no! never for a moment!

He never gloried in his churchmanship. If ever there was a good churchman, that man was Paul. He was himself a chosen apostle. He was a founder of churches, and an ordainer of ministers. Timothy and Titus, and many elders, received their first commission from his hands. He was the beginner of services and sacraments in many a dark place. Many a one did he baptize. Many a one did he receive to the Lords table. Many a meeting for prayer, and praise, and preaching, did he begin and carry on. He was the setter up of discipline in many a young church. Whatever ordinances, and rules, and ceremonies were observed in them, were first recommended by him. But did he ever glory in his office and church standing? Does he ever speak as if his churchmanship would save him, justify him, put away his sins, and make him acceptable before God? Oh! no! never! never! never for a moment!

And now, reader, mark what I say. If the apostle Paul never gloried in any of these things, who in all the world, from one end to the other, has any right to glory in them in our day? If Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory in anything whatever except the cross," who shall dare to say, "I have something to glory of — I am a better man than Paul?"

Who is there among the readers of this tract, that trusts in any goodness of his own? Who is there that is resting on his own amendments, his own morality, his own performances of any kind whatever? Who is there that is leaning the weight of his soul on anything whatever of his own in the smallest possible degree? Learn, I say, that you are very unlike the Apostle Paul. Learn that your religion is not apostolical religion.

Who is there among the readers of this tract that trusts in his churchmanship for salvation? Who is there that is valuing himself on his baptism, or his attendance at the Lords table — his church-going on Sundays, or his daily services during the week — and saying to himself, What lack I yet? Learn, I say, this day, that you are very unlike Paul. Your Christianity is not the Christianity of the New Testament. Paul would not glory in anything but the cross. Neither ought you.

Oh! reader, beware of self-righteousness. Open sin kills its thousands of souls. Self-righteousness kills its tens of thousands. Go and study humility with the great apostle of the Gentiles. Go and sit with Paul at the foot of the cross. Give up your secret pride. Cast away your vain ideas of your own goodness. Be thankful if you have grace, but never glory in it for a moment. Work for God and Christ with heart and soul, and mind and strength, but never dream for a second of placing confidence in any work of your own.

Think, you who take comfort in some fancied ideas of your own goodness — think, you who wrap up yourselves in the notion, "all must be right, if I keep to my church," — think for a moment what a sandy foundation your are building upon! Think for a moment how miserably defective your hopes and pleas will look in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment! Whatever men may say of their own goodness while they are strong and healthy, they will find but little to say of it, when they are sick and dying. Whatever merit they may see in their own works here in this world, they will discover none in them when they stand before the bar of Christ. The light of that great day of assize will make a wonderful difference in the appearance of all their doings. It will strip off the tinsel, shrivel up the complexion, expose the rottenness, of many a deed that is now called good. Their wheat will prove nothing but chaff. Their gold will be found nothing but dross. Millions of so-called Christian actions, will turn out to have been utterly defective and graceless. They passed current, and were valued among men. They will prove light and worthless in the balance of God. They will be found to have been like the whitened sepulchres of old, fair and beautiful without, but full of corruption within. Alas! for the man who can look forward to the day of judgment, and lean his soul in the smallest degree on anything of his own!

Reader, once more I say, beware of self-righteousness in every possible shape and form. Some people get as much harm from their fancied virtues as others do from their sins. Take heed, lest you be one. Rest not, rest not till your heart beats in tune with St. Pauls. Rest not till you can say with him, "God forbid that I should glory in anything but the cross."

II. Let me explain, in the second place, what you are to understand by the cross of Christ.

The cross is an expression that is used in more than one meaning in the Bible. What did St. Paul mean when he said, "I glory in the cross of Christ," in the Epistle to the Galatians? This is the point I now wish to make clear. The cross sometimes means that wooden cross, on which the Lord Jesus was nailed and put to death on Mount Calvary. This is what St. Paul had in his mind's eye, when he told the Philippians that Christ "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Php_2:8). This is not the cross in which St. Paul gloried. He would have shrunk with horror from the idea of glorying in a mere piece of wood. I have no doubt he would have denounced the Roman Catholic adoration of the crucifix, as profane, blasphemous, and idolatrous.

The cross sometimes means the afflictions and trials which believers in Christ have to go through if they follow Christ faithfully, for their religion's sake. This is the sense in which our Lord uses the word when He says, "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, cannot be my disciple" (Matthew 10:38). This also is not the sense in which Paul uses the word when he writes to the Galatians. He knew that cross well. He carried it patiently. But he is not speaking of it here.

But the cross also means in some places the doctrine that Christ died for sinners upon the cross — the atonement that He made for sinners by his suffering for them on the cross — the complete and perfect sacrifice for sin which He offered up when he gave His own body to be crucified. In short, this one word, — the cross, — stands for Christ crucified, the only Saviour. This is the meaning in which Paul uses the expression, when he tells the Corinthians, "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:18). This is the meaning in which he wrote to the Galatians, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross." He simply meant, "I glory in nothing but Christ crucified, as the salvation of my soul." [2] ("fn2")

Jesus Christ crucified was the joy and delight, the comfort and the peace, the hope and the confidence, the foundation and the resting place, the ark, and the refuge, the food and the medicine of Paul's soul. He did not think of what he had done himself, and suffered himself. He did not meditate on his own goodness, and his own righteousness. He loved to think of what Christ had done, and Christ had suffered, — of the death of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the atonement of Christ, the blood of Christ, the finished work of Christ. In this he did glory. This was the sun of his soul.

This is the subject he loved to preach about. He was a man who went to and fro on the earth, proclaiming to sinners that the Son of God had shed His own heart's blood to save their souls. He walked up and down the world, telling people that Jesus Christ had loved them, and died for their sins upon the cross. Mark how he says to the Corinthians, "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3). "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). He, a blaspheming, persecuting Pharisee, had been washed in Christ's blood. He could not hold his peace about it. He was never weary of telling the story of the cross. This is the subject he loved to dwell upon when he wrote to believers. It is wonderful to observe how full his epistles generally are of the sufferings and death of Christ, — how they run over with "thoughts that breathe, and words that burn," about Christ's dying love and power. His heart seems full of the subject. He enlarges on it constantly. He returns to it continually. It is the golden thread that runs through all his doctrinal teaching and practical exhortations. He seems to think that the most advanced Christian can never hear too much about the cross. [3] ("fn3") This is what he lived upon all his life, from the time of

his conversion. He tells the Galatians, "The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). What made him so strong to labor? What made him so willing to work? What made him so unwearied in endeavors to save some? What made him so persevering and patient? I will tell you the secret of it all. He was always feeding by faith on Christ's body and Christ's blood. Jesus, crucified, was the meat and drink of his soul.

And, reader, you may rest assured that Paul was right. Depend upon it, the cross of Christ, — the death of Christ on the cross to make atonement for sinners, — is the center truth in the whole Bible. This is the truth we begin with when we open Genesis. The seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head, is nothing else but a prophecy of Christ crucified. This is the truth that shines out, though veiled, all through the law of Moses and the history of the Jews. The daily sacrifice, the passover lamb, the continual shedding of blood in the tabernacle and temple, — all these were emblems of Christ crucified. This is the truth that we see honored in the vision of heaven before we close the book of Revelation. "In the midst of the throne and of the four beasts," we are told, "and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as it had been slain" (Revelation 5:6). Even in the midst of heavenly glory we get a view of Christ crucified. Take away the cross of Christ, and the Bible is a dark book. It is like the Egyptian hieroglyphics, without the key that interprets their meaning, — curious and wonderful, but of no real use.

Reader, mark what I say. You may know a good deal about the Bible. You may know the outlines of the histories it contains, and the dates of the events described, just as a man knows the history of England. You may know the names of the men and women mentioned in it, just as a man knows Caesar, Alexander the Great, or Napoleon. You may know the several precepts of the Bible, and admire them, just as a man admires Plato, Aristotle, or Seneca. But if you have not yet found out that Christ crucified is the foundation of the whole volume, you have read your Bible hitherto to very little profit. Your religion is a heaven without a sun, an arch without a keystone, a compass without a needle, a clock without spring or weights, a lamp without oil. It will not comfort you. It will not deliver your soul from hell.

Reader, mark what I say again. You may know a good deal about Christ, by a kind of head knowledge, as the dead Oriental churches know the facts of Christianity as well as we do. You may know who Christ was, and where He was born, and what He did. You may know His miracles, His sayings, His prophecies, and His ordinances. You may know how He lived, and how He suffered, and how He died. But unless you know the power of Christ's cross by experience — unless you have reason to know that the blood shed on that cross has washed away your own particular sins, — unless you are willing to confess that your salvation depends entirely on the work that Christ did upon the cross, — unless this be the case, Christ will profit you nothing. The mere knowing Christ's name will never save you. You must know His cross, and His blood, or else you will die in your sins.[4]("\ "fn4")

Reader, as long as you live, beware of a religion in which there is not much of the cross. You live in times when the warning is sadly needful. Beware, I say again, of a religion without the cross.

There are hundreds of places of worship, in this day, in which there is every thing almost except the cross. There is carved oak and sculptured stone. There is stained glass and brilliant painting. There are solemn services and a constant round of ordinances. But the real cross of Christ is not

there. Jesus crucified is not proclaimed in the pulpit. The Lamb of God is not lifted up, and salvation by faith in him is not freely proclaimed. And hence all is wrong. Beware of such places of worship. They are not apostolical. They would not have satisfied St. Paul.[5](("\ "fn5"))

There are thousands of religious books published in our times, in which there is everything except the cross. They are full of directions about sacraments and praises of the church. They abound in exhortations about holy living, and rules for the attainment of perfection. They have plenty of fonts and crosses both inside and outside. But the real cross of Christ is left out. The Saviour and His dying love are either not mentioned, or mentioned in an unscriptural way. And hence they are worse than useless. Beware of such books. They are not apostolical. They would never have satisfied St. Paul.

Dear reader, remember that St. Paul gloried in nothing but the cross. Strive to be like him. Set Jesus crucified fully before the eyes of your soul. Listen not to any teaching which would interpose anything between you and Him. Do not fall into the old Galatian error. Think not that any one in this day is a better guide than the apostles. Do not be ashamed of the old paths, in which men walked who were inspired by the Holy Ghost. Let not the vague talk of men who speak great swelling words about catholicity, and the church, and the ministry, disturb your peace, and make you loose your hands from the cross. Churches, ministers, and sacraments, are all useful in their way, but they are not Christ crucified. Do not give Christs honor to another. "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

III. Let me show you why all Christians ought to glory in the cross of Christ.

I feel that I must say something on this point, because of the ignorance that prevails about it. I suspect that many see no peculiar glory and beauty in the subject of Christs cross. On the contrary, they think it painful, humbling, and degrading. They do not see much profit in the story of His death and sufferings. They rather turn from it as an unpleasant thing.

Now I believe that such persons are quite wrong. I cannot hold with them. I believe it is an excellent thing for us all to be continually dwelling on the cross of Christ. It is a good thing to be often reminded how Jesus was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, how they condemned Him with most unjust judgment, how they spit on Him, scourged Him, beat Him, and crowned Him with thorns; how they led Him forth as a lamb to the slaughter, without His murmuring or resisting; how they drove the nails through His hands and feet, and set Him up on Calvary between two thieves; how they pierced His side with a spear, mocked Him in His sufferings, and let Him hang there naked and bleeding till He died. Of all these things, I say, it is good to be reminded. It is not for nothing that the crucifixion is described four times over in the New Testament. There are very few things that all the four writers of the Gospel describe. Generally speaking, if Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell a thing in our Lords history, John does not tell it. But there is one thing that all the four give us most fully, and that one thing is the story of the cross. This is a telling fact, and not to be overlooked.

Men forget that all Christs sufferings on the cross were fore-ordained. They did not come on Him by chance or accident. They were all planned, counselled, and determined from all eternity. The cross was foreseen in all the provisions of the everlasting Trinity, for the salvation of sinners. In the purposes of God the cross was set up from everlasting. Not one throb of pain did Jesus feel, not

one precious drop of blood did Jesus shed, which had not been appointed long ago. Infinite wisdom planned that redemption should be by the cross. Infinite wisdom brought Jesus to the Cross in due time. He was crucified by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

Men forget that all Christs sufferings on the cross were necessary for mans salvation. He had to bear our sins, if ever they were to be borne at all. With His stripes alone could we be healed. This was the one payment of our debt that God would accept. This was the great sacrifice on which our eternal life depended. If Christ had not gone to the cross and suffered in our stead, the just for the unjust, there would not have been a spark of hope for us. There would have been a mighty gulf between ourselves and God, which no man ever could have passed.[6](("\ "fn6"))

Men forget that all Christs sufferings were endured voluntarily and of His own free will. He was under no compulsion. Of His own choice He laid down His life. Of His own choice He went to the cross to finish the work He came to do. He might easily have summoned legions of angels with a word, and scattered Pilate and Herod and all their armies, like chaff before the wind. But he was a willing sufferer. His heart was set on the salvation of sinners. He was resolved to open a fountain for all sin and uncleanness, by shedding His own blood.

Now, when I think of all this, I see nothing painful or disagreeable in the subject of Christs cross. On the contrary, I see in it wisdom and power, peace and hope, joy and gladness, comfort and consolation. The more I look at the cross in my minds eye, the more fulness I seem to discern in it. The longer I dwell on the cross in my thoughts, the more I am satisfied that there is more to be learned at the foot of the cross than anywhere else in the world.

Would I know the length and breadth of God the Fathers love towards a sinful world? Where shall I see it most displayed? Shall I look at His glorious sun shining down daily on the unthankful and evil? Shall I look at seed- time and harvest returning in regular yearly succession? Oh! no! I can find a stronger proof of love than anything of this sort. I look at the cross of Christ. I see in it not the cause of the Fathers love, but the effect. There I see that God so loved this wicked world, that He gave His only begotten Son — gave Him to suffer and die — that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. I know that the Father loves us because He did not withhold from us His Son, His only Son. Ah! reader, I might sometimes fancy that God the Father is too high and holy to care for such miserable, corrupt creatures as we are. But I cannot, must not, dare not think it, when I look at the cross of Christ.[7](("\ "fn7"))

Would I know how exceedingly sinful and abominable sin is in the sight of God? Where shall I see that most fully brought out? Shall I turn to the history of the flood, and read how sin drowned the world? Shall I go to the shore of the Dead Sea, and mark what sin brought on Sodom and Gomorrah? Shall I turn to the wandering Jews, and observe how sin has scattered them over the face of the earth? No! I can find a clearer proof still. I look at the cross of Christ. There I see that sin is so black and damnable, that nothing but the blood of Gods own Son can wash it away. There I see that sin has so separated me from my holy Maker, that all the angels in heaven could never have made peace between us. Nothing could reconcile us short of the death of Christ. Ah! if I listened to the wretched talk of proud men, I might sometimes fancy sin was not so very sinful. But I cannot think little of sin, when I look at the cross of Christ.[8](("\ "fn8"))

Would I know the fulness and completeness of the salvation God has provided for sinners? Where shall I see it most distinctly? Shall I go to the general declarations in the Bible about Gods mercy? Shall I rest in the general truth that God is a God of love? Oh! no! I will look at the cross of Christ. I find no evidence like that. I find no balm for a sore conscience, and a troubled heart, like the sight of Jesus dying for me on the accursed tree. There I see that a full payment has been made for all my enormous debts. The curse of that law which I have broken has come down on One who there suffered in my stead. The demands of that law are all satisfied. Payment has been made for me, even to the uttermost farthing. It will not be required twice over. Ah! I might sometimes imagine I was too bad to be forgiven. My own heart sometimes whispers that I am too wicked to be saved. But I know in my better moments this is all my foolish unbelief. I read an answer to my doubts in the blood shed on Calvary. I feel sure that there is a way to heaven for the very vilest of men, when I look at the cross. Would I find strong reasons for being a holy man? Whither shall I turn for them? Shall I listen to the ten commandments merely? Shall I study the examples given me in the Bible of what grace can do? Shall I meditate on the rewards of heaven, and the punishments of hell? Is there no stronger motive still? Yes! I will look at the cross of Christ. There I see the love of Christ constraining me to live not unto myself, but unto Him. There I see that I am not my own now; — I am bought with a price. I am bound by the most solemn obligations to glorify Jesus with body and spirit, which are His. There I see that Jesus gave Himself for me, not only to redeem me from all iniquity, but also to purify me and make me one of a peculiar people, zealous of good works. He bore my sins in His own body on the tree, that I being dead unto sin should live unto righteousness. Ah! reader, there is nothing so sanctifying as a clear view of the cross of Christ! It crucifies the world unto us, and us unto the world. How can we love sin when we remember that because of our sins Jesus died? Surely none ought to be so holy as the disciples of a crucified Lord.

Would I learn how to be contented and cheerful under all the cares and anxieties of life? What school shall I go to? How shall I attain this state of mind most easily? Shall I look at the sovereignty of God, the wisdom of God, the providence of God, the love of God? It is well to do so. But I have a better argument still. I will look at the cross of Christ. I feel that He who spared not His only begotten Son, but delivered Him up to die for me will surely with Him give me all things that I really need. He that endured that pain for my soul, will surely not withhold from me anything that is really good. He that has done the greater things for me, will doubtless do the lesser things also. He that gave His own blood to procure me a home, will unquestionably supply me with all really profitable for me by the way. Ah! reader, there is no school for learning contentment that can be compared with the foot of the cross.

Would I gather arguments for hoping that I shall never be cast away? Where shall I go to find them? Shall I look at my own graces and gifts? Shall I take comfort in my own faith, and love, and penitence, and zeal, and prayer? Shall I turn to my own heart, and say, "This same heart will never be false and cold?" Oh! no! God forbid! I will look at the cross of Christ. This is my grand argument. This is my main stay. I cannot think that He who went through such sufferings to redeem my soul, will let that soul perish after all, when it has once cast itself on Him. Oh! no! what Jesus paid for, Jesus will surely keep. He paid dearly for it. He will not let it easily be lost. He died for me when I was yet a dark sinner. Ah! reader, when Satan tempts you to doubt whether Christ is able to keep his people from falling, bid Satan look at the cross.

And now, reader, will you marvel that I said all Christians ought to glory in the cross? Will you not rather wonder that any can hear of the cross and remain unmoved? I declare I know not greater proof of mans depravity, than the fact that thousands of so-called Christians see nothing in the cross. Well may our hearts be called stony, — well may the eyes of our mind be called blind, — well may our whole nature be called diseased, — well may we all be called dead, when the cross of Christ is heard of, and yet neglected. Surely we may take up the words of the prophet, and say, "Hear O heavens, and be astonished O earth; a wonderful and a horrible thing is done," — Christ was crucified for sinners, and yet many Christians live as if He was never crucified at all! Reader, the cross is the grand peculiarity of the Christian religion. Other religions have laws and moral precepts, — forms and ceremonies, — rewards and punishments. But other religions cannot tell us of a dying Saviour. They cannot show us the cross. This is the crown and glory of the Gospel. This is that special comfort which belongs to it alone. Miserable indeed is that religious teaching which calls itself Christian, and yet contains nothing of the cross. A man who teaches in this way, might as well profess to explain the solar system, and yet tell his hearers nothing about the sun.

The cross is the strength of a minister. I for one would not be without it for all the world. I should feel like a soldier without arms, — like an artist without his pencil, — like a pilot without his compass, — like a laborer without his tools. Let others, if they will, preach the law and morality. Let others hold forth the terrors of hell and the joys of heaven. Let others be ever pressing upon their congregations the sacraments of the church. Give me the cross of Christ. This is the only lever which has ever turned the world upside down hitherto, and made men forsake their sins. And if this will not, nothing will. A man may begin preaching with a perfect knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew. But he will do little or no good among his hearers unless he knows something of the cross. Never was there a minister who did much for the conversion of souls who did not dwell much on Christ crucified. Luther, Rutherford, Whitfield, Cecil, Simeon, Venn, were all most eminently preachers of the cross. This is the preaching that the Holy Ghost delights to bless. He loves to honor those who honor the cross.

The cross is the secret of all missionary success. Nothing but this has ever moved the hearts of the heathen. Just according as this has been lifted up missions have prospered. This is the weapon that has won victories over hearts of every kind, in every quarter of the globe. Greenlanders, Africans, South-Sea Islanders, Hindus, Chinese, all have alike felt its power. Just as that huge iron tube which crosses the Menai Straits, is more affected and bent by half an hours sunshine than by all the dead weight that can be placed in it, so in like manner the hearts of savages have melted before the cross when every other argument seemed to move them no more than stones. "Brethren," said a North American Indian after his conversion, "I have been a heathen. I know how heathens think. Once a preacher came and began to explain to us that there was a God; but we told him to return to the place from whence he came. Another preacher came and told us not to lie, nor steal, nor drink; but we did not heed him. At last another came into my hut one day and said, I am come to you in the name of the Lord of heaven and earth. He sends to let you know that He will make you happy, and deliver you from misery. For this end he became a man, gave his life a ransom, and shed his blood for sinners. I could not forget his words. I told them to the other Indians, and an awakening begun among us. I say, therefore, preach the sufferings and death of Christ, our Saviour, if you wish your words to gain entrance among the heathen." Never indeed did the devil triumph so thoroughly, as when he persuaded the Jesuit

missionaries in China to keep back the story of the cross!

The cross is the foundation of a church's prosperity. No church will ever be honored in which Christ crucified is not continually lifted up. Nothing whatever can make up for the want of the cross. Without it all things may be done decently and in order. Without it there may be splendid ceremonies, charming music, gorgeous churches, learned ministers, crowded communion tables, huge collections for the poor. But without the cross no good will be done. Dark hearts will not be enlightened. Proud hearts will not be humbled. Mourning hearts will not be comforted. Fainting hearts will not be cheered. Sermons about the Catholic Church and an apostolic ministry, — sermons about baptism and the Lord's supper, — sermons about unity and schism, — sermons about fast and communion, — sermons about fathers and saints, — such sermons will never make up for the absence of sermons about the cross of Christ. They may amuse some. They will feed none. A gorgeous banqueting room and splendid gold plate on the table will never make up to a hungry man for the want of food. Christ crucified is God's grand ordinance for doing good to men. Whenever a church keeps back Christ crucified, or puts anything whatever in that foremost place which Christ crucified should always have, from that moment a church ceases to be useful. Without Christ crucified in her pulpits, a church is little better than a cumberer of the ground, a dead carcass, a well without water, a barren fig tree, a sleeping watchman, a silent trumpet, a dumb witness, an ambassador without terms of peace, a messenger without tidings, a lighthouse without fire, a stumbling-block to weak believers, a comfort to infidels, a hot-bed for formalism, a joy to the devil, and an offence to God. The cross is the grand center of union among true Christians. Our outward differences are many without doubt. And what may be the importance of those differences which now in a measure divide such as faithfully hold the head, even Christ, we cannot here enquire. But, after all, what shall we hear about most of these differences in heaven? Nothing most probably: nothing at all. Does a man really and sincerely glory in the cross of Christ? That is the grand question. If he does he is my brother; we are travelling in the same road. We are journeying towards a home where Christ is all, and everything outward in religion will be forgotten. But if he does not glory in the cross of Christ, I cannot feel comfort about him. Union on outward points only is union only for time. Union about the cross is union for eternity. Error on outward points is only a skin-deep disease. Error about the cross is disease at the heart. Union about outward points is a mere man-made union. Union about the cross of Christ can only be produced by the Holy Ghost.

Reader, I know not what you think of all this. I feel as if I had said nothing compared to what might be said. I feel as if the half of what I desire to tell you about the cross were left untold. But I do hope that I have given you something to think about. I do trust that I have shown you that I have reason for the question with which I began this tract, "What do you think and feel about the cross of Christ?" Listen to me now for a few moments, while I say something to apply the whole subject to your conscience.

Are you living in any kind of sin? Are you following the course of this world, and neglecting your soul? Hear, I beseech you, what I say to you this day: "Behold the cross of Christ." See there how Jesus loved you! See there what Jesus suffered to prepare for you a way of salvation! Yes! careless men and women, for you that blood was shed! For you those hands and feet were pierced with nails! For you that body hung in agony on the cross! You are those whom Jesus loved, and for whom He died! Surely that love ought to melt you. Surely the thought of the cross

should draw you to repentance. Oh! that it might be so this very day. Oh! that you would come at once to that Saviour who died for you and is willing to save. Come and cry to Him with the prayer of faith, and I know that He will listen. Come and lay hold upon the cross, and I know that He will not cast you out. Come and believe on Him who died on the cross, and this very day you will have eternal life. How will you ever escape if you neglect so great salvation? None surely will be so deep in hell as those who despise the cross!

Are you inquiring the way toward Heaven? Are you seeking salvation but doubtful whether you can find it? Are you desiring to have an interest in Christ but doubting whether Christ will receive you? To you also I say this day, "Behold the cross of Christ." Here is encouragement if you really want it. Draw near to the Lord Jesus with boldness, for nothing need keep you back. His arms are open to receive you. His heart is full of love towards you. He has made a way by which you may approach Him with confidence. Think of the cross. Draw near, and fear not. Are you an unlearned man? Are you desirous to get to heaven and yet perplexed and brought to a stand-still by difficulties in the Bible which you cannot explain? To you also I say this day, "Behold the cross of Christ." Read there the Fathers love and the Sons compassion. Surely they are written in great plain letters, which none can well mistake. What though at present you cannot reconcile your own corruption and your own responsibility? Look, I say, at the cross. Does not that cross tell you that Jesus is a mighty, loving, ready Saviour? Does it not make one thing plain, and that is that if not saved it is all your own fault? Oh! get hold of that truth, and hold it fast.

Are you a distressed believer? Is your heart pressed down with sickness, tired with disappointments, overburdened with cares? To you also I say this day, "Behold the cross of Christ." Think whose hand it is that chastens you. Think whose hand is measuring to you the cup of bitterness which you are now drinking. It is the hand of Him that was crucified. It is the same hand that in love to your soul was nailed to the accursed tree. Surely that thought should comfort and hearten you. Surely you should say to yourself, "A crucified Saviour will never lay upon me anything that is not for my good. There is a needs be. It must be well."

Are you a believer that longs to be more holy? Are you one that finds his heart too ready to love earthly things? To you also I say, "Behold the cross of Christ." Look at the cross. Think of the cross. Meditate on the cross, and then go and set affections on the world if you can. I believe that holiness is nowhere learned so well as on Calvary. I believe you cannot look much at the cross without feeling your will sanctified, and your tastes made more spiritual. As the sun gazed upon makes everything else look dark and dim, so does the cross darken the false splendor of this world. As honey tasted makes all other things seem to have no taste at all, so does the cross seen by faith take all the sweetness out of the pleasures of the world. Keep on every day steadily looking at the cross of Christ, and you will soon say of the world as the poet does, —

Its pleasures now no longer please,
No more content afford;
Far from my heart be joys like these,
Now I have seen the Lord.
As by the light of opening day

The stars are all conceald,
So earthly pleasures fade away
When Jesus is reveald.

Are you a dying believer? Have you gone to that bed from which something within tells you you will never come down alive? Are you drawing near to that solemn hour when soul and body must part for a season, and you must launch into a world unknown? Oh! look steadily at the cross of Christ, and you shall be kept in peace. Fix the eyes of your mind firmly on Jesus crucified, and he shall deliver you from all your fears. Though you walk through dark places, He will be with you. He will never leave you, never forsake you. Sit under the shadow of the cross to the very last, and its fruit shall be sweet to your taste. "Ah!" said a dying missionary, "there is but one thing needful on a death-bed, and that is to feel ones arms round the cross."

Reader, I lay these thoughts before your mind. What you think now about the cross of Christ I cannot tell; but I can wish you nothing better than this, that you may be able to say with the apostle Paul, before you die or meet the Lord, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Notes

[1](("\ "1") "Howsoever men when they sit at ease, do vainly tickle their own hearts with the wanton conceit of I know not what proportionable correspondence between their merits and their rewards, which in the trance of their high speculations, they dream that God hath measured and laid up as it were in bundles for them; we see notwithstanding by daily experience, in a number even of them that when the hour of death approacheth, when they secretly hear themselves summoned to appear and stand at the bar of that Judge, whose brightness causeth the eyes of angels themselves to dazzle, all those idle imaginations do then begin to hide their faces. To name merits then, is to lay their souls upon the rack. The memory of their own deeds is loathsome unto them. They forsake all things wherein they have put any trust and confidence. No staff to lean upon, no rest, no ease, no comfort then, but only in Christ Jesus." — Richard Hooker.

[2](("\ "2") "By the cross of Christ the apostle understandeth the all-sufficient, expiatory, and satisfactory sacrifice of Christ upon the cross, with the whole work of our redemption: in the saving knowledge of, whereof he professeth he will glory and boast." — Cudworth on Galatians.

"Touching these words, I do not find that any expositor, either ancient or modern, Popish or Protestant, writing on this place, doth expound the cross here mentioned of the sign of the cross, but of the profession of faith in Him that was hanged on the cross." — Mayers Commentary.

"This is rather to be understood of the cross which Christ suffered for us, than of that we suffer for Him." — Leighs Annotations.

[3](("\ "3") "Christ crucified is the sum of the Gospel, and contains all the riches of it. Paul was so much taken with Christ that nothing sweeter than Jesus could drop from his pen and lips. It is observed that he hath the word Jesus five hundred times in his Epistles." — Charnock.

[4]("\ "4") "If our faith stop in Christs life, and do not fasten upon his blood, it will not be a justifying faith. His miracles which prepared the world for his doctrines; his holiness, which fitted himself for his sufferings, had been insufficient for us without the addition of the cross." — Charnock.

[5]("\ "5") "Paul determined to know nothing else but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. But many manage the ministry as if they had taken up a contrary determination, even to know anything save Jesus Christ and him crucified." — Traill.

[6]("\ "6") "In Christs humiliation stands our exaltation; in his weakness stands our strength; in his ignominy our glory; in his death our life." — Cudworth.

"The eye of faith regards Christ sitting on the summit of the cross, as in a triumphal chariot; the devil bound to the lowest part of the same cross, and trodden under the feet of Christ." — Bishop Davenant on Colossians.

[7]("\ "7") "The world we live in had fallen upon our heads, had it not been upheld by the pillar of the cross; had not Christ stepped in and promised a satisfaction for the sin of man. By this all things consist: not a blessing we enjoy but may put us in mind of it; they were all forfeited by sin, but merited by his blood. If we study it well we shall be sensible how God hated sin and loved a world. " — Charnock.

[8]("\ "8") "If God hateth sin so much that he would allow neither man nor angel for the redemption thereof, but only the death of his only and well-beloved Son, who will not stand in fear thereof?" — Homily for Good Friday.

The Danger of Christian Complacency

The Danger of

Christian Complacency

by J. C. Ryle

The times require distinct and decided views of Christian doctrine. I cannot withhold my conviction that the professing Church is as much damaged by laxity and indistinctness about matters of doctrine within, as it is by skeptics and unbelievers without. Myriads of professing Christians nowadays seem utterly unable to distinguish things that differ. Like people afflicted with color-blindness, they are incapable of discerning what is true and what is false, what is sound and what is unsound. If a preacher of religion is only clever and eloquent and earnest, they appear to think he is all right, however strange and heterogeneous his sermons may be. They are destitute of spiritual sense, apparently, and cannot detect error. The only positive thing about them is that they dislike distinctiveness and think all extreme and decided and positive views are very naughty and very wrong!

These people live in a kind of mist or fog. They see things unclearly, and do not know what they believe. They have not made up their minds about any great point in the Gospel, and seem content to be honorary members of all schools of thought. For their lives they could not tell you what they think is truth about justification, or regeneration, or sanctification, or the Lord's Supper, or baptism, or faith or conversion, or inspiration, or the future state. They are eaten up with a morbid dread of controversy and an ignorant dislike of party spirit; and yet they really cannot define what they mean by these phrases. And so they live on undecided; and too often undecided; they drift down to the grave, without comfort in their religion, and, I am afraid, often without hope.

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

Now I do beseech all to beware of this undecided state of mind in religion. It is a pestilence which walketh in darkness, and a destruction that wasteth at noonday. It is a lazy, idle frame of soul which, doubtless, saves man the trouble of thought and investigation but it is a frame of soul for which there is no warrant in the Bible. For your own soul's sake, dare to make up your mind what you believe, and dare to have positive, distinct views of truth and error. Never, never be afraid to

hold decided doctrinal opinions; and let no fear of man and no morbid dread of being thought party-spirited, narrow, or controversial, make you rest contented with a bloodless, boneless, tasteless, colorless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity.

Mark what I say. If you want to do good in these times, you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply-cut, doctrinal religion. If you believe little, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology; by telling men roundly of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice; by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross, and His precious blood; by teaching them justification by faith, and bidding them believe on a crucified Savior; by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit; by lifting up the brazen serpent; by telling them to look and live—to believe, repent, and be converted. This—this is the only teaching which for centuries God had honored with success, and is honoring at the present day both at home and abroad.

It is doctrine—doctrine, clear, ringing doctrine which, like the ram's horn at Jericho casts down the opposition of the devil and sin. Let us cling to decided doctrinal views, whatever some may please to say in these times, and we shall do well for ourselves, well for others, and well for Christ's cause in the world.

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The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper

by J. C. Ryle("../index.htm")

"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" — 1 Corinthians 11:28

The words which form the title of this paper refer to the subject of vast importance. That subject is the Lord's Supper.

Perhaps no part of the Christian religion is so thoroughly misunderstood as the Lord's Supper. On no point have there been so many disputes, strifes, and controversies for almost 1800 years. On no point have mistakes done so much harm. The very ordinance which was meant for our peace and profit has become the cause of discord and the occasion of sin. These things ought not to be!

I make no excuse for including the Lord's Supper among the leading points of "practical" Christianity. I firmly believe that ignorant views or false doctrine about this ordinance lie at the root of some of the present divisions of professing Christians. Some neglect it altogether; some completely misunderstand it; some exalt it to a position it was never meant to occupy, and turn it into an idol. If I can throw a little light on it, and clear up the doubts in some minds, I will feel very thankful. It is hopeless, I fear, to expect that the controversy about the Lord's Supper will ever be finally closed until the Lord comes. But it is not too much to hope that the fog and mystery and obscurity with which it is surrounded in some minds, may be cleared away by plain Bible truth.

In examining the Lord's Supper I will be content with asking four practical questions, and offering answers to them.

Why was the Lord's Supper ordained?

Who ought to go to the Table and be communicants?

What may communicants expect from the Lord's Supper?

Why do many so-called Christians (church-going unbelievers) never go to the Lord's Table?

I think it will be impossible to handle these four questions fairly, honestly, and impartially, without seeing the subject of this paper more clearly, and getting some distinct and practical ideas about some leading errors of our day. I say "practical" emphatically. My chief aim in this volume is to promote practical Christianity.

In the first place, "why was the Lord's Supper ordained?"

It was ordained for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we thereby receive. The bread which in the Lord's Supper is broken, given, and eaten, is meant to remind us of Christ's body given on the cross for our sins. The wine which is

poured out and received, is meant to remind us of Christ's blood shed on the cross for our sins. He that eats that bread and drinks that wine is reminded, in the most striking and forcible manner, of the benefits Christ has obtained for his soul, and of the death of Christ as the hinge and turning point on which all those benefits depend.

Now, is the view here stated the doctrine of the New Testament? If it is not, forever let it be rejected, cast aside, and refused by men. If it is, let us never be ashamed to hold it close, profess our belief in it, pin our faith on it, and steadfastly refuse to hold any other view, no matter who teaches it. In subjects like this we must call no man master. It matters little what great theologians and learned preachers have thought fit to put forth about the Lord's Supper. If they teach more than the Word of God contains they are not to be believed.

I take down my Bible and turn to the New Testament. There I find no less than four separate accounts of the first appointment of the Lord's Supper. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul, all four describe it: all four agree in telling us what our Lord did on this memorable occasion. Only two tell us the reason why our Lord commanded that His disciples were to eat the bread and drink the cup. Paul and Luke both record the remarkable words, "Do this in remembrance of me." Paul adds his own inspired comment: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:25-26). When Scripture speaks so clearly, why can't men be content with it? Why should we mystify and confuse a subject which in the New Testament is so simple? The "continual remembrance of Christ's death" was the one grand object for which the Lord's Supper was ordained. He that goes further than this is adding to God's Word, and does so to the great peril of his soul.

Now, is it reasonable to suppose that our Lord would appoint an ordinance for so simple a purpose as "remembering His death?" It most certainly is. Of all the facts in His earthly ministry none are equal in importance to that of His death. It was the great settlement for man's sin, which had been appointed in God's promise from the foundation of the world. It was the great redemption of almighty power, to which every sacrifice of animals, from the fall of man, continually pointed. It was the grand end and purpose for which the Messiah came into the world. It was the cornerstone and foundation of all man's hopes of pardon and peace with God. In short, Christ would have lived, and taught, and preached, and prophesied, and performed miracles in vain, if He had not "crowned it all by dying for our sins as our Substitute on the Cross!" His death was our life. His death was the payment of our debt to God. Without His death we would have been the most miserable of all creatures. No wonder that an ordinance was specially appointed to remind us of our Savior's death. It is the one thing which poor, weak, sinful man needs to be continually reminded.

Does the New Testament authorize men to say that the Lord's Supper was ordained to be a sacrifice, and that in it Christ's literal body and blood are present under the forms of bread and wine? Most certainly not! When the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "This is my Body," and "this is my Blood," He clearly meant, "This bread in my hand is an symbol of my Body, and this cup of wine in my hand contains a symbol of my Blood." The disciples were accustomed to hear Him use such language. They remembered His saying, "The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one" (Matthew 13:38). It never entered into their minds that He meant to say He was holding His own body and His own blood in His hands, and literally giving them His literal body and blood to eat and drink. Not one of the

writers of the New Testament ever speaks of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice, or calls the Lord's Table an altar, or even hints that a Christian minister is a sacrificing priest. The universal doctrine of the New Testament is that after the one offering of Christ there remains no more need of sacrifice.

If any one believes that Paul's words to the Hebrews, "We have an altar" (Hebrews 13:10), are a proof that the Lord's table is an altar, I remind him "Christians have an altar where they partake. That altar is Christ our Lord, who is Altar, Priest, and Sacrifice, all in One."

Throughout the Communion Service the one idea of the ordinance continually pressed on our attention is that of a "remembrance" of Christ's death. As to any presence of Christ's natural body and blood under the forms of bread and wine, the clear answer is that "the natural body and blood of Christ are in heaven, and not here." Those Roman Catholics who delight in talking of the "altar," the "sacrifice," the "priest," and the "real presence" in the Lord's Supper, would do well to remember that they are using language which is entirely non-Biblical.

The point before us is one of vast importance. Let us lay hold upon it firmly, and never let it go. It is the very point on which our Reformers had their sharpest controversy with the Roman Catholics, and went to the stake, rather than give way. Sooner than admit that the Lord's Supper was a sacrifice, they cheerfully laid down their lives. To bring back the doctrine of the "real presence," and to turn the communion into the Roman Catholic "mass," is to pour contempt on our Martyrs, and to upset the first principles of the Protestant Reformation. No, rather, it is to ignore the plain teaching of God's Word, and do dishonor to the priestly office of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches expressly that the Lord's Supper was ordained to be "a remembrance of Christ's body and blood," and not an offering. The Bible teaches that Christ's substituted death on the cross was the perfect sacrifice for sin, which never needs to be repeated. Let us stand firm in these two great principles of the Christian faith. A clear understanding of the intention of the Lord's Supper is one of the soul's best safeguards against the delusions of false doctrine.

In the second place, let me try to show "who ought to receive the Lord's Supper?" What kind of persons were meant to go to the Table and receive the Lord's Supper?

I will first show who ought not to be partakers of this ordinance. The ignorance which prevails on this, as well as on every part of the subject, is vast, lamentable, and appalling. If I can contribute anything that may throw light upon it, I will feel very thankful. The principal giants whom John Bunyan describes, in "Pilgrim's Progress," as dangerous to Christian pilgrims, were two, Pope and Pagan. If the good old Puritan had foreseen the times we live in, he would have said something about the giant Ignorance.

(a) It is not right to urge all professing Christians to go to the Lord's Table. There is such a thing as fitness and preparedness for the ordinance. It does not work like a medicine, independently of the state of mind of those who receive it. The teaching of those who urge all their congregation to come to the Lord's Table, as if the coming must necessarily do every one good, is entirely without warrant of Scripture. No, rather, it is a teaching which is calculated to do immense harm to men's souls, and to turn the reception of the Lord's Supper into a mere form. Ignorance can never be the mother of acceptable worship, and an ignorant communicant who comes to the Lord's Table without knowing why he comes, is altogether in the wrong place. "A man ought to examine himself

before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."--"recognizing the body of the Lord,"--that is to understand what the elements of bread and wine represent, and why they are appointed, and what is the particular use of remembering Christ's death--is an essential qualification of a true communicant. God commands all people everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel (Acts 17:30), but He does not in the same way, or in the same manner, command everybody to come to the Lord's Table. No: this thing is not to be taken lightly, or carelessly! It is a solemn ordinance, and solemnly it ought to be used.

(b) But this is not all. Sinners living in open sin, and determined not to give it up ought never to come to the Lord's Table. To do so is a positive insult to Christ, and to pour contempt on His Gospel. It is nonsense to profess we desire to remember Christ's death, while we cling to the accursed thing which made it needful for Christ to die. The mere fact that a man is continuing in sin is clear evidence that he does not care for Christ, and feels no gratitude for the offer of redemption.

The ignorant Roman Catholic who goes to the priest's confessional and receives absolution, may think he is fit to go to the Roman Catholic mass, and after mass may return to his sins. He never reads the Bible, and knows no better! But the professing Christian who habitually breaks any of God's commandments, and yet goes to the Lord's Table, as if it would do him good and wipe away his sins, is very guilty indeed. So long as he chooses to continue his wicked habits he cannot receive the slightest benefit from the Lord's Table, and is only adding sin to sin. To carry unrepented sin to the Lord's Table, and there receive the bread and wine, knowing in our own hearts that we and wickedness are yet friends, is one of the worst things man can do, and one of the most hardening to the conscience. If a man must have his sins, and can't give them up, let him by all means stay away from the Lord's Supper. There is such a thing as "eating and drinking in an unworthy manner" and to our own "judgment." To no one do these words apply so thoroughly as to an unrepentant sinner.

(c) But I am not done yet. Self-righteous people who think that they will be saved by their own works, have no business to come to the Lord's Table. Strange as it may sound at first, these persons are the least qualified of all to receive the Lord's table. They may be outwardly correct, moral and respectable in their lives, but so long as they trust in their own goodness for salvation they are entirely in the wrong place at the Lord's Supper. For what do we declare at the Lord's Supper? We publicly profess that we have no goodness, righteousness, or worthiness of our own, and that all our hope is in Christ.

We publicly profess that we are guilty, sinful, corrupt, and naturally deserve God's wrath and condemnation. We publicly profess that Christ's merit and not our's, Christ's righteousness and not our's is the only cause why we look for acceptance with God. Now what has a self-righteous man to do with an ordinance like this? Clearly nothing at all.

One thing at any rate, is very clear: a self-righteous man has no business to receive the Lord's Supper. The Communion Service of the Church bids all communicants declare that "they do not presume to come to the Table trusting in their own righteousness, but in God's numerous and great mercies." It tells them to say, "We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Your table," "the memory of our sins is grievous to us; the burden of them is intolerable." How many self-righteous professing Christians can ever go to the Lord's Table and take these words

into his mouth, is beyond my understanding! It only shows that many professing Christians use the "forms" of worship without taking the trouble to consider what they mean.

The plain truth is that the Lord's Supper was not meant for dead souls, but for living ones. The careless, the ignorant, the willfully wicked, the self-righteous, are no more fit to come to the Lord's Table than a dead corpse is fit to sit down at a king's feast. To enjoy a spiritual feast we must have a spiritual heart, and taste, and appetite. To suppose that the Lord's Table can do any good to an unspiritual man, is as foolish as to put bread and wine into the mouth of a dead person. The careless, the ignorant, and the willfully wicked, so long as they continue in that state, are utterly unfit to come to the Lord's Supper. To urge them to partake is not to do them good but harm. The Lord's Supper is not a converting or justifying ordinance. If a man goes to the Table unconverted or unforgiven, he will be no better when he comes away (actually worse due to the associated judgments for coming unworthily).

But, after all, the ground having been cleared of error, the question still remains to be answered--Who are the sort of persons who ought to receive the Lord's Supper? I answer that by saying, people who have "examined themselves to see whether they have truly repented of their former sins, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life--have a true faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of His death--they are in love with all men." In a word, I find that a worthy communicant is one who possesses three simple marks and qualifications--repentance, faith, and love. Does a man truly repent of sin and hate it? Does a man put his trust in Jesus Christ as his only hope of salvation? Does a man live in love towards others? He that can truly answer each of these questions, "I do," he is a man that is Scripturally qualified for the Lord's Supper. Let him come boldly. Let no barrier be put in his way. He comes up to the Bible standard of communicants. He may draw near with confidence, and feel assured that the great Master of the banquet is not displeased.

Such a man's repentance may be very much imperfect. Never mind! Is it real? Is he truly repentant? His faith in Christ may be very weak. Never mind! Is it real? A penny is as much true currency as is a one hundred dollar bill. His love may be very defective in quantity and degree. Never mind! Is it genuine? The grand test of a man's Christianity is not the quantity of holiness he has, but whether he has any all.

The first twelve communicants, when Christ Himself gave the bread and wine, were weak indeed--weak in knowledge, weak in faith, weak in courage, weak in patience, weak in love! But eleven of them had something about them which outweighed all defects: they were real, genuine, sincere, and true.

Forever let this great principle be rooted in our minds--the only worthy communicant is the man who has demonstrated repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and practical love toward others. Are you that man? Then you may draw near to the table, and take the ordinance to your comfort. Anything less than this I dare not change in my standard of a communicant. I will never encourage someone to receive the Lord's Supper who is careless, ignorant, and self-righteous. I will never tell anyone to keep away till he is perfect, and to wait till his heart is as unruffled as an angel's. I will not do so, because I believe that neither my Master nor His Apostles would have done so. Show me a man that really feels his sins, really leans on Christ, really struggles to be holy, and I will welcome him in My Master's name. He may feel weak, erring,

empty, feeble, doubting, wretched, and poor. But what does that matter? Paul, I believe, would have received him as a right communicant, and I will do likewise.

In the third place, let us consider "what benefit communicants may expect to get by receiving the Lord's Supper."

This is a point of grave importance, and one on which many mistakes abound. On no point, perhaps, connected with this ordinance are the views of Christians so vague and indistinct and undefined.

One common idea among men is that "receiving the Lord's Supper must do them some good." Why, they can't explain. What good, they can't exactly say. But they have a loose general notion that it is the right thing to be a communicant, and that somehow or other it is of value to their souls! This is of course nothing better than ignorance. It is unreasonable to suppose that such communicants can please Christ, or receive any real benefit from what they do. If there is any principle clearly laid down in the Bible about any act of religious worship, it is this that it must be with understanding. The worshiper must at least understand something about what he is doing. Mere bodily worship, unaccompanied by mind or heart, is utterly worthless. The man who eats the bread and drinks the wine, as a mere matter of form, because it is the "right" thing to do, without any clear idea of what it all means, derives no benefit. He might just as well stay at home!

Another common idea among men is that, "taking the Lord' Supper will help them get to heaven, and take away their sins." To this false idea you may trace up the habit in some churches of going to the Lord's Table once a year, in order, as an old farmer once said, "to wipe off the year's sins." To this idea again, you may trace the too common practice of sending for a minister in time of sickness, in order to receive the ordinance before death. Yes, how many take comfort about their relatives, after they have lived a most ungodly life, for no better reason than this, that they took the Lord's Supper when they were dying! Whether they repented and believed and had new hearts, they neither seem to know or care. All they know is that "they took the Lord's Supper before they died." My heart sinks within me when I hear people resting on such evidence as this.

Ideas like these are sad proofs of the ignorance that fills the minds of men about the Lord's Supper. They are ideas for which there is not the slightest warrant in Scripture. The sooner they are cast aside and given up, the better for the Church and the world.

Let us settle it firmly in our minds that the Lord's Supper was not given to be a means either of justification or of conversion. It was never meant to give grace where there is no grace already, or to provide pardon when pardon is not already enjoyed. It cannot possibly provide what is lacking with the absence of repentance to God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an ordinance for the penitent, not for the impenitent, for the believing, not for the unbelieving, for the converted, not for the unconverted. The unconverted man, who fancies that he can find a "shortcut" to heaven by taking the Lord's Supper, without treading the well-worn steps of repentance and faith, will find to his cost one day, that he is totally deceived. The Lord's Supper was meant to increase and help the grace that a man has, but not to impart the grace that he does not have. It was certainly never intended to make our peace with God, to justify, or to convert.

The simplest statement of the benefit which a truehearted communicant may expect to receive from the Lord's Supper, is the strengthening and refreshing of our souls--clearer views of Christ

and His atonement, clearer views of all the offices which Christ, fills as our Mediator and Advocate, clearer views of the complete redemption Christ has obtained for us by His substituted death on the cross, clearer views of our full and perfect acceptance in Christ before God, fresh reasons for deep repentance for sin, fresh reasons for lively faith--these are among the leading returns which a believer may confidently expect to get from his attendance at the Lord's Table. He that eats the bread and drinks the wine in a right spirit, will find himself drawn into closer communion with Christ, and will feel to know Him more, and understand Him better.

(a) Right reception of the Lord's Supper has a "humbling" effect on the soul. The sight of the bread and wine as emblems of Christ's body and blood, reminds us how sinful sin must be, if nothing less than the death of God's own Son could make satisfaction for it, or redeem us from its guilt. Never should we be so "clothed with humility," as when we receive the Lord's Supper.

(b) Right reception of the Lord's Supper has a "cheering" effect on the soul. The sight of the bread broken, and the wine poured out, reminds us how full, perfect, and complete is our salvation. Those vivid emblems remind us what an enormous price has been paid for our redemption. They press on us the mighty truth, that believing on Christ, we have nothing to fear, because a sufficient payment has been made for our debt. The "precious blood of Christ" answers every charge that can be brought against us. God can be "just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

(c) Right reception of the Lord's Supper has a "sanctifying" effect on the soul. The bread and wine remind us how great is our debt of gratitude to our Lord, and how thoroughly we are bound to live for Him who died for our sins. They seem to say to us, "Remember what Christ has done for you, and ask yourself whether there is anything too great to do for Him."

(d) Right reception of the Lord's Supper into hearts, has a restraining effect on the soul. Every time a believer receives the bread and the wine he is reminded what a serious thing it is to be a Christian, and what an obligation is laid on him to lead a consistent life. Bought with such a price as that bread and wine call to his recollection, ought he not to glorify Christ in body and spirit, which are His? The man that goes regularly and intelligently to the Lord's Table finds it increasingly hard to yield to sin and conform to the world.

Such is a brief account of the benefits which a right hearted communicant may expect to receive from the Lord's Supper. In eating that bread and drinking that cup, such a man will have his repentance deepened, his faith increased, his knowledge enlarged, his habit of holy living strengthened. He will realize more of the "real presence" of Christ in his heart. Eating, that bread by faith, he will feel closer communion with the body of Christ. Drinking that wine by faith, he will feel closer communion with the blood of Christ. He will see more clearly what Christ is to him, and what he is to Christ. He will understand more thoroughly what it is to be "one with Christ, and Christ one with him." He will feel the roots of his soul's spiritual life watered, and the work of grace in his heart established, built up, and carried forward. All these things may seem and sound like foolishness to a natural man, but to a true Christian these things are light, and health, and life, and peace. No wonder that a true Christian finds the Lord's Supper a source of blessing!

Remember, I do not pretend to say that all Christians experience the full blessing of the Lord's Supper, which I have just attempted to describe. Nor do I say that the same believer will always

find his soul in the same spiritual frame, and always receive the same amount of benefit from the ordinance. But I boldly say this: you will rarely find a true believer who will not say that he believes the Lord's Supper is one of his best helps and highest privileges. He will tell you that if he were deprived of the Lord's Supper on a regular basis he would find the loss of it a great detriment to his soul. There are some things of which we never know the value of till they are taken from us. So I believe it is with the Lord's Supper. The weakest and humblest of God's children gets a blessing from this ordinance, to an extent of which he is not aware.

In the last place, I have to consider "why it is that so many so-called Christians (false believers) never come to the Lord's Supper."

It is a simple matter of fact, that myriads of persons who call themselves Christians never come to the Table of the Lord. They would not endure to be told that they deny the faith, and are not in communion with Christ. When they worship, they attend a place of Christian worship; when they hear religious teaching, it is the teaching of Christianity; when they are married, they use a Christian service. Yet all this time they never come to the Lord's Supper! They often live on in this state of mind for many years, and to all appearance are not ashamed. They often die in this condition without ever having received the ordinance, and yet profess to feel hope at the last, and their friends express a hope about them. And yet they live and die in open disobedience to a plain command of Christ! These are simple facts. Let any one look around him, and deny them if he can.

Now why is this? What explanation can we give? Our Lord Jesus Christ's last injunctions to His disciples are clear, plain, and unmistakable. He says to all, "Eat, drink: do this in remembrance of Me." Did He leave it to our discretion whether we would obey His injunction or not? Did He mean that it was not significant whether His disciples did or did not keep up the ordinance He had just established? Certainly not. The very idea is absurd, and one certainly never dreamed of in apostolic times. Paul evidently takes it for granted that every Christian would go to the Lord's Table when it was available. A class of Christian worshipers who never came to the Table, was a class whose existence was unknown to him. What, then, are we to say of that number which fail to receive the Lord's Supper, unabashed, unhumiliated, not afraid, not the least ashamed? Why is it? How is it? What does it all mean? Let us look these questions fairly in the face, and endeavor to give an answer to them.

(1) For one thing, many fail to go to the Table because they are utterly careless and thoughtless about religion, and ignorant of very first principles of Christianity.

They go to church, as a matter of form, but they neither know, nor care anything about what is done at church! The faith of Christ has no place either in their hearts, or heads, or consciences, or wills, or understandings. It is a mere affair of "words and names," about which they know no more than Festus or Gallio. There were very few such false Christians in Paul's times, if indeed there were any. There are far too many in these last days of the world. They are the dead-weight of the Churches, and the scandal of Christianity. What such people need is light, knowledge, grace, a renewed conscience, a changed heart. In their present state they have no part of Christ; and dying in this state they are thrown into hell. Do I wish them to come to the Lord's Supper? Certainly not, till they are converted. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

(2) For another thing, many false Christians do not receive the Lord's Supper because they know they are living in the habitual practice of some sin, or in the neglect of some Christian duty.

Their conscience tells them so long as they live in this state, and do not turn away from their sins, they are unfit to come to the Table of the Lord. Well: they are so far quite right! I wish no man to be a communicant if he cannot give up his sins. But I warn these people not to forget that if they are unfit for the Lord's Supper in that condition they will be lost eternally. The same sins which disqualify them for the ordinance, most certainly disqualify them for heaven. Do I want them to come to the Lord's Supper as they are? Certainly not! But I do want them to repent and be converted, to cease to do evil, and to break off from their sins. Forever let it be remembered that the man unfit for the Lord's Supper is unfit to die.

(3) For another thing, some are not communicant because they fancy it will add to their responsibility.

They are not, as many, ignorant and careless about religion. They even attend church regularly and listen to the preaching of the gospel. But they say they dread coming to the Lord's Table and making a confession and a profession. They fear that they might afterwards fall away, and bring scandal on the cause of Christianity. They think it wisest to be on the safe side, and not commit themselves at all. Such people would do well to remember that if they avoid responsibility of one kind by not coming to the Lord's Table, they incur responsibility of another kind, quite as grave, and quite as injurious to the soul. They are responsible for open disobedience to a command from of Christ. They are shrinking from doing that which their Master continually commands His disciples--confessing Him before men. No doubt it is a serious step to come to the Lord's Table and receive the bread and the wine. It is a step that none should take lightly and without self-examination. But it is "no less a serious step to walk away and refuse the ordinance," when we remember Who invites us to receive it, and for what purpose it was appointed! I warn the people I am now dealing with to be careful what they are doing. Let them not flatter themselves that it can ever be a wise, a prudent, a safe line of conduct to neglect a plain command of Christ. They may find at length, to their cost, that they have only increased their guilt and forsaken their mercies.

(4) For another thing, some false Christians stay away from the Lord's Supper because they believe they are not yet worthy.

They wait and stand still, under the mistaken notion that no one is qualified for the Lord's Supper unless he feels within him something like perfection. They pitch their idea of a communicant so high that they despair of attaining to it. Waiting for inward perfection they live, and waiting for it they die. Now such persons would do well to understand that they are completely mistaken in their estimate of what "worthiness" really is. They are forgetting that the Lord's Supper was not intended for unsinning angels, but for men and women subject to weakness, living in a world full of temptations, and needing mercy and grace every day they live.

A sense of our own utter unworthiness is the best worthiness that we can bring to the Lord's Table. A deep feeling of our own entire indebtedness to Christ for all we have and hope for, is the best feeling we can bring, with us. The people I now have in view ought to consider seriously whether the ground they have taken up is defensible, and whether they are not standing in their own light. If they are waiting till they feel in themselves perfect hearts, perfect motives, perfect feelings,

perfect, repentance, perfect love, perfect faith, they will wait forever. There never were such communicants in any age--certainly not in the days of our Lord and of the Apostles--there never will be as long as the world stands. No, rather, the very thought that we feel literally worthy, is a symptom of secret self-righteousness, and proves us unfit for the Lord's Table in God's sight. Sinners we are when we first come to the throne of grace--sinners we will be till we die; converted, changed, renewed, sanctified, but sinners still (though not like before--sin is not the pattern of a believer's new life). In short, no man is really worthy to receive the Lord's Supper who does not deeply feel that he is a "miserable sinner."

(5) In the last place, some object going to the Lord's Table because they see others partaking who are not worthy, and not in a right state of mind.

Because others eat and drink unworthily, they refuse to eat and drink at all. Of all the reasons taken up by those refusing to come to the Lord's Supper to justify their own neglect of Christ's ordinance, I must plainly say, I know none which seems to me so foolish, so weak, so unreasonable, and so unscriptural as this. It is as good as saying that we will never receive the Lord's Supper at all! When will we ever find a body of communicants on earth of which all the members are converted and living perfect lives? It is setting up ourselves in the most unhealthy attitude of judging others. "Who are you that you judge another person?" "What is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:22). It is depriving ourselves of a great privilege because others profane it and make a bad use of it. It is pretending to be wiser than our Master Himself. It is taking up ground for which there is no warrant in Scripture. Paul rebukes the Corinthians sharply for the irreverent behavior of some of the communicants; but I cannot find him giving a single hint that when some came to the Table unworthily, others ought to draw back or stay away. Let me advise the non-communicants I have now in view to beware of being wise above that which was written. Let them study the parable of the Wheat and Tares, and mark how both were to "grow together until the harvest" (Matthew 13:30).

Perfect Churches, perfect congregations, perfect bodies of communicants, are all unattainable in this world of confusion and sin. Let us covet the best gifts, and do all we can to check sin in others; but let us not starve our own selves because others are ignorant sinners, and turn their food into poison. If others are foolish enough to eat and drink unworthily, let us not turn our backs on Christ's ordinance, and refuse to eat and drink at all.

Such are the five common excuses why myriads in the present day, though professing themselves Christians (but they are not), never come to the Lord's Supper. One common remark may be made about them: there is not a single reason among the five which deserves to be called "good," and which does not condemn the man who gives it. I challenge anyone to deny this. I have said repeatedly that I want no one to come to the Lord's Table who is not properly qualified. But I ask those who stay away never to forget that the very reasons they assign for their conduct are their condemnation. I tell them that they stand convicted before God of either being very ignorant of what a communicant is, and what the Lord's Supper is; or else of being persons who are not living right, and are unfit to die. In short, to say, I am a non-communicant, is as good as saying one of three things--I am living in sin, and cannot come--I know Christ commands me, but I will not obey Him--I am an ignorant man, and do not understand what the Lord's Supper means."

I know not in what state of mind this book may find the reader of this paper, or what his opinions may be about the Lord's Supper. But I will conclude the whole subject by offering to all some warnings, which I venture to think are highly required by the times.

(1) In the first place, "do not neglect" the Lord's Supper.

The man who coolly and deliberately refuses to use an ordinance which the Lord Jesus Christ appointed for his profit, may be very sure that his soul is in a very wrong state. There is a judgment to come; there is, an account to be rendered of all our conduct on earth. How any one can look forward to that day, and expect to meet Christ with comfort and in peace, if he has refused all his life to commune with Christ at His Table, is a thing that I cannot understand. Does this hit home to you? Be careful what you are doing.

(2) In the second place, "do not receive the Lord's Supper carelessly," irreverently, and as a matter of form.

The man who goes to the Lord's Table, and eats the bread and drinks the wine, while his heart is far away, is committing a great sin, and robbing himself of a great blessing. In this, as in every other means of grace, every thing depends on the state of mind in which the ordinance is used. He that draws near without repentance, faith, and love, and with a heart full of sin and the world, will certainly be nothing better, but rather worse. Does this hit home to you? Be careful what you are doing.

(3) In the third place, "do not make an idol" of the Lord's Supper.

The man who tells you that it is the first, foremost, chief, and principal precept in Christianity, is telling you that which he will find it hard to prove. In the great majority of the books of the New Testament the Lord's Supper is not even named. In the letter to Timothy and Titus, about a minister's duties, the subject is not even mentioned. To repent and be converted, to believe and be holy, to be born again and have grace in our hearts--all these things are of far more importance than to be a communicant. Without them we cannot be saved. Without the Lord's Supper we can. Are you tempted to make the Lord's Supper override and overshadow everything in Christianity, and place it above prayer and preaching? Be careful. Pay attention what you are doing.

(4) In the fourth place, "do not use the Lord's Supper irregularly."

Never be absent when the Lord's Supper is administered. Make every effort to be in attendance. Regular habits are essential to the maintenance of the health of our bodies. Regular use of the Lord's Supper is essential to the well-being of our souls. The man who finds it a burden to attend on every occasion when the Lord's Table is spread, may well doubt whether all is right within him, and whether he is ready for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. If Thomas had not been absent when the Lord appeared the first time to the assembled disciples, he would not have said the foolish things he did. Absence made him miss a blessing. Does this hit home to you? Be careful what you are doing.

(5) In the fifth place, "do not do anything to bring discredit" on your profession as a communicant.

The man who after attending the Lord's Table runs into sin, does more harm perhaps than any sinner. He is a walking sermon on behalf of the devil. He gives opportunity to the enemies of the

Lord to blaspheme. He helps to keep people away from Christ. Lying, drinking, adulterous, dishonest, passionate communicants are the helpers of the devil, and the worst enemies of the Gospel. Does this hit home to you? Be careful what you are doing.

(6) In the last place, "do not despair" and be cast down, if with all your desires you do not feel that you get a lot of good from the Lord's Supper.

Very likely you are expecting too much. Very likely you are a poor judge of your own state. Your soul's roots may be strengthening and growing, while you think you are not growing. Very likely you are forgetting that earth is not heaven, and that here we walk by sight and not by faith, and must expect nothing perfect. Lay these things to heart. Do not think harsh things about yourself without cause.

To every reader into whose hands this paper may fall, I commend the whole subject of it as deserving of serious and solemn consideration. I am nothing, better than a poor or fallible man myself. But if I have made up my mind on any point it is this--that there is no truth which demands such plain speaking, as truth about the Lord's Supper.

There are Many Ways to Hell

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO HELL

J.C. Ryle A sure way to go to hell is by living and dying without any religion at all. You may live like a beast, prayerless, godless, graceless and faithless. This is a sure way to go to hell.

Another way to go to hell is by taking up some kind of useless religion. You can live and die contenting yourself with a false christianity and rest on a groundless hope. This is probably the most common way to hell that there is today. There are many ways to hell, but only one way to heaven.

A religion is useless in which Jesus Christ is not the principle object. Most people today know nothing about Christ. Their religion is a few vague notions and empty expressions. They say, "I am no worse than others. I go to church when it is convenient. I really don't do anybody any harm. I hope God will be merciful to me." But He won't! God shows no mercy apart from His Son.

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