

# Struggles of Conscience

by C.H. Spurgeon

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*C.H. Spurgeon passionately teaches that sinners should come to Christ just as they are, breaking down the false barriers of needing perfect repentance or feeling before trusting in Jesus.*

**Scripture:** Job 13:23, Psalm 139:23-24, Matthew 11:28, John 7:37, John 3:16, Romans 7:18

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Faith", "Conscience and Sin"

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## Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon confronts the common spiritual struggle of feeling unworthy or insufficiently repentant to come to Christ. He dismantles the false barriers of self-righteousness and misguided expectations about repentance, encouraging sinners to trust Jesus immediately. Drawing on Scripture and personal insight, Spurgeon offers comfort, instruction, and exhortation to all who wrestle with their conscience and long for salvation.

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## Transcript

“How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin.”—Job 13:23.

THERE ARE MANY PERSONS who long to have a deeper sense of their sinfulness, and then with a certain show of conscientious scruple, they make an excuse for the exercise of simple faith. That spiritual disease, which keeps sinners from Christ, assumes a different shape at different times. In Luther's day the precise evil under which men laboured, was this: they believed in being self-righteous, and so they supposed that they must have good works before they might trust in Christ. In our day the evil has taken another, and that a most extraordinary shape. Men have aimed at being self-righteous after quite a singular fashion; they think they must feel worse, and have a deeper conviction of sin before they may trust in Christ. Many hundreds do I meet with, who say they dare not come to Christ and trust him with their souls, because they do not feel their need of him enough; they have not sufficient contrition for their sins they have not repented as fully as they have rebelled. Brethren, it is the same evil, from the same old germ of self-righteousness, but it has taken another and I think a more crafty shape. Satan has wormed himself into many hearts under the garb of an angel of light, and he has whispered to the sinner, “Repentance is a necessary virtue; stop until you have repented, and when you have sufficiently mortified yourself on account of sin, then you will be fit to come to Christ, and qualified to trust and rely on him.” It is with that deadly evil I want to grapple this morning. I am persuaded it is far more common than some would think. And I think I know the reason of its great commonness. In the Puritanic age, which was noted certainly for its purity of doctrine, there was also a great deal of experimental preaching, and much of it

was sound and healthy. But some of it was unscriptural, because it took for its standard what the Christian felt and not what the Saviour said; the inference from a believer's experience, rather than the message which goes before any belief. That excellent man, Mr. Rogers, of Deadham, who has written some useful works, and Mr. Sheppard, who wrote *The Sound Believer*, Mr. Flavel, and many others, give descriptions of what a sinner must be before he may come to Christ, which actually represent what a saint is, after he has come to Christ. These good brethren have taken their own experience; what they felt before they came into light, as the standard of what every other man ought to feel before he may put his trust in Christ and hope for mercy. There were some in the Puritanic times who protested against that theology, and insisted that sinners were to be bidden to come to Christ just as they were; not with any preparation either of feeling or of doing. At the present time there are large numbers of Calvinistic ministers who are afraid to give a free invitation to sinners; they always garble Christ's invitation thus: "If you are a sensible sinner you may come;" just as if stupid sinners might not come;" and then they describe what that feeling of need is, and give such a high description of it that their hearers say, "Well, I never felt like that," and they are afraid to venture for lack of the qualification. Mark you, the brethren speak truly in some respect. They describe what a sinner does feel before he comes, but they make a mistake in putting what a sinner does feel, as if that were what a sinner ought to feel. What the sinner feels, and what the sinner does, until he is renewed by grace, are just the very opposite of what he ought. We always get wrong when we say one Christian's experience is to be measured by the Word of God; and what the sinner should feel is to be measured by what Christ commands him to feel, and not by what another sinner has felt. Comparing ourselves among ourselves, we are not wise. I do believe there are hundreds and thousands who remain in doubt and darkness, and go down to despair, because there is a description given and a preparation for Christ demanded, to which they cannot attain—a description indeed which is not true, because it is a description of what they feel after they have found Christ, and not what they must feel before they may come to him. Now, then, with all my might I come this morning to break down every barrier that keeps a soul from Christ; and, as God the Holy Spirit shall help me, to dash the battering ram of truth against every wall that has been built up, whether by doctrinal truth or experimental truth, that keeps the sinner from Christ, who desires to come and to be saved by him.

I shall attempt to address you in the following order this morning. First, a little by way of consolation; then, a little by way of instruction; a little more upon discrimination or caution; and in the last place, a few sentences by way of exhortation.

I. First, beloved, let me speak to you who are desiring to feel more and more your sins, and whose prayer is the prayer of the text, "Lord how many are mine iniquities and my sins, make me to know my transgression and my sin." Let me try to COMFORT YOU. It ought to give you much solace when you recollect that the best of men have prayed this prayer before you. The better a man is, the more anxious is he to know the worst of his case. The more a man gets rid of sin and the more he lives above his daily faults and errors, the more does he cry "Search me, O God, and know my heart; O try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Bad men do not want to know their badness; it is the good man, the man who has been renewed by grace, who is anxious to discover what is his disease, that he may have it healed. Ought it not then be to some ground of comfort to you, that your prayer is not a prayer which could come from the lips of the wicked, but a prayer which has constantly been offered by the most advanced of saints, by those who have most grown in grace. Perhaps that is a reason why it would not be offered by you, who just now can scarcely hope to be a saint at all; yet it should be a matter of sweet rejoicing that your prayer cannot be an evil one, because the "Amen" of God's people, even those who are the fathers in our Israel, go up to God with it. I am sure my

aged brothers and sisters in Christ now present, can say unanimously, "That has often been my prayer, 'Lord let me know my iniquity and my sin; teach me how vile I am, and lead me daily to Christ Jesus that my sins may be put away.'"

Let this reflection also comfort you—you never prayed like this years ago when you were a careless sinner. It was the last thing you would ever think of asking for; you did not want to know your guilt. No! you found pleasure in wickedness. Sin was a sweet morsel to you; you only wanted to be let alone that you might roll it under your tongue. If any told you of your evil, you would rather they let it alone. "Ah," said you, "what business is that of yours? no doubt I make some mistakes and am a little amiss, but I don't want to be told so." Why, the last meditation you would ever have thought of entertaining would have been a meditation upon your own criminality. When conscience did speak, you said, "Lay down, sir, be quiet!" When God's word came home sharp to you, you tried to blunt its edge—you did not want to feel it. Now, ought it not to be some comfort that you have had such a gracious change wrought in you, that you are now longing for the very feeling which at one time you could not endure? Surely, man, the Lord must have begun a good work in you, for you would not have such wishes and desires as these unless he had put his hand to the plough, and had begun to plough the barren, dry, hard soil of your heart.

Yet further, there is another reason why you should take comfort; it is very probable you do already feel your guilt, and what you are asking for you already have in measure realized. It often happens that a man has the grace which he seeks for, and does not know he has it, because he makes a mistake as to what he should feel when he has the blessing. He has already got the boon which he asks God to give him. Let me just put it in another shape. If you are sorry because you cannot be sorry enough on account of sin, why you are already sorry. If you grieve because you cannot grieve enough, why you do grieve already. If it is a cause of repentance to you that your heart is very hard and that you cannot repent, why you do repent. My dear hearer, let me assure you for your comfort, that when you go down on your knees and say "Lord, I groan before thee, because I cannot groan; I cannot feel; Lord help me to feel;" why, you do feel, and you have got the repentance that you are asking for. At least you have got the first degree of it; you have got the mustard seed of repentance in tiny grain. Let it alone, it will grow; foster it with prayer and it will become a tree. The very grace which you are asking of God is speaking in your very prayer. It is repentance which asks God that I may repent more. It is a broken heart which asks God to break it. That is not a hard heart which says, "Lord I have a hard heart; soften my heart." It is a soft heart already. That is not a dead soul which says, "Lord I am dead, quicken me." Why, you are quickened. That man is not dumb who says, "Lord I am dumb; make me speak." Why, he speaks already; and that man who says, "Lord I cannot feel," why, he feels already. He is a sensible sinner already. So that you are just the man that Christ calls to him. This experience of yours, which you think is just the opposite of what it ought to be, is just what it should be. Oh, be comforted in this respect. But sit not down in it; be comforted enough to make you run to Jesus now,—just as you are. I take thee, sinner, to be just the man the minister is always seeking after. When we say that Christ came that there might be drink given to the thirsty, you are just the man we mean—you are thirsty. "No," you say, "I don't feel that I am thirsty, I only wish I did." Why, that wish to feel thirsty is your thirst. You are exactly the man; you are far nearer the character than if you said "I do thirst, I have the qualification;" then, I should be afraid you had not got it." But, because you think you have it not, it is all the clearer proof that you have this qualification, if indeed there be any qualification. When I say, "Come unto Christ all ye that labour and are heavy laden;" and you say, "Oh, I don't feel heavy laden enough," why, you are the very man the text means. And when I say, "Whosoever will, let him come," and you say, "I wish I were more willing, I will to be willing," why you are the man. It is only one of Satan's quibbles—a bit of hell's infernal logic to drive you from Christ. Be a match for Satan now, this once

and say "Thou lying fiend, thou tellest me I do not feel my need of a Saviour enough. I know I feel my need; and, inasmuch as I long to feel it I do feel it. Christ bids me come to him, and I will come—now, this morning. I will trust my soul, just as it is, in the hands of him whose body hung upon the tree. Sink or swim, here I am resting on him, and clinging to him as the rock of my salvation."

Take then, these words of comfort.

II. I must now go on to my second point, and give a few words of INSTRUCTION.

And so, my hearer, you anxiously long to know how many are your iniquities and your sins; and your prayer is, "Lord, make me to know my transgression and my sin." Let me instruct thee, then as to how God will answer your prayers. God hath more than one way of answering the same prayer; and though the ways are diverse, they are all equally useful and efficacious. It sometimes happens that God answers this prayer by allowing a man to fall into more and more gross sin. At our last church meeting, a brother, in giving his experience of how he was brought to God, said he could not feel his guilt, his heart was very hard; till it happened one day he was tempted to the utterance of an untruth, and no sooner had he uttered it than he felt what a despicable creature he was to tell a lie to another. So that one sin led him to see the deceitfulness and vileness of his own heart; and from that day he never had to complain that he did not feel his guilt enough, but, on the contrary, he felt too guilty to come to Christ. I believe many a man, who has been educated morally, who has been trained up in such a way that he has never fallen into gross sin, finds it very difficult to say, "Lord, I feel myself to be a sinner." He knows he is a sinner, and he knows it as a matter of fact, but he cannot altogether feel it. And I have known men who have often envied the harlot and the drunkard, because, say they, "Had I been like them, I should feel more bitterly my sin, and should feel I was one of those whom Jesus came to save." It may be, though I could hope it may not be so, that God may suffer thee to fall into sin. God grant it may never be so; but if thou ever shouldst, thou wilt then have cause to say, "Lord, I am vile; now mine eyes sees myself; I abhor myself in dust and ashes, because of this my great sin." Or possibly, you may not actually fall into sin, but be taken to the very verge of it. Did you ever know what it was on a sudden to be overtaken by some fiery temptation, to feel as if the strong hand of Satan had gripped you about the loins, and was pulling on, you knew not whither, nor why, nor how, but against your will, to the very verge of the precipice of some tremendous sin, and you went on and on, till, on a sudden, just as you were about to take a dive into sin, your eyes were opened, and you said, "Great God, how came I here,—I, who hate this iniquity?—I, who abhor it?—and yet my feet had almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped." Then in the recoil you say, "Great God, hold thou me up, for if thou dost not hold me up, I fall indeed." Then you discover that there is inbred sin in your heart only lacking opportunity to spring out; that your soul is like a magazine of gunpowder, only needing the spark, and there shall come a terrible catastrophe; that you are full of sin, grim with iniquity and evil devices, and that it only wants opportunity and strong temptation to destroy you body and soul, and that for ever. It happens sometimes that this is the way God answers this prayer.

A second method by which the Lord answers this prayer is by opening the eyes of the soul; not so much by providence, as by the mysterious agency of the Holy Spirit. Let me tell thee, my hearer, if thou shouldst ever have thine eyes opened to see thy guilt, thou wilt find it to be the most awful sight that thou hast ever beheld. I have had as much experience of this as any man among you. For five years as a child there was nothing before my eyes but my guilt; thought I do not hesitate to say that those who observed my life would not have seen any extraordinary sin, yet as I looked upon myself, there was not a day in which I did not commit such gross, such outrageous sins against God, that often and often have I wished I had never been born. I know John Bunyan's experience when he said he wished he had been a frog, or a toad,

rather than a man, so guilty did he feel himself to be. You know how it is with yourselves. It is as when a housewife cleans her chamber, she looks, and there is no dust; the air is clear, and all her furniture is shining brightly. But there is a chink in the window shutter, a ray of light creeps in, and you see the dust dancing up and down, thousands of grains, in the sunbeam. It is all over the room the same, but she cannot see it only where the sunbeam comes. It is just so with us; God sends a ray of divine light into the heart, and then we see how vile and full of iniquity it is. I trust, my hearer, that your prayer may not be answered as it was in my case, by terrible conviction, awful dreams, nights of misery, and days of pain. Take care; you are praying a tremendous prayer when you are asking God to show you your wickedness. Better for you to modify your prayer, and put it thus,—“Lord, let me know enough of my iniquity to bring me to Christ; not so much as to keep me from him, not so much as to drive me to despair; but only enough to be divorced from all trust in myself, and to be led to trust in Christ alone.” Otherwise, Like Moses, you may be constrained to cry out in a paroxysm of agony, “O Lord, kill me I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness.”

Still, however, the practical question recurs, and you ask me again, “Tell me how I can feel the need of my Saviour.” The first advice I give you is this: Particularise your sins. Do not say “I am a sinner;” it means nothing; everybody says that. But say this, “Am I a liar? Am I a thief? Am I a drunkard? Have I had unchaste thoughts? Have I committed unclean acts? Have I in my soul often rebelled against God? Am I often angry without a cause? Have I a bad tempter? Am I covetous? Do I love this world better than the world to come? Do I neglect prayer? Do I neglect the great salvation?” Put the yourself much more readily than by taking yourself in the gross as being a sinner. I have heard of a hypocritical old Monk who used to whine out, while he whipped his back as softly as he could, “Lord, I am a great sinner, as big a sinner as Judas;” and when some one said, “Yes that you are—you are like Judas, a vile old hypocrite,” then he would say, “No I am not.” Then he would go on again, “I am a great sinner.” Some one would say, “You are a great sinner, you broke the first commandment;” and then he would say, “No I have not.” Then when he would go on and say, “I am a great sinner,” some one would say, “Yes, you have broken the second commandment,” and he would say, “No I have not;” and the same with the third and the fourth, and so on right through. So it came to pass he had kept the whole ten according to his own account, and yet he went on crying he was a great sinner. The man was a hypocrite, for if he had not broken the commandments, how could he be a sinner at all? You will find it better not to dwell on your sins in the mass, but to pen them, count them over, and look at them individually, one by one.

Then let me advise you next to hear a personal ministry. Sit not where the preacher preaches to you in the plural number, but where he deals with you as a man alone, by yourself. Seek out a preacher like Rowland Hill, of whom it is said that if you sat in the back seat in the gallery, you always had a notion that Mr. Hill meant you; or, that if you sat in the doorway where he could not see you, yet you were quite convinced he must know you were there, and that he was preaching right at you. I wonder indeed, if men ever could feel their sins under some ministers—genteel ministers, intellectual, respectable, who never speak to their hearers as if they did anything wrong. I say of these gentlemen what Hugh Latimer said of many ministers in his day, that they are more fit to dance a morris-dance than to deal with the souls of men. I believe there are some this day more fit to deliver smart lectures and bring out pleasing things to soothe carnal minds, than to preach the Word of God to sinners. We want the like of John the Baptist back again, and Boanerges; we want men like Baxter to preach,

“As though they might not preach again,

As dying men to dying men.”

We want men like John Berride, who have pulled the velvet out of their mouths years ago and cannot speak fine words—men that hit hard, that draw the bow and pull the arrow to its very head, and send it right home, taking deadly aim at the heart and the conscience of men, ploughing deep, hitting at the private lusts and at the open sins, not generalising but particularizing, not preaching to men in the mass but to men in the detail, not to the mob and the crowd, but to each man separately and individually. Grow not offended with the minister if he come home too close to you; remember that is his duty. And if the whip goes right round you, and stings you, thank Cod for it, be glad of it. Let me, if I sit under a ministry, sit under a man who uses the knife with me sometimes, a man who will not spare me, a man who will not flatter me. If there should be flattery anywhere, let it not be at any rate in the pulpit. He who deals with men's souls should deal with them very plainly; the pulpit is not the place for fine words, when we have to deal with the solemnities of eternity. Take that advice, then, and listen to a personal, home-smiting ministry.

Next to that, if thou wouldst know thy sins, study much the law of God let the twentieth chapter of Exodus be often before your eyes, and take with it as a commentary, Christ's sermon, and Christ's speech when he said, "He that looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already with her in his heart." Understand that God's commandments mean not only what they say in words, but that they touch the thought, the heart, the imagination. Think of that sentence of David, "Thy commandments are exceeding broad." And thus, I think, thou wilt soon come to detect the heinousness of thy sin, and the blackness of thy guilt. And if thou wouldst know still more, spend a little time in contemplating the fatal end of thy sin, shouldst thou die impenitent. Dare to look downward to that fire which must be thy eternal doom, unless Jesus Christ save thee. Be wise, sinner, and look at the harvest which thou shalt surely reap if thou sowest tares; sometimes let these words ring in thy ears, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." Open thy ears and listen to the end of this text—"Where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Let such a passage as this be chewed over in your soul, "The wicked shall be cast into hell with all the nations that forget God." These solemn thoughts may help you. Such books as Allaine's Alarm, Baxter's Call to the Uncoverted, Doddridge's Rise and Progress, may have a good effect on your mind, in helping you to see the greatness of your guilt, by making you meditate upon the greatness of its punishment. But if thou wouldst have a better, and more effectual way still, I give thee one other piece of advice. Spend much of your time in thinking upon the agonies of Christ, for the guilt of thy sin is never so clearly seen anywhere as in the fact that it slew the Saviour. Think what an evil thing that must be which cost Christ his life, in order to save thee. Consider, I say, poor soul, how black must be that vileness which could only be washed out with his precious blood! how grievous those offences which could not be expiated unless his body were nailed to the tree, his side pierced, and unless he died in fever and in thirst, crying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Go thou to the garden at the foot of the Mount of Olives, and see the Saviour in his bloody sweat! Go thou to Pilate's hall, and see him in his shameful accusations! Go thou to the hall of Herod's praetorian guard, and see there how the mighty men set Christ at nought! And go then, last of all, to Calvary, and see that spectacle of woe, and if these do not show thee the blackness of thy sin, then nothing can. If the death of Christ do not teach thee thy need of a Saviour, then what remedy remains for a heart so hard, for a soul so blind as thine?

Thus have I given you words of instruction. Forget them not; put them into practice. Be ye not hearers only, but doers of the word.

III. And now, very briefly indeed, a few sentences by way of DISCRIMINATION.

Thou art longing, my hearer, to know thy great guilt and to feel thy need of Jesus. Take care that thou dost discriminate between the work of the Spirit and the work of the devil. It is the work of the Spirit to make thee feel thy self a sinner, but it never was his work to make thee feel that Christ could forget thee. It is the work of the Spirit to make thee repent of sin; but it is not the work of the Spirit to make thee despair of pardon; that is the devil's work. You know Satan always works by trying to counterfeit the work of the Spirit. He did so in the land of Egypt. Moses stretched out his rod and turned all the waters into blood. Out came Jannes and Jambres and by their cunning and sleight of hand, they have a large piece of water brought, and they turn that into blood. Then Moses fills the land with frogs—the ungracious sorcerers have a space cleared and they fill that with frogs; thus they opposed the work of God by pretender to do the same work; so will the devil do with thee. “Ah!” says God the Holy Spirit; “Sinner thou canst not save thyself” “Ah!” says the devil, “and he cannot save thee either.” “Ah!” says God the Holy Spirit “thou hast a hard heart, only Christ can soften it.” “Ah!” says the devil, “but he wont soften it unless thou dost soften it first.” “Ah!” says God the Spirit “thou hast no qualification, thou art naked, and ruined, and undone.” “Yes,” says the devil, “it is no use your trusting Christ, because you have no good in you, and you cannot hope to be saved.” “Ah!” says God the Spirit, “thou dost not feel thy sin; thou art hard to repent, because of thy hardness.” “Ah!” says the devil, “and because thou art so hard-hearted Christ cannot save thee.” Now do learn to distinguish between the one and the other. When a poor penitent sometimes thinks of destroying himself, do you think that is the Spirit's work? “It is the devil's work; ‘he was a murderer from the beginning.” One sinner says, “I am so guilty, I am sure I can never be pardoned.” Is that the Spirit's teaching—that lie? Oh! that comes from the father of lies. Take heed, whenever you read a biography like that of John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, as you read, say, “that is the Spirit's work, Lord send me that”—“that is the devil's work, Lord keep me from that.” Do not be desirous to have the devil tearing your soul to pieces; the less you have to do with him the better, and if the Holy Ghost keeps Satan from you, bless him for it. Do not wait to have the terrors and horrors that some have, but come to Christ just as you are. You do not want those terrors and horrors, they are of little use. Let me remind you of another thing; I ask you not to acquaint yourself with your sins so as to hope to know them all, because you cannot number them with man's poor arithmetic. Young, in his *Night Thoughts*, says, “God hides from all eyes but his own that desperate sight—a human heart.” If you were to know only the tenth part of how bad you have been you would be driven mad. You who have been the most moral, the most excellent in character, if all the past sins of your heart could stand before you in their black colours, and you could see them in their true light, you would be in hell, for indeed it is hell to discover the sinfulness of sin. Do you mean to say that you would go down on your knees and ask God to send you to hell, or drive you mad? Be not so foolish; say, “Lord, let me know my guilt enough to drive me to Christ; but do not gratify my curiosity by letting me know more; no, give me enough to make me feel that I must trust Christ, or else be lost, and I shall be well content if thou givest me that, though thou deniest me more.

Once again, my dear hearers, listen to this next caution, for it is very important. Take care thou dost not try to make a righteousness out of thy feelings. If you say, “I may not go to Christ till I feel my need of him”—that is clear legality; you are on the wrong track altogether, because Christ does not want you to feel your need in order to prepare for him; he wants no preparation, and anything which you think to be a preparation is a mistake. You are to come just as you are—today, as you are, now—not as you will be, but just now, as you now are. I do not say to you, “Go home and seek God in prayer; I say come to Christ now at this very hour;” you will never be in a better state than you are now, for you were never in a worse state, and that is the fittest state in which to come to Christ. He that is very sick is just in the right state to have a doctor; he that is filthy and begrimed is just in the right state to be washed; he that is naked is just in the right state to be clothed. That is your case. But you say, “I do not feel my need.” Just so: your not feeling it

proves you to have the greater need. You cannot trust your feelings, because you say, you have not any. Why, if God were to hear your prayers and make you feel your need, you would begin to trust in your feelings, and would be led to say, "I trust Christ because I feel my need;" that would be just saying, "I trust myself." All these things are but Popery in disguise; all this preaching to sinners that they must feel this and feel that before they trust in Jesus, is just self-righteousness in another shape. I know our Calvinistic brethren will not like this sermon—I cannot help that—for I do not hesitate to say, that Phariseeism is mixed with Hyper-Calvinism more than with any other sect in the world. And I do solemnly declare that this preaching to the prejudice and feelings of what they call sensible sinners, is nothing more than self-righteousness taking a most cunning and crafty shape, for it is telling the sinner that he must be something before he comes to Christ. Whereas the gospel is preached not to sensible sinners, or sinners with any other qualifying adjective, but to sinners as sinners, to sinners just as they are; it is not to sinners as repentant sinners, but to sinners as sinners, be their state what it may, and their feelings whatever they may. Oh, sinners, Mercy's door is wide open flung to you this morning; let not Satan push you back saying, "You are not fit;" You are not fit! that is to say, you have all the fitness Christ wants, and that is none at all. Come to him just as you are. "Oh," says one, "but you know that hymn of Hart's?"

'All the fitness he requireth

Is to feel your need of him.'

I cannot get that." Let me counsel you then, never to quote part of a hymn, or part of a text: quote it all:—

"All the fitness he requireth

Is to feel your need of him;

This he gives you,

'Tis his Spirit's rising beam."

Come and ask him to give it to you, and believe he will give it you. Do believe my Master is longing to save you: trust him, act on that better, sinner, and you shall be saved, or else I will be lost with you. Do but believe that my Master has got a loving heart, and that he is able to forgive, and that he has a mighty arm and is able to deliver you. Do him the honour now of not measuring his corn with your bushel. "For his ways are not your ways, neither are his thoughts your thoughts. "As high as the heaven is above the earth, so high are his ways above your ways, and his thoughts above your thoughts." To-day he says to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Sinner, if thou believest and art not saved, why God's Word is a lie, and God is not true. And wilt thou ever dream that to be the case? No, sinner; close in now with the proclamation of this gospel, and say,—

"I'll to the gracious King approach,

Whose sceptre mercy gives;

Perhaps he may command my touch,

And then the suppliant lives.

"Perhaps he will admit my plea,

Perhaps will hear my prayer;

But if I perish, I will pray,

And perish only there.”

Thou canst not perish trusting in Christ. Though thou hast no good works and no good feelings, yet if thine arms are round the cross, and if the blood be sprinkled on thy brow, when the destroying angel shall pass through the world, he shall pass over thee. Thus is it written:—“When I see the blood, I will pass over you;”—not “when I see your feelings about the blood,”—not “when I see your faith in the blood,” but “when I see the blood, I will pass over you.” learn to discriminate between a sense of sin which would humble thee, and a sense of sin which would only make thee proud; when thou hast come to say, “I have felt my sin enough, and therefore I am fit to come to Christ,” it is nothing but pride dressed in the garb of humility.

Let me tell the one more thing before I have done with thee on this point. Anything which keeps thee from Christ is sin, whatever though thou hast which keeps thee from trusting Christ to-day is a sinful thought; and every hour thou continuest as thou art, as unbeliever in Christ, the wrath of God abideth on thee. Now why shouldst thou be asking for a thing which may help to keep thee from Christ all the longer? You know now that you have nothing good in you; why not trust in Christ for all? But you say, “I must first of all feel more.” Poor soul, if you were to feel more acutely, you would find it all the harder to trust Christ. I prayed to God that he would show me my guilt; I little thought how he would answer me. Why I was such a fool that I would not come to Christ unless the devil dragged me there. I said, “Christ cannot have died for me, because I have not felt miserable enough.” God heard me, and, believe me, I will never pray that prayer again; for when I began to feel my guilt, then I said, “I am too wicked to be saved,” and I found the very thing I had been asking for was a curse upon me, and not a blessing. So, if thou shouldst feel what thou askest to feel, it might be the cause of thy condemnation. Be wise, therefore, and listen to my Master’s voice; stay not to gather together the fuller’s soap, and the refiner’s fire, but come thou and wash now in Jordan, and be clean; come, and stop not till thy heart be turned up with the plough, and thy soul hewn down with the axe. Come as thou art to him now. What man! wilt not thou come to Christ, when he has said, “Whosoever will, let him come?” Wilt thou not trust him when he looks down and smiles on thee and says, “Trust me, I will never deceive thee?” What, canst thou not say to him, “Master, I am very guilty, but thou hast said, ‘Come now, and let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’ Lord, this mercy is too great, but I believe it, I take thee at thy word; thou hast said, “Return, ye backsliding children, and I will forgive your iniquities.” Lord, I come to thee, I know not how it is that thou canst forgive such an one as I am, but I believe thou canst not lie, and on that promise do I rest my soul. I know thou hast said, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men;” Lord, I cannot understand how there can be power in the blood to wash away all manner of blasphemy, but thou hast said it, and believe it. It is thy business to make thy own word true, not mine, and thou hast said, “Whosoever will, let him come;” Lord, I am not worthy, but I do will to come, or if I do not will, yet I will to will, therefore will I come, just as I am, I know I have no good feeling to recommend myself to thee, but then thou dost not want good feeling in me, thou wilt give me all I want.

Oh my dear hearers, I feel so glad I have such a gospel as this to preach to you. If you have not received it, I pray God the Holy Ghost to send it home to you. It is so simple that men cannot believe it is true. If I were to bid you take off your shoes and run from here to York and you would be saved, why you would do it at once, and the road to York would be thronged; but when it is nothing but the soul-quickenings words,

“Believe and live,” it is too easy for your proud hearts to do. If I told you to go and earn a thousand pounds and endow a church with it, and you would be saved, you would think the price very cheap; but when I say, “Trust Christ and be saved,” you cannot do that—it is too simple. Ah, madness of the human heart! strange, strange, besotted sin, when God makes the path plain, men will not run in it for that very reason; and when he sets the door wide open, that is the very reason they will not come in. They say if the door was half a-jar and they had to push it open, they would come in. God has made the gospel too plain and too simple to suit proud hearts. May God soften proud hearts, and make you receive the Saviour.

IV. Now I come to, my last point, which I have already trenched upon, and that is by way of EXHORTATION.

Poor sinner, seven years ago you were saying just what you are saying now, and when seven more years shall have some, you will be saying just the same. Seven years ago you said, “I would trust Christ, but I do not feel as I ought.” Do you feel any better now? And when another seven years are come you will feel just as you do now. You will say, “I would come, but I do not feel fit—I do not feel my need enough.” Ay, and it will keep going on for ever, till you go down to the pit of hell, saying as you go down, “I do not feel my need enough,” and then the lie will be detected, and you will say, “It never said in the Word of God, ‘I might come to Christ when I felt my need enough,’ but it said ‘Whosoever will, let him come.’ I would not come as I was, therefore I am justly cast away.” Hear me, sinner, when I bid thee come to Jesus as thou art, and give thee these reasons for it.

In the first place, it is a very great sin not to feel your guilt, and not to mourn over it, but then it is one of the sins that Jesus Christ atoned for on the tree. When his heart was pierced,; he paid the ransomed price for your hard heart. Oh! sinner, if Christ had only died that we might be forgiven of other sins except our hard hearts, we should never go to heaven for we have, all of us, even we who have believed, committed that great sin of being impenitent before him. If He had not died to wash that sin away as well as every other sin, where should we be? The fact that thou canst not weep, nor sorrow as thou wouldst, is an addition to thy guilt; but did not Christ wash you from that sin, black though it be? Come to him, he is able to save you even from this.

Again, come to Jesus, because it is He only who can give you that heart for which you seek. If men were not to come to Christ till they feel as they should feel, they would never come at all. I will freely confess that if I had never trusted Christ until I felt I might have trusted him, I never could I trusted him, and could not trust him now. For there are times with me when after I have preached the gospel as plainly as I could, I have returned to my own chamber and my heart has been dead, lumpish, lying like a log within my spirit, and I have thought then if I could not come to Christ as a sinner, I could not come anyhow else. If I found in the text one word before that word “sinner”—“Jesus Christ came into the world to save”—and then an adjective, and then “sinners,” I should be lost. It is just because the text says, “sinners” just as they are, that “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” that I can hope he came to save me. If it had said Jesus Christ came into the world to save soft-hearted sinners, I should have said, “Lord, my heart is like adamant.” If it had said Jesus came into the world to save weeping sinners, I should have said, “Lord, though I press my eyelids, I could not force a tear.” If it had said Jesus came into the world to save sinners that felt their need of him, I should say, “I do not feel the need of it; I know I do need thee, but I do not feel it.” But, Lord, thou camest to save sinners, and I am saved. I trust thou camest to save me, and here I am, sink or swim, I rest on thee. If I perish, I will perish trusting thee; and if I must be lost, in thy hands it shall be; for in my own hands I will not be in any respect, or in any degree whatever. I come to that cross, and under that cross I stand; “thy perfect righteousness my beauty is—my glorious dress.”

Come sinner to Christ, because he can soften thine heart, and thou canst never soften it thyself. He is exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins; not merely the remission, but the repentance too. He gives his grace not merely to those who seek it, but even to those that seek it not. He gives repentance not to those who repent themselves, but to those who cannot repent. And to those who are saying, "Lord I would, but cannot feel;" "I would, but cannot weep;" I say Christ is just the Saviour for you—a Christ that begins at the beginning and does not want you to begin—a Christ that shall go to the end, and won't want you to finish—a Christ that does not ask you to say Alpha, and then he will be the Omega: but he will be both Alpha and Omega. Christ, that is the beginning and the end, the first and the last. The plain gospel is just this, "Look unto me, and be ye saved all the ends of the earth." "But, Lord, I cannot see anything." "Look unto me." "But, Lord, I do not feel." "Look unto me." "But, Lord, I cannot say I feel my need." "Look unto me, not unto thyself; all this is looking to thyself." "But, Lord, I feel sometimes that I could do anything, but a week passes, and then I am hard of heart." "Look unto me." "But Lord, I have often tried." "Try no more, look unto me." "Oh, but Lord thou knowest." "Yes. I know all things. I know everything, all thine iniquity and thy sins, but look unto me." "Oh, but often, Lord, when I have heard a sermon I feel impressed, yet it is like the morning cloud and the early dew; it passes away." "Look unto me," not to thy feelings or thy impressions, look unto me." "Well," says one, "but will that really save me, just looking to Christ?" My dear soul, if that does not save thee I am not saved. The only way in which I have been saved, and the only gospel I can find in the Bible is looking to Christ. "But if I go on in sin," says one. But you cannot go on in sin; your looking to Christ will cure you that habit of sin. "But if my heart remains hard?" It cannot remain hard; you will find that looking to Christ will keep you from having a hard heart. It is just as we sing in the penitential hymn of gratitude,—

"Dissolved by thy mercy I fall to the ground,

And weep to the praise of the mercy I've found."

You will never feel as you ought until you do not feel what you ought; you will never come to Christ until you do not feel that you can come. Come as thou art; come in all thy poverty, and stubbornness, and hardness, just as you are now, take Christ to be your all in all. Sound your songs ye angels, smite your golden harps ye redeemed ones; there are sinners snatched from hell to-day; there are men who have trusted Christ this morning. Though they scarcely know it, their sins are all forgiven; their feet are on the rock; the new song shall soon be in their mouth, and their goings shall be stablished. Farewell, ye brethren, turn to God this morning; God shall keep you, and you shall see his face in glory everlasting. Amen.

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