

The Great Separation

by J.C. Ryle

The sermon emphasizes the importance of examining oneself to determine whether one is among the wheat or the chaff, and highlights the separation that will occur at Christ's Second Coming.

Scripture: Psalm 149:4, Isaiah 42:3, Nahum 1:7, Matthew 3:12, Matthew 25:46, John 5:23, John 10:28, Ephesians 5:27, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Revelation 22:20

Topics: "Separation of Believers and Unbelievers", "The Urgency of Faith"

Description

J.C. Ryle's sermon 'The Great Separation' emphasizes the ultimate division of humanity into two classes: the 'wheat' representing true believers in Christ and the 'chaff' symbolizing those without faith. He warns that a day of reckoning is coming when Christ will separate the righteous from the unrighteous, and only those who have genuinely accepted Him will be gathered into His barn, while the rest will face eternal punishment. Ryle urges listeners to examine their own hearts and recognize the reality of their spiritual state, as neutrality is impossible. He reassures believers of Christ's unwavering care and the promise of eternal life, while also solemnly warning the unrepentant of the dire consequences of their choices. The sermon serves as a call to repentance and a reminder of the urgency of faith in Christ.

Transcript

"His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:12)

The verse of Scripture, which is now before our eyes, contains words that were spoken by John the Baptist. They are a prophecy about our Lord Jesus Christ, and a prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled. They are a prophecy which we will see fulfilled one day, and God alone knows how soon.

I invite every reader of this paper to consider seriously the great truths that this verse contains. I invite you to give me your attention, while I unfold them and set them before you in order. Possibly this text may prove to be a timely word to your soul? Who knows, maybe this text will help to make this day, the happiest day of your life?

I. Let me show you, in the first place, the two great classes into which mankind may be divided.

There are only two classes of people in the world in the sight of God, and both are mentioned in the text, which begins this paper. There are those who are called the wheat, and there are those who are called the

chaff.

Viewed with the eye of man, the earth contains many different sorts of inhabitants. Viewed with the eye of God it only contains two. Man's eye looks at the outward appearance--this is all he thinks of. The eye of God looks at the heart--this is the only part of which He takes any account. And tested by the state of their hearts, there are only two classes into which people can be divided--either they are wheat, or they are chaff.

Who are the wheat in the world? This is a point that demands special consideration.

The wheat refers to all men and women who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ--all who are led by the Holy Spirit--all who have felt themselves sinners, and fled for refuge to the salvation offered in the Gospel--all who love the Lord Jesus and live to the Lord Jesus, and serve the Lord Jesus--all who have taken Christ for their only confidence and the Bible for their only guide, and regard sin as their deadliest enemy, and look to heaven as their only home. All such people, of every Church, name, nation, people, and language--of every rank, occupation, and condition--all such people are God's "wheat."

Show me people of this kind anywhere, and I know what they are. I do not know whether they and I may agree in all particulars, but I see in them the handiwork of the King of kings, and I ask no more. I do not know where they came from and where they found their religion; but I know where they are going and that is enough for me. They are the children of my Father in heaven. They are part of His "wheat."

All such people, though sinful and vile, and unworthy in their own eyes, are the precious part of mankind. They are the sons and daughters of God the Father. They are the delight of God the Son. They are a dwelling place of God the Holy Spirit. The Father sees no iniquity in them--they are the members of His dear Son's mystical body: in Him He sees them, and is well pleased. The Lord Jesus sees in them the fruit of His own suffering and work upon the cross, and is well satisfied. The Holy Spirit regards them as spiritual temples, which He Himself has created, and rejoices over them. In a word, they are the "wheat" of the earth.

Who are the chaff in the world? This again is a point that demands special attention.

The chaff refers to all men and women who have no saving faith in Christ, and no sanctification of the Spirit. Some of them are atheists, and some are "Christians" in name only. Some are sneering Sadducees, and some self-righteous Pharisees. Some of them make a point of keeping up a kind of Sunday religion, and others are utterly careless of everything except their own pleasure and the world. But every one of them has the two great marks already mentioned--no faith and no sanctification--every one of them is "chaff." Those who attend Church and can think of nothing but outward ceremonies--the unconverted admirer of sermons--all are standing in one class before God: every one of them is "chaff."

They bring no glory to God the Father, because, "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him." (John 5:23) They neglect that mighty salvation which countless millions of angels admire. They disobey that Word which was graciously written for their understanding. They do not listen to the voice of Him who condescended to leave heaven and die for their sins. They do not serve nor love Him who gave them "life and breath and everything else." And therefore God takes no pleasure in them. He pities them, but He considers them no better than "chaff."

Yes! You may have rare intellectual gifts and great mental attainments: you may sway kingdoms by your counsel, move millions by your pen, or keep crowds in breathless attention by your tongue; but if you have never submitted yourself to the rule of Christ, and never honored His Gospel by heartfelt reception of it, then you are nothing in His sight. The most insignificant insect that crawls in the dirt is a nobler being than you are; it fills its place in creation and glorifies its Maker with all its power, and you do not. You do not honor God with heart, and will, and intellect, and with the members of your body, which are all His. You overturn His order and arrangement, and live as if your time on earth was more important than eternity, and the body better than the soul. You dare to neglect God's greatest gift--His own incarnate Son. You are cold about that subject which fills heaven with hallelujahs. And as long as this is the case, then you belong to the worthless part of mankind. You are the "chaff" of the earth.

Let this thought be engraved deeply in the mind of every reader of this paper, whatever else he forgets. Remember there are only two kinds of people in the world. There are wheat, and there are chaff.

There are many nations in Europe. Each differs from the rest. Each has its own language, its own laws, and its own unique customs. But God's eye divides Europe into two great parties--the wheat and the chaff.

There are many classes in England. There are peers and commoners--farmers and shopkeepers--masters and servants--rich and poor. But God's eye only sees two classes--the wheat and the chaff.

There are many and various minds in every congregation that gathers for religious worship. There are some who attend for a mere form, and some who really desire to meet Christ--some who come there to please others, and some who come to please God--some who's hearts are open are very alert to the message, and some who have closed their hearts and consider the whole service a drudgery. But the eye of the Lord Jesus only sees two divisions in the congregation--the wheat and the chaff.

There were millions of visitors to the Great Exhibition of 1851. From Europe, Asia, Africa, and America--from North and South, and East and West--crowds came together to see what skill and industry could do. People from all over the world, who had never seen each other before, met face to face under one roof. But the eye of the Lord only saw two groups crowding that large palace of glass--the wheat and the chaff.

I know full well that the world dislikes this way of dividing professing Christians. The world tries hard to convince us that there are three classes of people and not two. The first class of people are the very good and the very strict; however, this does not suit the world: they cannot and will not be saints. Yet, the third class, which has no religion at all, does not suit the world either: it would not be respectable. "Thank God," they will say, "we are not as bad as they are." Then there is the second class--a safe middle class, the world thinks--and in this middle class the majority of men persuade themselves is where they belong. In this class a person only needs enough religion to be saved, and yet not go into extremes--to be minimally good, and yet not be exceptional--to have a quiet, easy-going, moderate kind of Christianity, and go comfortably to heaven when they die--this is the world's favorite class.

I denounce this notion of a middle class as an immense and soul-ruining delusion. I warn you strongly not to be carried away by it. It is as vain an invention as the Roman Catholic's purgatory. It is a refuge of lies--a castle in the air--a Russian ice-palace--a vast unreality--an empty dream. This middle class is a class of Christians that is nowhere spoken of in the Bible.

There were two classes in the day of Noah's flood: those who were inside the ark, and those who were outside; two in the parable of the Gospel-net: those who are called the good fish, and those who are called the bad; two in the parable of the ten virgins: those who are described as wise, and those who are described as foolish; two in the account of the judgment day: the sheep and the goats; two sides of the throne: the right hand and the left; two abodes when the last sentence has been passed: heaven and hell.

And just as there are only two classes in the visible Church on earth--those who are in their natural state of unbelief and sin, and those who are in the state of grace; those who are on the narrow road, and those who are traveling on the broad road; those who have faith, and those who do not have faith; those who have been converted, and those who have not been converted; those who are with Christ, and those who are against Him; those who gather with Him, and those who scatter; those who are "wheat," and those who are "chaff,"--into these two classes the whole professing Church of Christ may be divided. Apart from these two classes there is none.

You must examine yourselves! Are you among the wheat, or among the chaff? Neutrality is impossible. Either you are in one class, or in the other. Which is it of the two?

Perhaps you attend church. You go to the Lord's table. You like good people. You can distinguish between good preaching and bad. You think Roman Catholicism is a false religion, and heartily oppose it. You think Protestantism is true and warmly support it. You attend Christian meetings. You sometimes read Christian books. It is good: it is all very good. It is more than can be said of many. But still this is not a straightforward answer to my question--are you wheat or are you chaff?

Have you been born again? Are you a new creature? Have you put off the old man and put on the new? Have you ever felt convicted of your sins and repented of them? Are you looking only to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life? Do you love Christ? Do you serve Christ? Do you hate your sins and fight against them? Do you long for perfect holiness and strive after it? Have you come out from the world? Do you delight in the Bible? Do you wrestle in prayer? Do you love Christ's people? Do you try to do good to the world? Are you vile in your own eyes and willing to take the lowest place? Do you live like a Christian at work, and on weekdays, and also in the privacy of your own home? Oh, think, think, think on these things, and then perhaps you will be better able to tell the state of your soul.

I implore you not to turn away from my question, however unpleasant it may be. Answer it, though it may prick your conscience and convict your heart. Answer it, though it may prove you in the wrong and expose your fearful danger. Do not rest, do not rest, until you know how it is between you and God. It is a thousand times better to find out that you are living an evil life of sin, and repent immediately, than live on in uncertainty and be eternally lost.

II. Let me show you, in the second place, the time when the two great classes of mankind will be separated.

The verse at the beginning of this paper tells of a coming separation. It says that Christ will one day do to His professing Church what the farmer does to his corn. He will sift it. He "will clear His threshing floor." And then the wheat and the chaff will be divided.

There is no separation yet. Good and bad are now all mingled together in the visible Church of Christ. Believers and unbelievers--converted and unconverted--holy and unholy--all are to be found now among those who call themselves Christians. They sit side by side in our churches. They kneel side by side in

prayer. They listen side by side to our sermons. They sit side by side at the Lord's table and receive the same bread and wine from our hands.

But it will not always be so. Christ will come the second time with His winnowing fork in His hand. He will purge His Church, even as He purified the temple. And then the wheat and the chaff will be separated, and each will go to its own place.

(a) Before Christ comes separation is impossible.

It is not in man's power to make the separation. There is no minister on earth who can read the hearts of every person in his congregation. He may speak decidedly about some, but not everyone. Who has oil in their lamps, and who has not--who has grace as well as profession, and who has profession only and no grace--who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil--all these are questions which in many cases we cannot accurately answer. The winnowing fork was not put into our hands.

There are some Christians whose grace is sometimes so weak and feeble that they look like unbelievers. Unbelievers sometimes are so convincing and well dressed that they look like Christians. I believe that many of us would have said that Judas was as good as any of the Apostles; and yet he proved to be a traitor. I believe that we would have said that Peter was a reprobate when he denied his Lord; and yet he repented immediately. We are fallible men. "For we know in part and we prophesy in part."

(1 Corinthians 13:9) We scarcely understand our own hearts. It is any great wonder that we cannot read the hearts of others?

But it will not always be this way. There is One coming who never makes a mistake in judgment and is perfect in knowledge. Jesus will purge His floor. Jesus will sift the chaff from the wheat. I wait for this. Till then I will lean to the side of love in my judgments. I would rather tolerate a lot of chaff in the Church than to cast out one grain of wheat. He will soon come with "His winnowing fork is in His hand," and then everyone's identity will be known.

(b) Before Christ comes it is useless to expect to see a perfect Church.

There cannot be a perfect Church. In this life the wheat and the chaff will always be found together. I pity those who leave one Church and join another because of a few faults and questionable members. I pity them because they are fostering ideas, which can never be realized. I pity them because they are seeking that which cannot be found. I see "chaff" everywhere. I see imperfections and weaknesses in every congregation on earth. I believe there are only a few communion tables of the Lord, if any, where all the communicants are converted. I often see loud-talking Christians exalted as saints. I often see holy and contrite believers looked upon as having no grace at all. I believe that those who demand a perfect Church will go fluttering about, like Noah's dove, all their days, and never find rest.

Does any reader of this paper desire a perfect Church? You must wait for the Second Coming of Christ. Then, and not until then, you will see a "a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. (Ephesians 5:27) Then, and not until then, the threshing floor will be purged.

(c) Before Christ returns it is vain to look for the conversion of the world.

How can the whole world be converted, if the Bible says that Christ will find wheat and chaff growing side by side in the day of His Second Coming? I believe some Christians expect that missions will fill the earth

with the knowledge of Christ, and that in time sin will disappear and a state of perfect holiness will gradually be manifest. I cannot agree with them. I think they are mistaking God's purposes, and sowing for themselves bitter disappointment. I expect nothing of the kind. I see nothing in the Bible or in the world around me to make me expect it. I have never heard of a single congregation in all of England or Scotland, which was entirely converted to God--so why am I to look for a different result from the preaching of the Gospel in other countries of the world? I only expect to see a few raised up as witnesses to Christ in other nations, some in one place and some in another. Then I expect the Lord Jesus will come in glory with His winnowing fork in His hand. And when He has purged His floor, and not until then, His kingdom will begin.

No separation and no perfection until Christ comes! This is my creed. I am not moved when the unbeliever asks me, "How can Christianity be true if the whole world is not converted?" I answer, "It was never promised that the whole world would be saved before the return of Christ." The Bible tells me that believers will always be few in number and that evil and divisions and heresies will always abound, and that when my Lord returns to earth He will find plenty of chaff.

No perfection until Christ comes! I am not disturbed when men say, "You must make all the people good Christians at home before you send missionaries to the heathen abroad." I answer, "If I am to wait for that, I may wait forever." When we have done all that we can at home, the Church will still be a mixed body--it will contain some wheat and a lot of chaff.

But Christ will come again. Sooner or later there will be a separation of the visible Church into two companies, that will be a fearful separation. The wheat will make up one company. The chaff will make up another. The one company will be all godly. The other company will be all ungodly. Each will be by themselves, and a great gulf will exist between them that no one can cross. Blessed indeed will the righteous be in that day! They will shine like stars, no longer obscured with clouds. They will be beautiful as the lily, no longer choked with thorns. (Song of Solomon 2:2) The wretched will be most ungodly! How corrupt will corruption be when left without one grain of salt to season it! How dark will darkness be when left without one spark of light! Yes, it is not enough to respect and admire the Lord's people! You must belong to them, or you will one day be separated from them forever. There will be no chaff in heaven. Many, many are the families where one will be taken and the other left. (Luke 17:34)

Who is there, among the readers of this paper, that sincerely loves the Lord Jesus Christ? If I know anything of the heart of a Christian, you experience your greatest trials when you are in the company of worldly people, and you experience your greatest joys when in the company of the saints. Yes! There are many days when your spirit feels broken and crushed by the "worldliness" of all those around you--days when you could cry out with David, "Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar!" (Psalm 120:5) And yet there are hours when your soul is so refreshed and revived by meeting some of God's dear children that it seems like heaven on earth. Am I not speaking to your heart? Are these things not true? Then you should long for the time when Christ will return. You should pray daily that the Lord would expedite His coming kingdom, and say to Him, "Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20) Then, and only then, will there be a pure unmixed communion. Then, and only then, will the saints all be together and will not go out from one another's presence again. Wait a little while. Wait a little while. Scorn and contempt will soon be over. Laughter and ridicule will soon be ended. Slander and misrepresentation will soon cease. Your Savior will come and plead your case. And then, as Moses said to Korah, "the LORD will show who belongs to Him." (Numbers 16:5)

Is there anyone, among the readers of this paper, who knows that his heart is not right in the sight of God? You should fear and tremble at the thought of Christ's appearing. Yes, for the man that lives and dies with nothing better than a pretext of religion, he will have his true colors exposed in the day that Christ comes and separates the chaff from the wheat. You may deceive ministers, friends, and neighbors--but you cannot deceive Christ. The paint and varnish of a heartless Christianity will never stand the fire of that day. The Lord is a God of knowledge, and He will examine and judge every action. You will find that the eye that saw Achan's and Gehazi's sins has also read your secrets and searched out the hidden things of your heart. You will hear that awful word, "Friend, how did you get in here without wedding clothes?" and you too will be speechless. (Matthew 22:12) Oh, tremble at the thought of the day of sifting and separation! Surely hypocrisy is a losing proposition. Surely acting the part of a Christian without its reality will fail. Surely you will suffer like Ananias and Sapphira who pretended to give something to God and yet kept back their heart. It all fails in the end. Your joy will last for only a moment. Your hopes will be no better than a dream. Oh, tremble, tremble: tremble and repent!

III. Let me show, in the third place, the inheritance that Christ's people will receive when He comes to purge His threshing floor.

The text at the beginning of this paper tells us, with words of comfort, that Christ will "gather His wheat into the barn."

When the Lord Jesus comes the second time, He will gather His believing people into a place of safety. He will send His angels and gather them from the four winds. The sea will give up the dead that are in it, and the graves the dead that are in them, and those who are alive will be changed. Not one poor sinner of mankind, who has ever believed in Jesus Christ by faith, will be missing from that company. Not one single grain of wheat will be missing and left outside, when judgments fall upon a wicked world. There will be a barn for the wheat of the earth and into that barn all the wheat will be brought.

It is a sweet and comfortable thought, that "the LORD takes delight in His people" and "cares for those who trust in Him." (Psalm 149:4; Nahum 1:7) But I fear that little is known, and only dimly seen, of exactly how much the Lord cares for them. Beyond question, believers have a great many trials. The flesh is weak. The world is full of snares. The cross is heavy. The way is narrow. The companions are few. But still they have great consolations, if only their eyes were open to see them. Like Hagar, they have a well of water near them, even in the wilderness, though often they do not see it. Like Mary, they have Jesus standing by their side, though often they are not aware of it because of their very tears. (Genesis 21:19; John 20:14)

Bear with me while I try to tell you something about Christ's care for poor sinners that believe in Him. We live in a day of weak and feeble preaching. The danger of the natural state of man is feebly exposed. The privileges of the state of grace are feebly set forth. Faltering souls are not encouraged. Disciples are not established and confirmed. The man without Christ is not properly alarmed. The man in Christ is not properly built up. The one sleeps on and seldom has his conscience pricked. The other creeps and crawls all his days and never thoroughly understands the riches of his inheritance. Truly this is a painful disease, and one that I would gladly help to cure. Truly it is a sad thing that the people of God never go up to mount Pisgah and, therefore, never know the length and breadth of their possessions. To be brethren of Christ and sons of God by adoption--to have full and perfect forgiveness and the renewing of the Holy Spirit--to have a place in the book of life and a name on the breastplate of the Great High Priest in heaven--all these are truly glorious things. But still they are not everything that the believer will receive.

(a) The Lord takes pleasure in His believing people.

Though stained and spotted in their own eyes, they are beautiful and honorable in His. They are all lovely. He sees "no flaw" in them. (Song of Solomon 4:7) Their weaknesses and shortcomings do not break off the union between Him and them. He chose them, knowing everything in their hearts. He took them for His own, with a perfect understanding of all their debts, liabilities, and weaknesses, and He will never break His covenant and cast them off. When they fall, He will raise them up again. When they wander, He will bring them back. Their prayers are pleasant to Him. As a father loves the first stammering efforts of his child to speak, so the Lord loves the poor feeble petitions of His people. He endorses them with His own mighty intercession and gives them power on high. Their acts of service are pleasant to Him. As a father delights in the first daisy that his child picks and brings him, even so the Lord is pleased with the weak attempts of His people to serve Him. Not a single cup of cold water will ever lose its reward. Not a word spoken in love will ever be forgotten. The Holy Spirit inspired the writer of Hebrews to tell of Noah's faith, but not of his drunkenness--of Rahab's faith, but not of her lie. It is a blessed thing to be God's wheat!

(b) The Lord cares for His believing people in their lives.

Their dwelling-place is well known. The street called "Straight" where Judas lived, and Paul lodged--the house by the seaside where Peter prayed, were all familiar to their Lord. No one has such attendants as they have: angels rejoice when they are born again; angels minister to them; and angels encamp around them. No one has such food--their bread is given them and their water is sure, and they have meat to eat of which the world knows nothing about. No one has such company as they have: the Holy Spirit lives within them; the Father and the Son come to them and make their home with them. (John 14:23) Their steps are all ordered from grace to glory: they that persecute them persecute Christ Himself, and they that hurt them hurt the apple of the Lord's eye. A wise Physician measures out all their trials and temptations: not a grain of bitterness is ever mingled in their cup that is not good for the health of their souls. Their temptations, like Job's, are all under God's control. Satan cannot touch a hair of their head without their Lord's permission, nor even tempt them above that which they will be able to bear. "As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him." "He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to them." (Psalm 103:13; Lamentations 3:33) He leads them down the right path. He withholds nothing that would be for their good. Come what may, any pain they receive will always be necessary. When they are placed in the furnace, it is that they may be purified. When they are chastened, it is so that they may become more holy. When they are pruned, it is to make them more fruitful. When they are transplanted from place to place, it is that they may bloom more brightly. All things are continually working together for their good. Like the bee, they extract sweetness even out of the bitterest flowers.

(c) The Lord cares for His believing people in their deaths.

Their times are all in the Lord's hand. The hairs of their heads are all numbered and not one can ever fall to the ground without their Father's permission. They are kept on earth until they are ripe and ready for glory and not one moment longer. When they have had enough sun and rain, enough wind and storm, enough cold and heat--when the fruit is ripe--then, and not until then, they are harvested. They are all immortal until their work is done. There is not a disease that can take their lives until the Lord gives the word. A thousand may fall at their right hand, but there is not a plague that can touch them till the Lord sees fit. There is not a physician that can keep them alive when the Lord gives the word to bring them home. When they come to their deathbed, the everlasting arms are wrapped around them. When they die, they die like Moses, "as the LORD had said," and at the right time, and in the right way. (Deuteronomy

34:5) And when they breathe their last, they fall asleep in Christ and are immediately carried, like Lazarus, to Abraham's bosom. Yes! It is a blessed thing to be Christ's wheat! When the sun of other men is setting, the sun of the believer is rising. When other men are laying aside their honors, he is putting his on. Death locks the door on the unbeliever and shuts him out from hope; but death opens the door to the believer and lets him into paradise.

(d) The Lord will care for His believing people in the dreadful day of His appearing.

The flaming fire will not come near them. The voice of the Archangel and the trumpet of God will not proclaim any terrors to their ears. Sleeping or waking, alive or dead, decomposing in the coffin, or going about their daily duties--believers will be secure and immovable. They will lift up their heads with joy when they see redemption drawing near. They will be changed and will put on their beautiful heavenly robes in the twinkling of an eye. They will be caught up "to meet the Lord in the air." (1 Thessalonians 4:17) Jesus will do nothing to a sin-laden world till all His people are safe. There was an ark for Noah when the flood began. There was the town of Zoar for Lot to flee to when the fire fell on Sodom. There was a place of refuge for early Christians when Jerusalem was besieged. There was a Zurich for English reformers when Mary, a supporter of Roman Catholicism, came to the throne. And there will be a safe and secure barn for all the wheat of the earth in the last day. Yes! It is a blessed thing to be Christ's wheat!

I often wonder at the miserable faithlessness of those among us who are believers. Next to the hardness of the unconverted heart, I call it one of the greatest wonders in the world. I am amazed that with such mighty reasons for confidence that we can still be so full of doubts. I marvel, above all things, how any can deny the doctrine that Christ's people persevere to the end, and can imagine that He who loved them so much, that He died for them upon the cross, will ever abandon them. I do not think it possible. I do not believe the Lord Jesus will ever lose one of His flock. He will not let Satan pluck away from Him so much as one sick lamb. He will not allow one bone of His mystical body to be broken. He will not allow one jewel to fall from His crown. He and His bride have been joined into an everlasting covenant and they will never, never be put asunder. The trophies won by earthly conquerors have often been wrested from them and carried off; but this will never be said of the trophies of Him who triumphed for us on the cross. "My sheep," He says, "will never perish." (John 10:28) I take my stand on that text. I do not know how it can be evaded. If words have any meaning then for sure, the perseverance of Christ's people is there.

I do not believe that when David had rescued the lamb from the paws of the lion, that he left it weak and wounded to perish in the wilderness. I cannot believe that when the Lord Jesus has delivered a soul from the snare of the devil that He will ever leave that soul to take his chances and wrestle on in his own feebleness, against sin, the devil, and the world.

I am absolutely positive that if you were present at a shipwreck and saw some helpless child tossing on the waves, that you would plunge into the sea and save him at the risk of your own life. I am absolutely positive that you would not be content with merely bringing that child safely to shore. You would not lay him down when you had reached the land, and say, "I will do no more. He is weak--he is unconscious--he is cold: it does not matter. I have done enough--I have delivered him from the waters: he is not drowned." You would not do it. You would not say these things. You would not treat that child in such a manner. You would lift him in your arms; you would carry him to the nearest house; you would use every means to restore his health and vigor: you would never leave him until his recovery was certain.

Now, can you suppose the Lord Jesus Christ is less merciful and less compassionate? Can you think He would suffer on the cross and die and yet leave it uncertain whether believers in Him would be saved? Can you think He would wrestle with death and hell and go down to the grave for our sakes, and yet allow our eternal life to hang on such a thread as our poor miserable endeavors.

Oh, no! He does not do it that way! He is a perfect and complete Savior. Those whom He loves, He loves to the end. Those whom He washes in His blood, He never leaves nor forsakes. He puts His fear into their hearts so that they will not depart from Him. Where He begins a work, there He also finishes. All whom He plants in His garden on earth, He transplants sooner or later into paradise. All whom He revives by His Spirit, He will also bring with Him when He enters His kingdom. There is a barn for every grain of the wheat. All will appear before God in Zion.

Man may fall from false grace. I never doubted this. I see proof of it continually. Men never fall from true grace. They never did, and they never will. If they commit sin, like Peter, they will repent and rise up again. If they stray from the right path, like David, they will be brought back. It is not by any strength or power of their own that keeps them from apostasy. They are kept secure because of the power and love, and promises of the Trinity. The election of God the Father will not be fruitless; the intercession of God the Son will not be ineffectual; the love of God the Holy Spirit will not labor in vain. The Lord "will guard the feet of His saints." (1 Samuel 2:9) They will all be more than conquerors through Him that loved them. They all will conquer, and none will die eternally.

"Blessed forever and ever is that mother's child whose faith has made him the child of God. The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under us, the countenance of the heaven may be horrified, the sun may lose its light, the moon its beauty, the stars their glory: but concerning the man that trusts in God--what is there in the world that will change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affection towards God, or the affection of God to him?" Richard Hooker, 1585.

If you have not yet taken up the cross and become Christ's disciple, then you know little what privileges you are missing. Peace with God now and glory in the future--the everlasting arms to guide and protect you on your way to heaven and the shelter of safety in the end--all these are freely offered to you without money and without cost. You may say that Christians have trials--you forget that they also have comforts. You may say they have unique sorrows--you forget they also have unique joys. You only see half of the Christian life. You do not see everything. You see the warfare but not the daily sustenance and the rewards. You see the struggles and conflicts of the outward part of Christianity but you do not see the hidden treasures that lie deep within. Like Elisha's servant you see the enemies of God's children but you do not, like Elisha, see the chariots and horses of fire which protect them. Oh, do not judge by outward appearances! Be sure that the smallest drop of the "water of life" is better than all the rivers of the world. Remember the place of shelter and the crown. Be wise as you live on this earth.

If you feel that you are a weak disciple, then do not think that weakness shuts you out from any of the privileges of which I have been speaking about. Weak faith is true faith, and weak grace is true grace and both are a gift from Him who never gives in vain. Do not fear and do not be discouraged. Do not doubt, neither despair. Jesus will never "break a bruised reed, nor snuff out a smoldering wick." (Isaiah 42:3) The infants in a family are as much loved and thought of as the elder brothers and sisters. The tender seedlings in a garden are as diligently looked after as the old trees. The lambs in the flock are as carefully tended by the good shepherd as the old sheep. Oh, rest assured it is just the same in Christ's family, in Christ's garden, in Christ's flock! All are loved. All are tenderly thought of. All are cared for. And in the end

all will be found in His barn.

IV. Let me show in the last place, the portion that remains for all who are not Christ's people.

The text at the beginning of this paper describes this in words, which should make our ears tingle: Christ will "burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes to clear His floor He will punish all who are not His disciples with a fearful punishment. All who are found to be unrepentant and unbelieving--all who have suppressed the truth by their wickedness--all who have clung to sin, loved the world, and set their affections on things below--all who are without Christ-- all of them will come to an awful end. Christ will "burn up the chaff."

Their punishment will be most severe. There is no pain like that of burning. If you doubt this, then put your finger in the flame of a candle for a moment. Fire is the most destructive and devouring of all elements. Look into the mouth of a blast furnace and think what it would be like to be in there. Of all elements, fire is the most opposed to life. Creatures can live in air, and earth, and water; but nothing can live in fire; yet fire is the doom to which the Christless and the unbelieving will come to. Christ will "burn up the chaff with fire."

Their punishment will be eternal. Millions of ages will pass away and the fire into which the chaff is thrown will still burn on. That fire will never burn low and become dim. The fuel of that fire will never be consumed. It is "unquenchable fire."

These are sad and painful things to speak of! I have no pleasure in dwelling on them. I would rather say, with the Apostle Paul, as I write, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." (Romans 9:2) But they are things written for our learning and it is good to consider them. They are a part of that Scripture which is "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 the fires of hell if God had not spoken of it? When God has spoken so plainly about it, then who can safely keep from speaking of it?

I dare not shut my eyes to the fact that a deep-rooted indifference 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 of others about their neighbors' souls: they show little anxiety to snatch the burning sticks from the fire. I denounce such indifference with all my might; believing that there are "terrors of the Lord," as well as the "giving of rewards," I call on all who profess to believe the Bible to be on their guard.

(a) I know that some do not believe that hell exists.

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 his own favorite doctrine: "You will not surely die." (Genesis 3:4)

(b) Furthermore, I know that some do not believe that hell is eternal.

They tell us it is incredible that a compassionate God will punish men forever; He will surely open the prison doors someday. This also is a great assistance to the devil's cause. "Take it easy," he whispers to sinners: "if you do make a mistake, never mind, it is not forever." A wicked woman was overheard in the

streets of London, saying to an evil companion, "Come along: do not be afraid. In fact, some preachers say there is no hell."

(c) I also know that some do believe there is a hell, but do not believe that anybody is going there.

They believe that everyone, along with them, are declared and made "good" as soon as they die, because all were sincere, all meant well, and all, they hope, made it to heaven. Oh, what a common delusion this is! I can clearly understand the feeling of the little girl who asked her mother where all the wicked people were buried, "because all the gravestones in the cemetery say that these were good people."

(d) And I know very well that some believe there is a hell but never like it to be spoken of.

In their opinion, it is a subject that should always be avoided. They see no profit in bringing it up and are rather shocked when it is mentioned. This also is an immense aid to the devil. "Quiet, quiet!" says Satan, "say nothing about hell." The hunter does not want to make any noise when he sets his traps. The wolf would like the shepherd to stay asleep while he prowls around the fold. The devil rejoices when Christians are silent about hell.

All these notions are the opinions of man. But what does it matter to you and me what man thinks about religion? Man will not judge us at the last day. Man's thoughts and traditions are not to be our guide in this life. There is only one point to be settled: "What does the Word of God say?"

(a) 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 on the cross--as true as the Dead Sea. If you doubt hell, then there is no fact or doctrine in the Bible that you cannot also doubt. Disbelieve hell and you unscrew and unsettle everything in Scripture. You may as well throw your Bible away, for there are only a few steps from "no hell" to "no God."

(b) Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell will have inhabitants.

The wicked will certainly be sent to hell, and all the people that forget God. "They will go away to eternal punishment." (Matthew 25:46) The same blessed Savior who now sits on a throne of grace, will one day sit on a throne of judgment, and men will see that there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb." (Revelation 6:16) The same lips which now say, "Come: come to Me!" will one day say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed!" How awful the thought of being condemned by Christ Himself, judged by the Savior, and sentenced to misery by the Lamb!

(c) Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell will be an intense and unutterable misery.

It is vain to talk of all the expressions of hell, as only being figures of speech. The pit, the prison, the maggot, 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 beyond all doubt, figures of speech, in the Bible, mean something, and here they mean something which man's mind can never fully conceive. The anguish 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.

(d) Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell is eternal.

It must be eternal or words have no meaning at all. Forever and ever--everlasting--unquenchable--eternal--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 destroyed. If hell has an end, heaven has an end too. They both stand or fall together. It must be eternal or else every doctrine of the Gospel is undermined. If a man without faith in Christ or without the sanctification of the Spirit can escape hell, then sin is no longer an infinite evil and there was no great need for Christ making an atonement. And where in the Bible is there 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 anything. Grant a hope of deliverance, however distant, and hell is but a drop of water. Oh, these are solemn things! It has been well said, that, "FOREVER is the most solemn saying in the Bible." For a day in hell will have no tomorrow. It will be a place when men will seek death and not find it, and will desire to die, but death will flee from them! "Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?" (Revelation 9:6; Isaiah 33:14)

(e) Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell is a subject that ought not to be kept back.

It is obvious to note the many texts about hell in the Scriptures. It is interesting to observe that no one said so much about hell as did our Lord Jesus Christ, that gracious and merciful Savior, and the apostle John, whose heart seems full of love. Truly, it is doubtful whether we ministers speak of it as much as we ought. I cannot forget the words of a dying person to his minister, "Sir, you often told me of Christ and salvation, but why didn't you often 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 that broad road that leads to it, and I would willingly arouse them to a sense of the peril before them. What would you say of the man who saw his neighbor's house on fire and never raised his voice and cried out, "Fire!"? What would be said about us as ministers, if we call ourselves watchmen of souls, who see the fires of hell raging in the distance, and never give the alarm? Call it bad taste, if you like, to speak of hell. Call it love to speak about pleasant things, and speak smoothly, and soothe men with a constant lullaby of peace. May I always be delivered from such notions of taste and love! My notion of love is to warn men plainly of danger. My notion of taste in the ministerial office is to declare the whole counsel of God. If I never spoke of hell, I would be holding something back that was profitable, and would look on myself as an accomplice of the devil.

I implore every one that reads this paper, with all tender affection, to beware of false views of the subject on which I have been dwelling. Beware of new and strange doctrines about hell and eternal 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 has a heaven for everybody, but a hell for none--a God who can allow good and bad to exist side by side on earth, and will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity. Such a God is an idol of your own creation as real as Jupiter or Moloch--as true an idol as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple--as true an idol as ever was molded out of brass or clay. The hands of your own notions and emotions have made him. He is not the God of the Bible; and aside from 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 indiscriminate characters would surely be a place of miserable discord. Oh, what a miserable eternity such a heaven would be--there would be little difference between it and hell! There is a hell! There is a fire for the chaff! Be careful that you do not find it out too late--to your own loss.

Beware of thinking yourself wiser than that which is written in God's Word. Beware of forming fanciful theories of your own, and then trying to make the Bible agree with them. Beware of taking selections from your Bible to suit your taste--refusing, like a spoiled child, whatever you think might taste bitter--grabbing, like a spoiled child, whatever you think might be sweet. What is all of this but the same as taking Jehoiakim's penknife and cutting out portions of Scripture and throwing them into the fire? (Jeremiah 36:23) What does it amount to but telling God that you, a poor short-lived worm, know what is good for you better than He. It will not do: it will not do. You must take the Bible as it is. You must read it all and believe it all. You must read it with the spirit of a little child. Do not dare to say, "I believe this verse, because I like it. I reject that one, because I don't like it. I accept this verse, for I can understand it. I refuse that one, for I cannot reconcile it with my views." May this never be! "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Romans 9:20) By what right do you talk in this way? Surely it would be better to say over every chapter in the Word, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening." If men would do this, then they would never deny hell, the chaff, and the fire.

And now, let me say four things in conclusion, and then I will be done. I have shown the two great classes of mankind, the wheat and the chaff. I have shown the separation that will one day take place. I have shown the safety of the Lord's people. I have shown the fearful fate of the unbelievers--those without Christ. In the sight of God, I urge these things to the conscience of every reader of this paper.

(1) First of all, settle it in your mind that the things of which I have been speaking are real and true.

I do believe that many never see the great truths of religion in this light. I firmly believe that many never listen to the things they hear from ministers as realities. They regard it all as nothing but "names and words," and nothing more; a huge shadow--a formal acting part--an immense sham. The latest novel, the most recent news from France, India, Australia, Turkey, or New York--all these are things they comprehend: they feel interested and excited about them. But as to the Bible, and heaven, and the kingdom of Christ, and the judgment day--these are subjects that do not affect their hearts: they do not really believe them. If an archeologist had dug up anything at the excavation of Nineveh that would damage the truth and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, it would not have interfered with their peace for one moment.

If this is your frame of mind, then I ask you to cast it off forever. Awaken to a thorough conviction that the things I have brought before you in this paper are real and true. The wheat, the chaff, the separation, the barn, the fire--all these are great realities--as real as the sun in heaven, as real as the paper which your eyes see. For me, I believe in heaven, and I believe in hell. I believe in a coming judgment. I believe in a day of sifting. I am not ashamed to say so. I believe them all, and therefore write as I do. Oh, take a friend's advice--live as if these things were true.

(2) In the second place, settle it in your own mind, that the things which I write about concerns you personally. They are your business, your affair, and your concern.

Many, I believe, never look on religion as a matter that concerns them. They are careful to attend to its outward form in a decent and proper fashion. They listen to sermons. They read religious books. They have their children christened. But all the while they never ask themselves, "What does all of this really mean to me?" They sit in our churches like spectators in a theatre or a court of law. They read our writings as if they were reading a report of an interesting trial, or of some event far away. But they never say to themselves, "I am the man."

If you have this kind of feeling, then you can depend on it, that it will never do. All of this thinking must come to an end if you are ever to be saved. I write to the one that reads this paper--you are that person. I do not write especially to the rich. I do not write especially to the poor. I write to everybody who will read, whatever his rank may be. It is because of your very soul that I am pleading and not another's. You are the one spoken of in the verse that begins this paper. You are this very day either among the "wheat" or among the "chaff." Your destiny will one day either be the barn or the fire. Oh, that men were wise, and would take these things to heart! Oh, that they would not trifle, dally, linger, or live on as false Christians, meaning well, but never acting boldly and finally, realizing in the end that it is too late!

(3) In the third place, settle it in your mind, that if you are willing to be one of the wheat of the earth, then the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to receive you.

Does any one suppose that Jesus is not willing to see His barn filled? Do you think He does not desire to bring many to glory? Oh, if you can think such a thought then you know very little of the depth of His mercy and compassion! He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem. He mourns over the unrepentant and the indifferent in the present day. He sends you invitations by my mouth this very hour. He invites you to hear and live, to forsake the way of the foolish and go down the path of understanding. The sovereign Lord declares, "I take no pleasure in the death of anyone. Repent and live!" (Ezekiel 18:32)

Oh, if you never came to Christ for life before, come to Him this very day! Come to Him with the repentant sinners' prayer for mercy and grace. Come to Him without delay. Come to Him while the subject of this paper is still fresh on your mind. Come to Him before another sun rises on the earth, and let the morning find you a new creature.

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 is your case, there is but one end for you. I honestly warn you--I tell you plainly: you will sooner or later be thrown into the eternal fire.

But if any man is willing to be saved, the Lord Jesus Christ stands ready to save him. "Come to Me," He says, "all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Oh, come guilty and sinful soul, and I will give you free pardon. Come, lost and ruined soul, and I will give you eternal life. (Matthew 11:28)

Let that passage be a timely word to your soul. Wake up and call on the Lord. Let the angels of God rejoice over one more saved soul. Let the courts of heaven hear the good news that one more lost sheep is found.

(4) Last of all, settle it in your mind, that if you have committed your soul to Christ, then Christ will never allow your soul to perish.

The everlasting arms are around you. Lean back in them and know your safety. The same hand that was nailed to the cross is holding you. The same wisdom that created the heavens and the earth is engaged to maintain your cause. The same power that redeemed the twelve tribes from the house of bondage is on your side. The same love that sustained and carried Israel from Egypt to Canaan is pledged to keep you. Yes! Those whom Christ keeps are well kept! Our faith may rest calmly on such a bed as Christ's omnipotence. Take comfort, doubting believer. Why are you downcast? The love of Jesus is not shallow water: no man has ever yet seen its bottom. The compassion of Jesus is a fire that never yet burned low: the cold, grey ashes of that fire have never yet been seen. Take comfort. In your own heart you may find

little cause for rejoicing, but you may always rejoice in the Lord.

You say your faith is small. But where is it said that none will be saved except those whose faith is great? And after all, "Who gave you this faith?" The very fact that you have any faith at all is a sign of God's grace.

You say you have too many sins. But where is the sin or the heap of sins, that the blood of Jesus cannot wash away? After all, "Who told you that you had any sins?" That feeling never came from you. Greatly blessed is the person who really knows and feels that he is a sinner.

I say once more, take comfort, if you have truly come to Christ. Take comfort, and know your privileges. Cast every care on Jesus. Tell your every want to Jesus. Roll every burden onto Jesus: sins--unbelief--doubts -fears--anxieties--lay them all on Christ. He loves to see you do so. He loves to be employed as your High Priest. He loves to be trusted. He loves to see His people ceasing from the vain effort to carry their burdens for themselves.

I commend these things to the notice of every one into whose hands this paper may fall. Be among Christ's "wheat" now, and then in the great day of separation, as sure as the Bible is true, you will be in Christ's "barn" forever.

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