

On the Spiritual Conflict (Continued)

by Thomas Reade

Thomas Reade's sermon emphasizes the ongoing spiritual conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, encouraging believers to persevere in faith and rely on God's grace for victory over sin.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:6, 1 Corinthians 9:27, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Corinthians 10:4, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 6:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:8, 1 Timothy 6:12, James 2:26, 1 John 5:14

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Sanctification"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the importance of true faith and holiness, as exemplified by the sentiments of the Saxon Reformer, Martin Luther. Luther's teachings on the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit emphasize the need for believers to understand and overcome their sinful nature through the power of the Gospel. The sermon highlights Luther's exhortation for ministers to remain zealous in their duties and to combat spiritual temptations and persecutions. It also stresses the necessity for believers to crucify the flesh, resist sin, and rely on the Spirit to lead a life pleasing to God, echoing Luther's teachings on justification, sanctification, and perseverance in faith.

Transcript

We have seen the sentiments of the Saxon Reformer respecting that corner-stone of the Reformation, the doctrine of justification by faith; how zealous he was for the absolute freeness of Divine grace, and yet how zealous for the interests of holiness. We will now consider his views and feelings with regard to the Christian's conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, "It is very useful," says Luther, "for sincere and pious people to know and meditate on Paul's doctrine concerning the contest of the flesh and the Spirit. It is an admirable comfort to the tempted. When I was a monk, if at any time I happened to feel the motions of a bad passion, I used to think the prospect of my salvation was completely over. I struggled in a variety of ways both to overcome the bad passion, and to quiet my conscience. All in vain. The lust of the flesh returned, and I was harassed with thoughts of this sort- You have committed this, or that sin; you are impatient, you are envious; in vain have you entered into holy orders. Now if I had rightly understood Paul's doctrine of the flesh lusting against the Spirit. I should not so long and so miserably have afflicted myself. I should have reflected, and said, as I do at this day in similar situations- Martin, as long as you remain in the flesh, you will never be entirely without sin; you are now in the flesh, and therefore you must experience a contest with it; and this is agreeable to what Paul says, the flesh resists the Spirit. Despair not then, but strive manfully against all carnal dispositions, and fulfill not their lustings. Do this, and the Law shall have no condemning dominion over you."

In the same self-abasing spirit, he speaks of himself and his fellow-laborers in the ministry- "We ourselves, the ministers of the Gospel, are not so active and zealous in doing our duty, now that we have the light of truth, as we were before, during the darkness of our ignorance. We are grown cold and negligent in handling the Word, and in prayer also; and lastly, both in well-doing and in suffering; insomuch, that if Satan did not torment us internally, with spiritual temptations, and externally, with hostile persecutions, and above all, with the contempt and ingratitude of our own congregations, we should become, I fear, quite careless, and lazy, and lost to every good work."

Happy would it be for the Church, if this picture did not apply to modern times. But, blessed be God, we still have men among us, who, like Luther, are valiant for the truth upon the earth; who contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; and who are not ashamed to confess Christ before a sinful and adulterous generation. May their number increase a thousand-fold.

Luther labored to bring back the Christian Church, not only to the purity of the faith, but to the practice of piety. "The whole man," writes this enlightened Reformer, "must, in the Gospel, stoop and become new. He must put off, as it were, the old skin, as the serpent does. For when its skin is old, the serpent seeks out a narrow hole of a rock, and forces itself into it, and draws its old skin off from itself, and leaves it outside the hole. So must a man yield himself to the Gospel and God's Word, and boldly follow, and draw off, as it were his old skin, and leave outside, his knowledge, his thoughts, his will, his love, his pleasures, his words, his works; and become entirely a new man, who sees all things differently from what he did before, judges differently, feels differently, thinks differently, chooses differently, speaks differently, desires differently, pursues and works differently." "Truly religious people," he justly remarks, "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts; and hence their sins do not finally ruin them. For, if they obey the flesh by gratifying its concupiscence, they infallibly lose their faith and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, if they do not abhor their sins, sincerely repent, and return to Christ, that they may recover their faith and the Holy Spirit, they will die in their sins. Wherefore I can speak no comfort to those who dream they have faith, and yet live in sin." Against all such there is a dreadful sentence in force; namely- Those who live after the flesh shall die. And further, the works of the flesh are manifest; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, and such like; they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Luther then shows in what way true believers are kept from falling into gross sins, and how they are enabled to persevere even unto the end, "The severe threatenings of Almighty God against sin," he observes, "have a due effect upon the minds of true believers, so as to deter them from breaking his laws. They arm themselves with the word of God, with faith, and with prayer, and do not give way to the lusts of the flesh. In fact, they so resist the flesh, as to nail it to the cross with all its sinful desires. Hence it is, that the flesh, though yet alive, and capable of showing some signs of motion, cannot perform what it would; being bound hand and foot, and nailed fast to the cross. Such are the principles, and such is the practice of truly pious people. The same important truths may be expressed a little differently thus- The faithful, while they live on earth, do actually crucify the flesh; that is, though they are sensible of its lustings, they do not obey them. Furnished with the armor of God, namely, faith, hope, and the sword of the spirit, they oppose the natural or carnal man; and with these spiritual arms, as it were, with nails, fix him to the cross of Christ, and compel him against his will, to be subject to the spiritual man, or new creature. Afterwards when they die, they entirely put off the carnal man, and they will rise from the dead, with a body incorruptible, and free from sinful affections and lusts."

Thus clearly did this zealous Reformer declare, in unison with the Apostle, that, there are two principles of action within us, flesh and spirit; and though we cannot entirely put off the flesh or kill it, we must fight

against it, and strive to subdue it, until we put off our mortal body, and enter that blessed state, where,

"Flesh and sin no more control.

The sacred pleasures of the soul."

The Church of England maintains the same truth with equal clearness in one of her Collects- "O Lord, raise up your power, and come among us, and with great might support us; that whereas through our sins and wickedness, we are sorely hindered in running the race that is set before us, your bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us."

Also, in the ninth Article- "Man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusts always contrary to the Spirit. And this infection of nature does remain in those who are regenerated, whereby the lust of the flesh is not subject to the law of God."

This remnant of corruption in the converted sinner is powerfully pressed upon our consciences, as a cause for deep humiliation in the Homily on the misery of man- "Let us all confess with mouth and heart, that we are full of imperfections; Let us know our own works, of what imperfection they be, and then we shall not stand foolishly and arrogantly in our own conceits, nor challenge any part of justification by our merits or works. For truly there are imperfections in our best works; We do not love God so much as we are bound to do, with all our heart, mind, and power; We do not fear God so much as we ought to do; We do not pray to God, but with great and many imperfections; We give, forgive, believe, live, and hope imperfectly; We speak, think, and do imperfectly; We fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh imperfectly. Let us therefore not be ashamed to confess imperfection even in all our best works."

Becon, one of the most active of the English reformers, and who, by his writings, contributed much to the diffusion of the Truth, in his "Dialogue between the Christian Knight and Satan," makes his Christian warrior say, "In myself I am a sinner, but in Christ, my righteous Maker, I am righteous. For he has forgiven me all my sins and has taken me into his grace, favor, and tuition. He is always ready to help me; he forgives me the remnant of my sins, and purges them in me daily, until he makes me altogether new. Although I fulfill not the commandments of God in the Law with my own works, yet I fulfill them in the Gospel with the most perfect works, and the satisfaction of Christ, in whom I believe. This faith is reckoned to me unto righteousness, although my works of themselves be imperfect. All these things can I prove by the Word of God.

"With this do I comfort myself; I have sins indeed, but yet, for Christ's sake, in whom I believe, there is no condemnation for me. The Law is good and holy, but it can justify no man. It cannot change our stony heart, or give us a softer heart, or purify our sinful nature and renew it, or take away sins; this the Spirit of Christ alone can do. In myself I am a sinner; but this is not to walk after the flesh. For to walk after the flesh is, without all fear, stubbornly and proudly to fulfill the lusts and desires of the flesh, and all that our sinful nature desires, and of itself is bent unto. I fall indeed into sin, but yet after the inward man I hate sin; I desire nothing more than to be clean, and utterly delivered from sin; and I am sorry, even from the very heart, that I have sinned, and do sin against God. I cannot of my own natural strength, without the Spirit of God, hate sin and resist it, seeing, that even together with nature, it is born into the world with me. He that hates sin, has the Spirit of Christ, yes, he is Christ's. Paul therefore confesses that in all godly people the remnants of sin do remain, against which the Spirit strives. But he adds words full of high consolation, even that for all this, there is no condemnation to them. And this privilege and prerogative have they in Christ, that Righteous One, in whom they are engrafted through faith, and whose merits they do enjoy,

and by them are saved from their sins."

Thus, our venerable Reformers were experimentally taught of God to know themselves, as well as to understand the Truths which they cheerfully sealed with their blood. While they pressed upon men's consciences the absolute necessity of universal holiness, as essential unto salvation; saying with Paul, "This also we wish, even your perfection;" they at the same time declared with Solomon, "There is not a just man upon earth that does good and sins not;" "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin;" and with James, "In many things we stumble." If then all, even the best of us, are conscious of so many slips and falls, ought it not to make us very humble and modest in our thoughts of ourselves, and sparing in our censures of others? Surely spiritual pride cannot luxuriate in such a soil as this. The deeper are our views of the sin that dwells in us, the more humbly we shall think of ourselves, and the more gratefully we shall prize our salvation by Christ. What Paul felt in his own experience, he strongly enforced upon others. To the Christians of Galatia he writes, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would. But if you are led of the Spirit, you are not under the Law. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." This is true blessedness, to live tunder the daily influence of the Holy Spirit, and through his power to overcome the lustings of the flesh.

The consciousness of indwelling sin made the Apostle say to the Corinthians, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." What need would there have been for this self-government, if he had attained to a state of sinless perfection?

Were sin wholly destroyed in the hearts of believers, and in consequence of this happy liberation from evil, were they delivered from the fear of falling, Paul would not have given this admonitory exhortation to the Thessalonian Christians; "This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication; that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence even as the Gentiles, who know not God; for God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." The knowledge where his strength lay, enabled this good soldier of Jesus Christ to declare, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience to Christ."

Satan, taking advantage of these remnants of evil in the hearts of believers, is constantly laboring to excite opposition against the holy principle of grace implanted in the soul. Hence Paul, whose care over the infant churches was incessant, thus admonishes the Christians at Ephesus, "My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

Believers then must be strong in the Lord, for they have to encounter a mighty adversary in an evil day. But let them not fear; for through the power of Jesus they shall prevail, since He, who is in them, is greater than he that is in the world.

As a father exhorts his child, so does the tenderhearted Apostle his beloved Timothy; "My son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." And like a general, experienced in this holy warfare, he animates the Christians at Corinth to the spiritual combat, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, act like men, be strong."

But who is sufficient for these things? What feeble arm, or what human weapon can successfully oppose the powers of darkness; He who calls us to the combat, opens the spiritual armory, and bids us equip ourselves for the fight. "Stand, therefore," says the Apostle, "having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance." Being himself well acquainted with the efficacy of believing prayer, he feelingly adds, "And supplication for all saints, and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds, that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

With equal force, he urges on the Thessalonians to spiritual combat- "Let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation." How invincible is the believer, when thus clad. And, as the hour of dissolution advances, how unspeakably blessed, when, in the triumph of Christian hope, he can exclaim, "O death where is your sting. O grave, where is your victory. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." May every reader experience this full assurance of hope which upheld the conquering Apostle while passing through the deepest waters, and which cheered his soul in the darkest seasons of affliction.

Too many resemble the character of Pliable, so admirably drawn by Bunyan in his Pilgrim's Progress. They are delighted with the glowing descriptions which are given of heaven by the inspired writers, and long to behold the golden streets, the pearly gates, the crystal streams, the unwithering tree of life, and all the glories which compose that blissful place. But when they fall into the Slough of Despond, that mire of inward corruption, with which they were hitherto unacquainted; and have to struggle with doubts and fears, raised by Satan and their own unbelieving hearts; they are offended, and gladly run back again into the world, just as the dog returns to its vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

The true believer, on the contrary, like Christian, is bent upon advancing toward the wicket-Gate. He is escaping for his life from the City of Destruction, this present evil world, and therefore dares not tarry in the plain, much less turn back to the place from where he came. He may, for a time, sink deep in desponding fears, arising from indwelling sin and obscure views of the grace and glory of Jesus, but having received a new nature, he ardently longs after the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. He cries for help, and help is vouchsafed from the Lord, whose well-timed promises, like the steps across the Slough of Despond, support his feet, until he reaches the firm ground nearest to the Shining light, and thus evidences the reality of his conversion to God. Though much discouraged because of the difficulty of the way, he is still determined to persevere; and obtaining a clearer view of the cross of Christ by the exercise of a stronger faith, every spiritual blessing is imparted to him, and he finally enters with joy into the Celestial City.

The amiable and pious Leighton has forcibly described this chequered experience of the true believer, which is so compounded of joy and sorrow. "Inward corruptions," as he truly observes, "clog and trouble

the believer, and he cannot shake them off nor prevail against them, without much pains, many prayers, and tears. And many times, after much wrestling, he scarcely finds that he has gained ground; yes, sometimes he is foiled, and cast down by them; and so in all other duties, such a fighting and continued combat with a revolting backsliding heart, the flesh pulling and dragging downwards. When he would mount up, he finds himself as a bird with a stone tied to its foot; has wings that flutter to be upwards, but is pressed down with the weight fastened to him. What struggling with wanderings, and deadness in hearing, and reading, and prayer.

"How much pain to attain anything, any particular grace of humility, or meekness, or self-denial; and if anything is attained, how hard to keep and maintain it against the contrary party. How often are the righteous driven back to their old point! If they do but cease from striving a little, they are carried back by the stream; and what returns of doubtings and mischief, after they thought they were gotten somewhat above them; insomuch that they are at the point of giving over, and thinking it will never do for them. And yet, through all these, they are brought safely home. There is another strength which bears them up, and brings them through; but these things, and many more of this nature, argue the difficulty of their course, and that it is not so easy to come to heaven as most imagine."

The heavenly-minded Leighton, no doubt, included himself in this experience of the righteous, though Burnet has left his record of his superior sanctity, "I can say with great truth, that in a free and frequent conversation with him, for above twenty-two years, I never knew him speak an idle word, that had not a direct tendency to edification; and I never once saw him in any other temper, but that in which I wished to be in the last minutes of my life."

If then, the righteous scarcely are saved; if so many sufferings, temptations, and difficulties surround their path; if so many enemies are up in arms to impede their progress; and so much evil still remains from the fleshy principle within; requiring incessant watchfulness and prayer; how shall the sinner and the ungodly stand in judgment? Awful indeed will be the end of those, who have either rejected or neglected the grace of God, so freely offered in the Gospel of his Son.

There are, it is true, many shades of character, some darker and some fainter, but still they are shades of evil. The Bible speaks of no middle character, no neutral state between the righteous and the wicked. We must be either believers or unbelievers, saints or sinners, the friends or the enemies of Christ. We cannot serve God and Mammon. The line of demarcation between the true Church and the world, is broadly and distinctly drawn in the Word of God. The blessed Jesus has declared, "He that is not with me is against me." This important distinction was also clearly made when the gracious commission was given to Paul at the period of his conversion, "Now I send you to the Gentiles, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

This transforming power accompanied the preaching of the Apostle. Hence he could say to the Ephesians, "You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord, walk as children of light." Also, to the Thessalonians. "You are all the children of light, and the children of the day; we are not of the night, nor of darkness."

Clement of Alexandria gives this short account of the primitive Christians, "As the fairest possession we give up ourselves to God, entirely loving him, and reckoning this the great business of our lives. No man is with us a Christian, or accounted truly rich, temperate, and generous, but he that is pious and religious; nor does any further bear the image of God, than he speaks and believes what is just and holy. So that

this, in short, is the state of us who follow God; such as are our desires, such are our discourses; such as our discourses, such are our actions; such as are our actions, such is our life; so universally good is the whole life of Christians." Certainly none were ever greater enemies to a naked profession, and the covering a bad life under the title of Christianity, than these early followers of the Savior.

Do any live otherwise than Christ has commanded? It is a most certain argument that they are not Christians, though with their tongue they smoothly profess the Christian doctrines; for not mere professors, but those who live according to their profession, shall be saved. So careful were the primitive believers to avoid all sin, that they stood at the greatest distance from anything, however lawful in itself, which seemed to bear the appearance of evil, or which might offend the weakest of their brethren.

"Who," says Clement, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, "that has ever been among you, has not experienced the firmness of your faith, and its fruitfulness in all good works- and admired the temper and moderation of your religion in Christ? All of you were humble minded, not boasting of anything; desiring rather to be subject than to govern; to give than to receive; being content with the portion God has dispensed to you- and hearkening diligently to his word; you were enlarged in your affections, having his sufferings always before your eyes. Thus, a firm and blessed, and profitable peace was given unto you; and an inestimable desire of doing good; and a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit was upon all of you. You were sincere, and without offence towards each other; not mindful of injuries; all sedition and schism was an abomination unto you. You bewailed every one his neighbor's sins, esteeming their defects your own- you were kind one to another without grudging, being ready to every good work- and being adorned with a conversation altogether virtuous and religious, you did all things in the fear of God, whose commandments were written upon the table of your hearts."

Such was the lovely portrait, drawn by the early Fathers of the Christian Church. In those days, religion consisted not in talking finely, but in living well. We, alas! are not now, what these primitive Christians were- burning and shining lights. The lamentation of the prophet is sadly too descriptive of our state- "Our silver has become dross, and our wine is mixed with water." The world has tainted the Church by its unhallowed admixture. Where is the simplicity, the self-denial, the zeal, the entire devotedness of these first Christians to be found? Certainly not among the great mass of religious professors. Long continued prosperity has induced a spirit of slumber. The visible Church planted in our countries has had a long season of repose. No storm of violent persecution has been permitted to assail it. We have grown up within its bosom during a period of religious liberty unknown to former ages. From our infancy we have heard, in a greater or less degree, the glorious truths of the Gospel. They have become familiar to our ears, but they have not proportionally affected our hearts. Hence, without considering what is the nature, the operation, and the requirements of the Gospel, we have substituted the form for the power, the notion for the spirit of Christianity; contenting ourselves with the circumstance of being born in a Christian country, and belonging to a Christian Church; as if the initiatory rite of baptism would amply secure our admission into heaven.

Without any breach of that charity which hopes all things, we are compelled to declare this painful truth; that thousands who are moral, and regular in all the outward duties and decencies of religion, are still as far distant from the spirit and practice, the principles and feelings, of the true believer, as the East is from the West. Do any startle at this plain assertion? Where, would ask, is their deep contrition, their sincere repentance, their hatred of sin, their application to the Savior, their love to his name, their delight in his service, their attachment to him, their self-denying obedience, their renunciation of the world, their patience under suffering for the Gospel's sake? Where, in short, is the new creature in Christ Jesus to be

seen in them? It has no existence. They have a name to live, being called Christians, and professing to believe in Jesus, but they are dead. The general truths of the Gospel may dwell in their understandings, but they have no abiding place in their hearts. Their notions may make them moral, but they do not transform their souls into the holy image of Christ. The Apostle has well described the character of these nominal Christians- "they profess that they know God; but in works deny him. They have the form of godliness, but, deny the power thereof."

These are the people who, frequenting the House of God, sneer at conscientious piety, and sarcastically pity the weakness of "the saints." Yet, they have full confidence in the mercy of God, and deem it most uncharitable, even to breathe a hint that they are in danger of eternal perdition. But, when death seizes upon them, when the world is found to be an idol which cannot save, and worldly friends but miserable comforters; when conscience fastens upon them as its prey, and tears their souls with inconceivable anguish, (awful presage of the worm that never dies;) O what would they not give for that sweet assurance of hope, that real Christianity, which supports and gladdens the despised believer, as he passes through the cold stream of death to his eternal rest. Unbelief blinds their minds, and hardens their hearts. While in the enjoyment of health and plenty, they can sport with thoughtless gaiety on the brink of hell. The sun of prosperity shines upon them, and all around is pleasant. Then why should they forebode the death-bearing storm, or sigh in the midst of laughter? Sickness or poverty, in their estimation, is the proper time for reflection, because at such gloomy seasons, the opportunities for pleasure are gone. They may, perhaps, be induced to bestow a few thoughts upon serious things, but they never do it with a serious spirit. At the grave of some beloved friend, they drop the tear of affection, and for the moment feel the vanity of earthly things; but soon, the tide of occupation and of pleasure returns, and the faint impression is obliterated from their minds.

Like Felix, they dismiss, as soon as possible, the unwelcome visitor, and quiet their consciences by this message, "When I have a more convenient season I will call for you." Have we never imitated Felix in his dangerous procrastination? When will this more convenient season arrive? Will tomorrow find us more disposed to repent than today? As we grow in years, will our hearts grow softer, or the world less powerful in its influence over us? No! may not the same motives which occasion our delay today, prevail with us on the morrow, to procrastinate until the day ensuing, and thus lead us onwards to the verge of life, unprepared to meet our God?

O how awfully great is our insensibility to eternal things. Rising from their beds in the vigor of health, what numbers have been struck by the dart of death, and hurried, in a few hours, into the presence of their Judge. This day may be our last. What season then, is convenient as the present? Other opportunities may be less favorable; none can be more advantageous; for now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation. Now the door of mercy stands open, but it will shortly be shut. Now the scepter of mercy is held out, but soon it will become a rod of vengeance. Now we hear the voice of love, but before long we shall behold the wrath of the Lamb. Now the invitation is "Come unto me and I will give you rest;" speedily we shall hear in dreadful thunder, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire." O that every slumbering sinner may be aroused to a sense of his danger. Has God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man;" has he pronounced his righteous judgment upon procrastinating sinners, "Because I have called, and you refused. I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. I will also laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear comes," -then let us tremble, lest His insulted and grieved Spirit should never more vouchsafe his convictions; lest this awful seal of perdition should be placed upon us. "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone."

While in the pursuit of earthly things, or distracted by worldly cares, what thousands are deceived through the subtlety of Satan to their eternal ruin. They intend to repent, and are resolved to be godly. They resolve, and re-resolve, and die the same. Blest with a profusion of worldly goods, which a bounteous Providence has heaped upon them, what multitudes of professing Christians are thus unmindful of the Giver of their mercies, forgetful of their responsibilities, neglectful of their souls, yes more, rejecters of Him who died to save them, who is even now waiting to be gracious, who calls to them by his ministers, who invites them by his Word, who strives with them by his Spirit.

Should any one cast his eyes upon these humble pages, whose conscience bears testimony to the truth of these reflections, I pray that the Divine Spirit of all grace, may bless the faithful admonition to his heart. O that these solemn truths may be received in the same spirit of love in which they were written; for, as "the ear that hears the reproof of life abides among the wise;" -so, "he that hates reproof shall die."

Whatever human reason may suggest as the way to heaven, the Bible plainly declares, that there is no salvation for sinners but through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ; and no other way of coming to Christ, as a Savior, but by believing on him; that, faith is the gift of God, the work of his Spirit in our hearts; and that, for this inestimable blessing, we must pray without ceasing. To encourage us to the performance of this duty, with what inimitable tenderness has Jesus appealed to our hearts, "If you, being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven, give good things to those who ask him."

Can we remain insensible to this inconceivable lovingkindness of our God and Savior? God is love, and has manifested his love towards us, by sending his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. God is love, and has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. How importunate are his calls of mercy- "Why will you die, O house of Israel? Will you not be made clean? When shall it once be? O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you? I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins."

May this exhibition of redeeming love soften our hearts, and lead us to the mercy-seat where God waits to be gracious. There, with an earnestness of desire, and deep feeling of our need, let us ask, that we may receive; seek that we may find, knock that it may be opened. "For this," says John, "is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us; and if we know that he hear us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

"Why should earthly beauties tear me

From the fountain of all bliss,

From that Lord, who waits to bear me

To a happier land than this?

Faith already seems beginning

To approach that land of rest,

Where I shall be done with sinning

And with endless peace be blest.
Hasting to those heavenly treasures,
Lower joys I leave behind;
Earth with all its boasted pleasures,
Shall not move my steadfast mind."

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