

# NOTES OF ADDRESSES

BY THE LATE

REV. WILLIAM C. BURNS,

MISSIONARY OF THE ENGLISH PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH TO CHINA.

EDITED BY

M. F. BARBOUR,

*Author of "The Way Home," "The Child of the Kingdom,"  
"The Soul-Gatherer," &c.*

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

1869.

## VIII.

### TRUE ZEAL.

[*In February 1844, Mr. Burns visited Perth for ten days, at the earnest request of those who longed to see an ingathering of souls. Besides three services on the Sabbaths, he had a service every evening, as also at 9.15 a.m., for working people, during their breakfast hour. Prayer for a blessing on the town was followed by a short address to Christians on the way to work acceptably for Christ. Snow was on the ground most of the time, but it did not prevent a large attendance.*]

“BUT IT IS GOOD TO BE ZEALOUSLY AFFECTED ALWAYS IN A GOOD THING.”—*Galatians IV. 18.*

**T**HERE is nothing more precious than true zeal in the things of God, and nothing, perhaps, which has so many counterfeits. Genuine zeal is simply a soul-absorbing concern for the Lord’s glory, and it is thus the highest of all graces: it can only be in lively exercise when love to God is felt, and, indeed, not always then, for it requires a high degree of heart-devotion and self-dedication to put it forth and sustain it. There may easily be a great deal of zeal in a bad cause; so high may that zeal rise, that the true zeal of God’s children can scarce keep pace with it. They seldom rival the zeal that will “compass sea and land to make one proselyte.” There may also be a great deal of bad zeal in a good cause. Alas! that this should be, at all times, so common in the Church of God. True zeal is, then, as rare as it is precious; it is a fruit seldom seen among us. Few men are filled with such a desire after God’s glory as Christ had, when he said, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up,” or if they do at times feel something approaching to it, it soon evaporates, it does not last. And why is this? Why do those, who were once the most zealous in the work of God, begin to fall asleep? Why do those who used to weep tears of sorrow and pity over the unawakened, and who could not let one act, dishonouring to God, pass unreprieved, or at least unmourned, now begin to sit down with careless professors, giving all up in despondency and hopelessness, and even saying in God-dishonouring unbelief, “We must take things as they are, and leave others to take their own way, and wait God’s time?” My dear friends, whoever says *that*, is guilty of treason against the King of kings; and, moreover, whoever *perseveres* in saying that, will bring, ere long, a blight upon his own soul, and it may be, upon all his labours. It is a dangerous thing to cease from the work of seeking to gain others over to the service of our Master; the soul’s prosperity is so intimately connected with it, that we cannot neglect it without losing the blessing of God.

On the other hand, if we *are* engaged in a good work, we cannot throw too much energy into it; it is impossible to cast too fervent a heat into genuine heaven-born zeal; for when will our zeal be worthy the followers of the Lord Jesus, who left His throne, and suffered, and bled, and died on this earth, just that He might bring glory to the divine law, and sanctify the Father's name, in the redemption of lost sinners, by the blood of His cross?

"It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing." And were none of you ever thus affected? Some of you *were* zealous in days past. Has it lasted? Examine yourselves as to this, while we mention one or two things which are inseparable from true zeal, and without which it cannot burn with a pure and steady flame.

The first of these, is a *strong spiritual appetite*. A living believer seeks to have an equal relish for all the food which he finds in the Word of God. There is no truth, provided it have Divine sanction, from which he will not extract saving benefit, and life to his soul: the *smallest* parts of God's truth, as we might be apt to call them, have deep attractions in His eyes, and the *plainest* parts of the Word have more charms for Him than the most adorned human compositions. Have you this characteristic of a child of God?

The second thing which we shall mention, is *spiritual activity*. This is the first outward manifestation of the existence of true zeal in the heart, and it springs immediately from the spiritual appetite of which we have spoken.

The want of food incapacitates a man from working; unless his body receive due support, he cannot work either hard or long; and so in the Divine life, if a man cease personally to live on Christ, he cannot work long for Christ among others. Impossible! He may keep up the *appearance* of this life long after the *reality* of it is *gone*: I believe that some now present can confirm the truth of this by painful experience. Are there not some among you who used to warn your fellow-sinners, and pray with them, and employ every means in your power to lead them to Jesus, speaking to them out of a full heart, and with all the earnestness of love?—but now, your efforts are feeble, and what you say is forced, and only said from a sense of duty.

You complain that it does not impress the hearts of those to whom it is addressed. My dear friend, *it does not pierce your own conscience*; and it is *only* when a deep and powerful impression of the truth abides on a man's own heart that the word has power to convince and to convert others. Sometimes the words spoken, whether of warning, or in commendation of Christ, are like nothing but dry skeletons of skin and bone, without either life or soul in them, and falling cold and powerless on the ear. But when truth is vividly impressed on the speaker's inmost soul, each word seems to have a volume in it, and every remark drops down sweetness and fresh fragrance.

And why should it not be *always* thus? Is the glory of Christ not what it once was? Are the interests of God's kingdom less dear to you, or is it so far

advanced in the world, that you have nothing now to do but to sit still, and look idly on? Is the state of sinners less awful, or their danger less imminent, because they are so many years nearer eternity? No, brethren. It is *we* who have changed; it is *we* who have fallen asleep. Oh! confess it—it is *we* who are shutting our eyes and folding our hands, and falling asleep over the work, in which our heart and hand, our body, soul, and spirit, our time, talents, life, all, *all* should be engaged. That is not the spirit of the Lord's true people. That is not like the character of your God and Father, or of your Elder Brother in the heavens, for He is a High Priest *for ever*—He intercedeth *ever*—He loveth to the end, and *beyond* the end of time, even for evermore.

How inconsistent, then, are we, professing as we do to be His chosen people, and to be seeking after conformity to His likeness. You know it is said in one place, that “all people will walk everyone *in the name of his god*,” even the poor blinded heathen spend much of their strength and substance in the worship of their gods, which “are yet no gods, but dumb idols.” What! and shall not *we* then “walk in the name of the Lord *our* God for ever and ever?” seeing that He lives and reigns “the same yesterday, today, and for ever.” His glorious power is not less now than it was when first we trusted in Him; his long-suffering is not less patient, nor His covenant less secure—His love is not yet removed from us, and His faithful word abideth ever. We have the same Bible we had then; no promise has been taken out of it; the same throne of grace to go to, the same Spirit to help infirmity and strengthen faith. *The Son of God is not asleep*. Oh, no! He has been interceding for us on high amid all our forgetfulness, barrenness, and indifference. “Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.” But for that we had been cut down long ago. In His name, then, go forward; forward to do His will. To some of you we say, *go forward rather than pray*. Think not that we would, as these words might imply, cast discredit on prayer; but, beloved, our hearts are deceitful, and although we should at every moment have an upward eye and a thirsting heart for the guidance and the presence of the living God, still there are times and circumstances when it becomes almost a sin to pray; sometimes it is unbelief that makes us pray, or rather *seem* to pray—else what does that word mean—“Why criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.” This shows us that men may, and do, sometimes, slink away from self-denying, disagreeable duties, and go to prayer, when they ought rather to be turning “the battle to the gate.” You will generally find that these are the times when you will be *least able* to pray. It were absurd to call *true* prayer sinful; prayer is our strength, the safeguard of the soul: the Lord the Spirit gives the heart to pray. But let us keep all things in the order which God has laid them, remembering for our encouragement that nothing is ever undertaken for the promotion of the cause of God in which He will refuse to aid us. I would

make no exceptions or limitations to this; for I believe that no man, however poor, and weak, and humble, ever did undertake anything with a single heart and eye to God's glory, and according to his will, without finding God in his path, strengthening and supporting him, if not visibly working with and for him.

Believer! can *you* contradict this assertion? Can you point to the time when you sought, with a sincere and willing heart, to serve and glorify Him, and say, that *then* you found Him to be a wilderness, or a land of darkness? I know you cannot.

If you desire the continuance of real, solid, spiritual comfort, seek to work diligently for God. You know that mere feeling cannot last long—much of it must necessarily pass away; it lasts for a time, but the mind wears out, and sinks into a cold relapse, and fresh excitement is required to arouse it again. Ah! but that is not like the calm, pure, spiritual feeling, produced by an impression on the will, through the Holy Ghost,—elevating the conceptions, purifying the desires, constraining and keeping in subjection the whole heart and mind to the obedience of Christ.

Another mark of zeal, is *implicit, immediate, child-like obedience*. How simple is the obedience of a little child; it does not ask a reason, or form a precise opinion of each step it takes, but readily follows its parent wherever he leads. A calm, un murmuring obedience is what the Lord seeks from His people, a chastened temper, a renewed will; for such a work in the soul is permanent and abiding, and sends forth a constant flow of holy zeal.

The world will not believe in any real zeal among God's children; the world thinks it is only a natural thing, arising from natural sources, and, therefore, that it will soon wear out and pass off. Alas! that we should give them so much reason to think so. Beloved friends, look at Paul. Did his zeal wear out? Did it diminish? Did the coldness of the prison chill it? Was it broken under the lash? Was it bound by the chains that lay on his body? Did it suffer shipwreck, when he was three days in the depths of the sea? Did the flame of persecution consume it? Did the roaring of wild beasts terrify him out of his zeal for the cross? *No*; for Christ was revealed within him, and that was a *permanent* thing.

As men advance in the divine life, zeal becomes purer; it has less of natural emotion in it, and more of God's grace. And, my dear friends, whenever a Christian begins to languish and fall away, the first flower that the wind of temptation nips, is zeal. Pray, then, for us, and for yourselves, that we may endure, shall I say, for a *little* longer—a few years—or many years? No; it is *to the end* that we must endure. This is not the language of our own hearts, the flesh is always crying out, "Stop now, stop now!" Yes, and that is a very comfortable sound in a man's ears, when he is worn out and weary; ay, and a man might begin to think about obeying it, if another voice did not contra-

dict the lie—if God did not say, “He that shall endure *to the end*, the same shall be saved.” Alas! brethren, *we* know too well what decays of zeal are; and now that, in the gracious providence of God, we are permitted again to meet in this place, to labour together for the ingathering of souls, may it be to act boldly, and to enter in, by the open door of Immanuel’s glorious and everlasting righteousness, to obtain the promise of the Father,—the great Breaker Himself going before us, and Jehovah on the head of us. He breaks up the way for all His children, not only to deliver them from the wrath to come, and from a state of condemnation, but going before them also in all that is undertaken for His glory, and in His name. He does a part of all His works on earth by His people, and enables them to overcome all difficulties, and to overthrow them in the name of the Lord. He makes the worm Jacob, a new sharp threshing instrument, by him beating the mountains as chaff. “Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.”