

COUNSELS TO CONVERTS.

I

IN leaving home to preach the Word of life, as it may please God to give openings to me, I have it specially on my heart to seek to lend a helping hand to young believers, and to throw out points whereby, in the very outset of the Christian life, they may be helped so to walk, that God may give them to enjoy peace and true happiness, and which may, by His blessing, cause them in the very beginning of their spiritual life to bear fruit to the praise, the honour, and glory of the Lord. I more especially seek to do so, because, for the first four years after my conversion, I made many mistakes about the things of God, and was far from walking in the road which leads to real joy and happiness in the Lord, and far from being in a position to grow either in grace or knowledge.

READING THE SCRIPTURES.

Four years after I had known the Lord, through the helping hand of an older and more experienced brother, I was led into a way whereby I increased more rapidly in knowledge and grace, and was consequently, in some little measure, able to glorify the Lord and to be more useful than before. The great mistake I made at the outset, was neglect of the divine Word, and in consequence of this many things were lacking. Therefore, it is laid upon my heart to impress it upon my younger brethren and sisters, to go from the very outset to the Word of God.

CONVICTION OF SIN.

I now speak more especially to believers; and by this I do not understand those who at some time or other have had some religious impressions. These may lead to nothing, and therefore there must be something more in order to be children of God. In order to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must be regenerated, must be on the road to heaven, and have been “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son.” For all this, more is wanted than mere religious impressions. Many persons have these, and are brought no further; but there they remain. It is needful that we should have been brought in a greater or less degree to look upon ourselves as sinners in need of a Saviour. And therefore I ask affectionately, Have we been convinced of this?

I am not speaking of degree. With ten thousand different persons, God may work in ten thousand different ways. I myself had little of this serious, deep conviction of sin at the beginning of my new life, and yet was, I believe, really and truly converted; and from the very beginning there was a marked difference in me. Yet I did see I was a sinner deserving punishment and nothing else. As to the degree of this sorrow, that is quite a different thing. We must, if we are children of God, have been convinced in the light of His word, that we are sinners deserving of punishment, and that the Lord Jesus Christ alone can save.

TRUST IN CHRIST.

Then, again, we must be led to trust in Him; for we may have been convinced of sin, and yet have gone no further. If so, we are not on the road to heaven yet. We must have put all our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls.

And all the more do I make these remarks, my beloved friends, because at such a time, when a wave of divine blessing has been passing through the land, and so many have been led to make a profession of faith, many may be trusting in a mere impression, perhaps a conviction, to some extent, of sin. All this is right as far as it goes, but not enough. Such are as yet in the state of which the Lord speaks—"Not far from the kingdom of heaven," and yet not in it. We must have passed from death unto life, ere we are the children of God, and there is no such thing as being a child of God without faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This, then, is most important, that we trust in Him, and in Him alone, for the salvation of our souls, and that we have no other hope in the matter of our salvation, than the merits and the intercession of Him, who sits on the right hand of God.

If we have been convinced of sin, and have believed in Him, then, as it is said in Acts x. 43, we have received remission of sin. Then are we the children of God, as in Gal. iii. 26. And, again, it is said that "to as many as received" the Lord Jesus Christ, "to them gave He power to become the sons of God." It is to these poor sinners who have trusted in the Lord Jesus for the salvation of their souls, that I desire particularly to speak. Those alone are they who have the bright blessed prospect of heaven, and who know in their own blessed experience, the joy of the latter part of Rom. viii., or have the glorious confidence of Philippians i. 6, that "He who hath begun a good work will perform it." To you, brother and sister in Christ, I desire to say a few words as to the Christian life.

UPRIGHTNESS.

One of the most deeply important points to the young believer—indeed to all believers—is, to aim after uprightness and honesty of heart. We may have a fair amount of prayerfulness, may read the word of God, may be frequently in a place of worship, and yet, with all these things, we lack much, yea all, if we have not uprightness of heart before God. My dear Christian friends, ask yourselves, as before God the Searcher of hearts, before Him who knows everything about you, how it is with you as to this point? Can you stand before and say in honesty, “Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee, and that my desire is not to listen to sin and temptation, and not willingly to go on in anything contrary to Thy mind. I would have nothing that Thou hatest; but, by Thy grace, I am engaged in a warfare against it. Thou knowest how Thy weak, erring child hates the deeds of darkness, and desires to carry on a warfare daily against these powers.”

Do we really seek to walk in this way? Then we shall have part in the blessed words of the Lord Jesus (Matt. xiii. 12), “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.”

I desire these words to be fixed upon your hearts, because, in looking back on the past fifty years, during which I have known the Lord, I can see the faltering steps with which I began. How weak I was! How ignorant! Even when preaching the Word, how ignorant! Although Christ was in me, the hope of glory, yet I failed again and again. Nevertheless, I made warfare against sin, and sought not to listen to Satan. I experienced, therefore, the truth of these words, “To Him that hath shall be given,” and although it was by little and little, yet I did grow. So this evening I say to you, “Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance.”

But remember, it is added, “But whosoever hath not”—or only appears to have—“from him shall be taken away even that which he hath.” Thus, those who do not maintain an upright heart, and who do not walk sincerely before God, shall, for the time, make no progress in the divine life, because the Holy Spirit does not work in such. Therefore it is deeply important to be sincere and honest before Him who knoweth the heart; and then, although we may be weak, yet we shall be helped in the divine life.

I know how much this one thing helped me at the first—honesty and uprightness of heart. And I remember one who was converted at the same time, and whom I met years after, and found he was just the same as at first—he had

made no progress whatever; and it was because he was not honest and upright before God.

DENYING UNGODLINESS.

The next deeply important point is this, whatever at the very outset of the divine life is hateful to God, must be given up. Whatever is offensive to Him, must be forsaken. Some say this is only needful regarding glaring sins, but it must be in everything. If the Holy Ghost says "No," the sin must be put aside at once. We must be faithful to Him. This unfaithfulness, this dallying with sin, is hindering the spiritual life of many. I wish to impress it on your hearts, that from the very beginning you should seek to be out-and-out Christians.

With many who set out in the divine life, the question is, "How much of the world can I keep, and yet get to heaven?" "How much can I enjoy of this world, and yet be saved?" There may be such a thing as being saved under such circumstances; but it is being saved "as by fire;" and none of God's children should be content to be saved as by fire.

Better by far that you and I were to be at once taken home to the Lord, than that we should be satisfied with being saved ourselves, and still seeking to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of this world as much as possible; trying how much we can make of both worlds. This is the most wretched possible thing for us to do. Under such circumstances you will have just religion enough to make you a miserable Christian; a happy Christian you can never be while living so.

There are no happy children who are not also holy children. The Father says, "Let that mind be also found in you which was found in Him." And what was the life of the Lord Jesus? "Holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." His life was one single sacrifice to God, one single act of obedience to God. Now, we are left here to be representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ in this world. This great honour He has bestowed upon us here. He might bring us to know Him, and then take us away at once to be with Him, as with the thief on the cross; but, as you all know, this is not His ordinary way. He brings no one to Himself, in order that we may bring honour to His name, and glorify Him on this earth; and also, that we may practically and experimentally be prepared for the glory that awaits us above; and that each of us may have the honour of winning souls for Him, and be helpful to the children of God: in short, that we should bear fruit.

FRUITFULNESS.

Well, this being the case—that we are left here to bring glory to His name—our heavenly Father expects us to live in separation from the world; and He does expect us not to go on in a sinful state. If we seek it, He will help us to be holy children, in order that we may be useful. Let us all aim after this. We should not be satisfied without bearing fruit, but should seek to be out-and-out for God.

There is such a thing as bearing much fruit—sixty or even a hundred-fold. Nor should you and I be content with thirty-fold, without seeking to bring forth sixty or a hundred-fold. Ought we not in earnest longing to pray that we may be permitted to bear fruit to the praise, honour, and glory of God?

But in order to this, there is nothing better than at once, in the very outset of the divine life, to aim after being out-and-out Christians. And never should any child of God harbour such a thought as this, “How much can I enjoy this world, and yet get to heaven at last? Is it possible for me by going to a ball, and attending a concert, or going to the theatre now and then, at last to get to heaven?” Oh! wretched, miserable state for a child of God to be in. Away with it! Be it far from any of those whom God has left on earth as witnesses for His glory.

I am here a pilgrim and a stranger, and far be it from me so to set my heart on this earth. I am going to heaven; this is not my place. As a child of God, I know that no place is my place save that upon which I can ask my Father’s blessing. How could I ask His blessing in the theatre? How could I ask God to bless me in the whirl of the ball-room, or at the card-table, or in the noisy tavern? Away with all of them; they are the sinful pleasures of this evil world.

LIVING CHRIST.

So, my beloved younger brethren and sisters in Christ at the very outset of your spiritual life, say boldly, “I will be, by the grace of God, an out-and-out Christian, living for God. I will, by His grace, seek to bear fruit to His glory and honour. I will, by His grace, seek to have done with this sinful world. I will, by His grace, strive so to live, that a line of demarcation shall be clearly seen between me and the world, and that the people of the world shall seek to have no intercourse with me, seeing that I do not belong to them, but that I belong to the kingdom of heaven.”

That is what we have to aim after; and what would be the result? Not only should we be holy men and women, but also happy men and women, in whom God delights; and we should also be useful men and women. The world ought

to say of each of us, “If ever there was a Christian, it is surely that man or that woman.” “Surely that man or woman has been with Jesus.” If the world does not say that of us, there is something wanting. We ought to be ashamed, if any one is able to live three or four days in the house with us, without finding out that we are not of the world, but are born again.

And that is not the only use of thus bearing testimony; it will also be very helpful to our brethren in the Lord.

Let me insist particularly, my beloved brethren and sisters, but especially you, my younger brethren and sisters, on this point—that of being out-and-out for God in the very outset. We must be opposed to the world, and the flesh, and entirely for Christ. This is the purpose for which we are left in the world. I do not say we are to give up our ordinary business. I have seen much of this; there is often too much readiness in giving up the earthly business, and it is often done hastily. I have found that men may greatly glorify God in their earthly business, and I do not say that they are to forsake that business in order to become evangelists, missionaries, district visitors, tract distributors, or the like. We may serve and honour Him well whilst occupied with the business of this life. If God does call us, by all means go at once; but do not go unless He calls. We require a special call from God, and even when we think we have received it, let us make it a matter of consideration. Let us prayerfully, quietly, and calmly look to God before taking such a step.

But, again, I say, if there be anything, whatever it may be, and however dear it may be, which is contrary to the divine will, let us give it up at once, and aim after being out-and-out, and decided for God in every way. The result will be increased happiness, joy, and holiness; and our usefulness will increase more and more.

In connection with this, I would especially state that, though we all ought to aim after conformity to the mind of Christ, yet we all more or less fail. It is deeply important to mark, that all of us are liable to sin, and do sin. If any man come to me, and say, “I do not sin,” I would say, “My brother, you are mistaken; perhaps you do not know what sin is, or you do not know your own state.” All of us, though not living in sin, are yet liable to sin; if not in acts, yet in words; or if not even in words, yet in feelings or desires. We are all apt to fall short of what we might be and of what we ought to be. What then? Well, we must make confession, and come afresh to the blood of Jesus Christ, and have these sins washed away.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS.

Many children of God err here. As, for instance, when I was first converted, I thought, when I sinned that now it was all over, as I could not be a Christian, or a child of God. Or, if not this, there was at least a feeling in me, "Before you come to God in prayer, you must seek to be better." What a great mistake! And yet many of God's dear children make this mistake, and if they fall in any way, in acting, speaking, thinking, or desiring, they feel that they cannot approach with confidence.

What ought they to do? Why, at once to make confession to God. They should seek to enter into that gracious promise," If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." This is deeply important to us all, because the Spirit of God will not work in our hearts if there is guilt. There is therefore no practical power to resist sin, or to walk with God, as long as sin is not cleansed away. And as we are liable to err, more especially our younger brethren and sisters, yet we must not think we are not Christians because we do so-and-so. Let us cast away this thought, and not entertain it for a moment. Only let us be stirred to go afresh to the Lord Jesus Christ, to have the sin put away.

This is where the words of the Lord Jesus come in, "He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." Remember our position: we are not criminals; we were that, but such is not the case now. We are in the relationship of children. In this new relationship, however, we are apt to defile ourselves; just as a man who takes a bath in the morning, may require to wash his hands or his face throughout the day, and yet his body is clean. So are we, though apt to defile ourselves, yet clean.

But for this defilement we must come afresh, practically and experimentally, to the blood of Christ. If this be neglected, the result will be loss of power and joy. But it is a grievous mistake to stay away from God because we have sinned, and to wait until we are better. We are to come as we are, to obtain peace and joy in the Lord.

CONFESSING CHRIST.

The next point is also deeply important, and it is, at the very outset of the divine life we must make a plain, bold confession of the Lord Jesus Christ. Very few things are of greater importance than this. The temptation will be, to keep your new life to yourself: "I can get to heaven without telling." Well, if you do so, you are weak, and will remain weak. It is of great importance, even for the vigour of your own Christian life, to make confession, and come out boldly for

Christ at once. The reason is this —people will know that you are on the Lord’s side, and will therefore no longer tempt you to act otherwise. They will no longer come with invitations to the theatre, or such and such a ball, or company, of a purely worldly character. You escape all this by open confession. If they know you are the Lord’s, and see the line of demarcation between you and the world, they will not seek your company.

I remember when I was converted, I was a student in a large university, where there were twelve hundred and sixty students. Amongst all these there were only three who were known as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; but it was well known what they were; they were “marked men.” I joined them, and became a “marked man” instantaneously. But we held out, and soon there were about half-a-dozen united together. We were called fanatics and mystics; and I used to be pointed at by my fellow-students, “There goes the mystic.” What of this? In three or four weeks it was all over, and they left me alone. Before my conversion, I had been one of the gayest among them, and was continually at the theatre. If there was a ball, I was there; and in the tavern I was one of the noisiest. But now, looked on as a “marked man,” they gave me up as a hopeless case, and ceased to annoy me. Thus I escaped a thousand temptations to which I would otherwise have been exposed. If I had kept back the knowledge of my conversion, would I not have been continually tempted to sin?

This is my own experience; I know the blessed result of thus boldly confessing Christ, and would affectionately press it upon all my brothers and sisters in Jesus. If any here have not yet made this bold confession of their decision for Christ, oh, make it now! It will be of immense service to you.

Again, in doing so, we stand by the side of Christ. He comes forward, and takes His stand by our side, saying, “In weakness thou hast stood for Me; now I will stand by thee;” and thus we reap the benefit in our own souls. We can never have grace and strength by keeping our religion to ourselves. You will never be out-and-out Christians—never be happy Christians—without this confession.

The will of the Lord is that we should be as cities set on a hill, which cannot be hid; or as lights, not placed under a bushel, but set on a lamp-stand, so as to be seen. And, let us aim after this, if it is not the case with us now; and let us be assured, that, when any man aims at keeping his religion to himself, he is going the wrong road. People must know that we are the Lord’s, and on His side; and we should not rest satisfied without this. Our duty, remember, is to win souls for Him; and how can we do this, if we hide our light? Although we are neither evangelists, missionaries, Sunday-school teachers, nor visitors, yet God will help us to win souls; therefore, we have to come out boldly for Him.

GROWTH IN CHRIST.

Another deeply important point is this; very frequently the dear children of God, at the very outset of their new life, are immensely discouraged, because they do not feel themselves making the progress they ought to make, or wish to make. They are afraid, because they do not make this progress in knowledge or grace, that they are not Christians. Now, as an encouragement to the dear young brethren and sisters, I would say, be not over-discouraged by this. I do not mean to say we are to rest content without making progress, I only warn you against one of Satan's devices—viz., that when we are failing in any way, he is apt to say to us that we are not Christians; that, after all we have felt, we are only deceiving ourselves. Now, every one of you know well enough whether you are deceiving yourselves or not.

You have all of you the witness within you, and you can look up and say, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." We may not have the bold faith and triumphant assurance of Peter, or of Paul, but we can say "We do love Thee." And while conscious of our weakness and unworthiness, yet we are also conscious of our faith. You know very well, for instance, when the child is born, it is not at once a young man. It is a babe; a weak, helpless babe. When it is a week old, you do not expect it to run about. We all know how it takes week after week, and month after month, ere it can so run. So it is in the divine life; you do not at once become young men or women in the Lord Jesus. And if any should come to me after being only three or four weeks in Christ, and complain that he is not full grown, I should say to him, "my dear friend, you are greatly mistaken; I do not expect to see you already become a young man, and far less a father in Christ." There is no such thing as fits and starts in the divine life. As in the natural life it requires some time to attain to manhood, so in the spiritual life; therefore let them not be discouraged that they have not yet become young men or young women in Christ, and far less that they have not become fathers and mothers in Him.

Let them, I say, not be discouraged, but steadily and quietly go on, living according to the light God has given them. If they are thus walking, it will be unto them according to the promise, "To him that hath, it shall be given, and he shall have more abundance." For your encouragement, let me give you my own experience.

OLD ENEMIES.

I was, at the beginning of my new life, again and again overcome by my old tendencies. For instance, I had been a habitual liar in former days, and could stand and look people in the face, and deliberately say things that were not true. If any of you have been so, my friends, you know what a terrible thing it is. Well, after my conversion I stated twice things that were not true; but that was a very different thing from habitually telling lies; for with sorrow of heart I confessed it before God, and owned before Him that such and such was not the truth.

Again, I had been a habitual attendant at the theatre; and twice after my conversion, through circumstances, I was drawn in to go to the theatre; but, nevertheless, I was humbled, before the Lord, and it was a very different thing from my former habitual attendance.

Soon God delivered me from that also. Therefore I wish to say that no child of God who, by deeds, words, or thoughts, is carried away to sin against God, should give heed to the suggestion of the devil, "There is no reality in your conversion." Rather let us come afresh to the blood of Jesus, which "taketh away all sin." Remember that this blood not only washes away, but also gives us more and more power over sin. By coming frequently, we shall grow in grace and in experience. I may say I have grown somewhat since those days, to which, for your encouragement, I have referred; and what one has done, others may do.

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.

Another important point is, to seek at once, or as soon as possible, to unite ourselves to some dear children of God, or to some faithful ministry. Wherever you find Christians, with whom it would be to your profit to mingle, or a ministry likely to feed your soul, go there; only get into some little band of God's children, or disciples, at once. Remember, it will be very helpful to you in your new life.

I am not referring to this or that particular place, that wherever God has cast your lot, and wherever there are dear children of the Lord, go there. Go where the gospel is faithfully set forth, and get united to them, that they may help you as the younger brother or sister. You will find such fellowship very helpful to you. I myself found it of the utmost value.

Shortly after my conversion, there were a few other students led to the Lord, and we used to meet together regularly in my room, and sought to help one an-

other. It was very helpful. But, where practicable, I would advise you to search out the company of some older and more experienced Christian—one who is really a living gospel Christian—to whom you can speak freely, and from whom you can get much useful advice and counsel. All you older believers may lend a helping hand to your younger brothers and sisters, and thus be a great help to one another.

I have often found that, when led astray by natural tendency, the fellowship of my brother-students was exceedingly helpful, and often brought me into the light again. Especially would I say to all Christians—not merely the younger, but even the older—seek to have some truly spiritual friend, to whom you can run and unbosom yourself, and take sweet counsel together; you will find it to be very helpful in the things of God.

I have much more to say, but will continue the subject on Friday evening, when I will seek to bring before you many other important points.