

[Chapter taken from “*Old Paths*” 1900AD edition]

OLD PATHS

BEING PLAIN STATEMENTS

OF SOME OF THE

WEIGHTIER MATTERS OF CHRISTIANITY

BY THE RIGHT REV.

JOHN CHARLES RYLE, D.D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL.

Author of “Knots Untied,” “Practical Religion,” etc.

“If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?”—1 Cor. xiv. 8.

New and Improved Edition.

London

NATIONAL PROTESTANT CHURCH UNION
321, REGENT STREET, W.

AND

CHARLES MURRAY
11, LUDGATE SQUARE, E.C.

1900

FEW SAVED!

BY

JOHN CHARLES RYLE D.D.

“Are there few that be saved?”—LUKE xiii. 23.

I TAKE it for granted that every reader of this paper calls himself a Christian. You would not like to be reckoned a deist, or an infidel. You profess to believe the Bible to be true. The birth of Christ the Saviour, the death of Christ the Saviour, the salvation provided by Christ the Saviour,—all these are facts which you have probably never doubted. But, after all, will Christianity like this profit you anything at last? Will it do your soul any good when you die? In one word,—*Shall you be saved?*

It may be you are now young, healthy and strong. Perhaps you never had a day's illness in your life, and scarcely know what it is to feel weakness and pain. You scheme and plan for future years, and feel as if death was far away, and out of sight. Yet, remember, death sometimes cuts off young people in the flower of their days. The strong and healthy of the family do not always live the longest. Your sun may go down before your life has reached its midday. Yet a little while, and you may be lying in a narrow, silent home, and the daisies may be growing over your grave. And then, consider,—*Shall you be saved?*

It may be you are rich and prosperous in this world. You have money, and all that money can command. You have “honour, love, obedience, troops of friends.” But, remember, “riches are not for ever.” You cannot keep them longer than a few years. “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.” (Prov. xxvii. 24; Heb. ix. 27.) And then, consider,—*Shall you be saved?*

It may be you are poor and needy. You have scarcely enough to provide food and raiment for yourself and family. You are often distressed for want of comforts, which you have no power to get. Like Lazarus, you seem to have “evil things” only, and not good. But, nevertheless, you take comfort in the thought that there will be an end of all this. There is a world to come, where poverty and want shall be unknown. Yet, consider a moment, *Shall you be saved?*

It may be you have a weak and sickly body. You hardly know what it is to be free from pain. You have so long parted company with health, that you have almost forgotten what it is like. You have often said in the morning, “Would God it were evening,” and in the evening, “Would God it were morning.” There are days when you are tempted by very weariness to cry out with Jonah, “It is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah iv. 3.) But, remember, death is not all. There is something else beyond the grave. And then, consider, *Shall you be saved?*

If it was an easy thing to be saved, I would not write as I do in this volume. But is it so? Let us see.

If the common opinion of the world as to the number of the saved was correct, I

would not trouble men with searching and hard questions. But is it so? Let us see. If God had never spoken plainly in the Bible about the number of the saved, I might well be silent. But is it so? Let us see.

If experience and facts left it doubtful whether many or few would be saved, I might hold my peace. But is it so? Let us see.

There are four points which I propose to examine in considering the subject before us.

I. Let me explain *what it is to be saved*.

II. Let me point out *the mistakes which are common in the world about the number of the saved*.

III. Let me show *what the Bible says about the number of the saved*.

IV. Let me bring forward *some plain facts as to the number of the saved*.

A calm examination of these four points, in a day of widespread carelessness about vital religion, will be found of vast importance to our souls.

I. *First of all let me explain what it is to be saved.*

This is a matter that must be cleared up. Till we know this, we shall make no progress. By being “saved” I may mean one thing, and you may mean another. Let me show you what the Bible says it is to be “saved,” and then there will be no misunderstanding

To be saved, is not merely to profess and call ourselves Christians. We may have all the outward parts of Christianity, and yet be lost after all. We may be baptized into Christ’s Church, go to Christ’s table, have Christian knowledge,—be reckoned Christian men and women—and yet be dead souls all our lives,—and at last, in the judgment day, be found on Christ’s left hand, among the goats. No: this is not salvation! Salvation is something far higher and deeper than this. Now what is it?

(a) To be saved, is to be delivered in this present life from *the guilt of sin*, by faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour. It is to be pardoned, justified, and freed from every charge of sin, by faith in Christ’s blood and mediation. Whosoever with his heart believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, is a saved soul. He shall not perish. He shall have eternal life. This is the first part of salvation, and the root of all the rest. But this is not all.

(b) To be saved, is to be delivered in this present life from *the power of sin*, by being born again, and sanctified by Christ’s spirit. It is to be freed from the hateful dominion of sin, the world, and the devil, by having a new nature put in us by the Holy Ghost. Whosoever is thus renewed in the spirit of his mind, and converted, is a saved soul. He shall not perish. He shall enter into the glorious kingdom of God. This is the second part of salvation. But this is not all.

(c) To be saved, is to be delivered in the day of judgment, from all *the awful consequences of sin*. It is to be declared blameless, spotless, faultless, and com-

plete in Christ, while others are found guilty, and condemned for ever. It is to hear those comfortable words,—“Come, ye blessed!” while others are hearing those fearful words, “Depart, ye cursed!” (Matt. xxv. 34, 41.) It is to be owned and confessed by Christ, as one of His dear children and servants, while others are disowned and cast off for ever. It is to be pronounced free from the portion of the wicked,—the worm that never dies, the fire that is not quenched, the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, that never ends. It is to receive the reward prepared for the righteous, in the day of Christ’s second coming—the glorious body, the kingdom that is incorruptible, the crown that fadeth not away, and the joy that is for evermore. This is *complete salvation*. This is the “redemption” for which true Christians are bid to look and long. (Luke xxi. 28.) This is the heritage of all men and women who believe and are born again. By faith they are saved already. In the eye of God their final salvation is an absolutely certain thing. Their names are in the book of life. Their mansions in heaven are even now prepared. But still there is a fulness of redemption and salvation which they do not attain to while they are in the body. They are saved from the guilt and power of sin; but not from the necessity of watching and praying against it. They are saved from the fear and love of the world but not from the necessity of daily fighting with it. They are saved from the service of the devil; but they are not saved from being vexed by his temptations. But when Christ comes the salvation of believers shall be complete. They possess it already in the bud. They shall see it then in the flower.

Such is salvation. It is to be saved from the guilt, power, and consequences of sin. It is to believe and be sanctified now, and to be delivered from the wrath of God in the last day. He that has the first part in the life that now is, shall undoubtedly have the second part in the life to come. Both parts of it hang together. What God has joined together, let no man dare to put asunder. Let none dream he shall ever be saved at last, if he is not born again first. Let none doubt, if he is born again here, that he shall assuredly be saved hereafter.

Let it never be forgotten that the chief object of a minister of the Gospel is to set forward *the salvation of souls*. I lay it down as a certain fact that he is no true minister who does not feel this. Talk not of a man’s orders! All may have been done correctly, and according to rule. He may wear a black coat, and be called a “reverend” man. But if the saving of souls is not the grand interest—the ruling passion—the absorbing thought of his heart,—he is no true minister of the Gospel: he is a hireling, and not a shepherd. Congregations may have called him, but he is not called by the Holy Ghost. Bishops may have ordained him, but not Christ.

For what purpose do men suppose that ministers are sent forth? Is it merely to wear a surplice, and read the services, and preach a certain number of sermons? Is it merely to administer the sacraments, and officiate at weddings and funerals? Is it merely to get a comfortable living, and be in a respectable profession? No, indeed! we are sent forth for other ends than these. We are sent to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. We are sent to persuade men to flee from the wrath to come. We are sent to draw men from the service of the world to the service of God, to awaken the sleeping,—to arouse the careless,—and “by all means to save some.” (1 Cor. ix. 22.)

Think not that all is done when we have set up regular services, and persuaded people to attend them. Think not that all is done, when full congregations are gathered, and the Lord's table is crowded, and the parish school is filled. We want to see a manifest work of the Spirit among people, an evident sense of sin, a lively faith in Christ,—a decided change of heart, a distinct separation from the world, a holy walk with God. In one word, *we want to see souls saved*,—and we are fools and impostors, blind leaders of the blind, if we rest satisfied with anything less.

After all, the grand object of having a religion is *to be saved*. This is the great question that we have to settle with our consciences. The matter for our consideration is not whether we go to church or chapel,—whether we go through certain forms and ceremonies,—whether we observe certain days, and perform a certain number of religious duties. The matter is whether, after all, we shall be “*saved*.” Without this all our religious doings are weariness and labour in vain.

Never, never let us be content with anything short of a *saving* religion. Surely to be satisfied with a religion which neither gives peace in life, nor hope in death, nor glory in the world to come, is childish folly.

II. Let me, in the second place, *point out the mistakes which are common in the world about the number of the saved*.

I need not go far for evidence on this subject. I will speak of things which every man may see with his own eyes, and hear with his own ears.

I will try to show that there is a widespread delusion abroad about this matter, and that this very delusion is one of the greatest dangers to which our souls are exposed.

(a) What then do men generally think about the spiritual state of others *while they are alive*? What do they think of the souls of their relations, and friends, and neighbours, and acquaintances? Let us just see how that question can be answered.

They know that all around them are going to die, and to be judged. They know that they have souls to be lost or saved. And what, to all appearance, do they consider their end is likely to be?

Do they think those around them are in danger of hell? There is nothing whatever to show they think so. They eat and drink together; they laugh, and talk, and walk, and work together. They seldom or never speak to one another of God and eternity, of heaven and of hell. I ask any one, who knows the world, as in the sight of God, is it not so?

Will they allow that anybody is wicked or ungodly? Never, hardly, whatever may be his way of life. He may be a breaker of the Sabbath; he may be a neglecter of the Bible; he may be utterly without evidence of true religion. No matter! His friends will often tell you, that he may not make so much profession as some, but that he has a “good heart” at the bottom, and is not a wicked man. I ask any one, who knows the world, as in God's sight, is it not so?

And what does all this prove? It proves that men flatter themselves there is no great difficulty in getting to heaven. It proves plainly that men are of opinion that most persons will be saved.

(b) But what do men generally think about the spiritual state of others *after*

they are dead? Let us just see how this question can be answered.

Men allow, if they are not infidels, that all who die have gone to a place of happiness, or of misery. And to which of these two places do they seem to think the greater part of persons go, when they leave this world?

I say, without fear of contradiction, that there is an unhappily common fashion of speaking well of the condition of all who have departed this life. It matters little, apparently, how a man has behaved while he lived. He may have given no signs of repentance, or faith in Christ; he may have been ignorant of the plan of salvation set forth in the Gospel; he may have shown no evidence whatever of conversion or sanctification; he may have lived and died like a creature without a soul. And yet, as soon as this man is dead, people will dare to say that he is “probably happier than ever he was in his life.” They will tell you complacently, they “hope he is gone to a better world.” They will shake their heads gravely, and say they “hope he is in heaven.” They will follow him to the grave without fear and trembling, and speak of his death afterwards as “a blessed change for him.” They may have disliked him, and thought him a bad man while he was alive; but the moment he is dead they turn round in their opinions and say they trust he is gone to heaven. I have no wish to hurt any one’s feelings. I only ask anyone, who knows the world, is it not true?

And what does it all prove? It just supplies one more awful proof that men are determined to believe it is an easy business to get to heaven. Men will have it that most persons are saved.

(c) But again, what do men generally *think of ministers* who preach fully the doctrines of the New Testament? Let us see how this question can be answered.

Send a clergyman into a parish who shall “declare all the counsel of God,” and “keep back nothing that is profitable.” Let him be one who shall clearly proclaim justification by faith, regeneration by the Spirit, and holiness of life. Let him be one who shall draw the line distinctly between the converted and the unconverted, and give both to sinners and to saints their portion. Let him frequently produce out of the New Testament a plain, unanswerable description of the true Christian’s character. Let him show that no man who does not possess that character can have any reasonable hope of being saved. Let him constantly press that description on the consciences of his hearers, and urge upon them repeatedly that every soul who dies without that character will be lost. Let him do this, ably and affectionately, and after all, what will the result be?

The result will be, that while some few repent and are saved, the great majority of his hearers will not receive and believe his doctrine. They may not oppose him publicly. They may even esteem him, and respect him as an earnest, sincere, kind-hearted man, who means well. But they will go no further. He may show them the express words of Christ and His Apostles; he may quote text upon text, and passage upon passage: it will be to no purpose. The great majority of his hearers will think him “too strict,” and “too close,” and “too particular.” They will say among themselves, that the world is not so bad as the minister seems to think,—and that people cannot be so good as the minister wants them to be, and that after all, they hope they shall be all right at the last! I appeal to any minister of the Gospel, who has been any length of time in the ministry, whether I am not stating the truth. Are

not these things so?

And what does it prove? It just makes one more proof that men generally are resolved to think that salvation is not a very hard business, and that after all most people will be saved.

Now what solid reason can men show us for these common opinions? Upon what Scripture do they build this notion, that salvation is an easy business, and that most people will be saved? What revelation of God can they show us, to satisfy us that these opinions are sound and true?

They have none, literally none at all. They have not a text of Scripture which, fairly interpreted, supports their views. They have not a reason which will bear examination. They speak smooth things about one another's spiritual state, just because they do not like to allow there is danger. They build up one another into an easy, self-satisfied state of soul, in order to soothe their consciences and make things pleasant. They cry "Peace, peace," over one another's graves, because they want it to be so, and would fain persuade themselves that so it is. Surely against such hollow, foundationless opinions as these, a minister of the Gospel may well protest.

The plain truth is that the world's opinion is worth nothing in matters of religion. About the price of an ox, or a horse, or a farm, or the value of labour,—about wages and work, about money, cotton, coals, iron and corn, about arts, and sciences, and manufactures, about railways, and commerce, and trade, and politics, about all such things the men of the world may give a correct opinion. But we must beware, if we love life, of being guided by man's judgment in the things that concern salvation. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him." (1 Cor. ii. 14.)

Let us remember, above all, that it never will do to think as others do, if we want to get to heaven. No doubt it is easy work to "go with the crowd" in religious matters. It will save us much trouble to swim with the stream and tide. We shall be spared much ridicule: we shall be freed from much unpleasantness. But let us remember, once for all, that the world's mistakes about salvation are many and dangerous. Unless we are on our guard against them we shall never be saved.

III. Let me show, in the third place, *what the Bible says about the number of the saved.*

There is only one standard of truth and error to which we ought to appeal. That standard is the Holy Scripture. Whatsoever is there written we must receive and believe: whatsoever cannot be proved by Scripture we ought to refuse.

Can any reader of this paper subscribe to this? If he cannot, there is little chance of his being moved by any words of mine. If he can, let him give me his attention for a few moments, and I will tell him some solemn things.

Let us look, then, for one thing, at one single text of Scripture, and examine it well. We shall find it in Matthew vii. 13, 14:—"Enter ye in at the strait gate for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and *few there be that find it.*" Now these are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are the words of Him who was very God, and whose

words shall never pass away. They are the words of Him who knew what was in man, who knew things to come, and things past,—who knew that He should judge all men at the last day. And what do those words mean? Are they words which no man can understand without a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek? No: they are not! Are they a dark, unfulfilled prophecy, like the visions in Revelation, or the description of Ezekiel's temple? No: they are not! Are they a deep mysterious saying, which no human intellect can fathom? No: they are not! The words are clear, plain, and unmistakable. Ask any labouring man who can read, and he will tell you so. There is only one meaning which can be attached to them. Their meaning is, that many people will be lost, and few will be found saved.

Let us look, in the next place, at the whole history of mankind as respects religion, as we have it given in the Bible. Let us go through the whole four thousand years, over which the history of the Bible reaches. Let us find, if we can, one single period of time at which godly people were many, and ungodly people were few.

How was it in the *days of Noah*? The earth we are told expressly was “filled with violence.” The imagination of man's heart was only “evil continually.” (Gen. vi. 5, 12.) “All flesh had corrupted his way.” The loss of paradise was forgotten. The warnings of God, by Noah's month, were despised. And at length, when the flood came on the world and drowned every living thing, there were but eight people who had faith enough to flee for refuge to the ark! And were there many saved in those days? Let any honest reader of the Bible give an answer to that question. There can be no doubt what the answer must be.

How was it in the *days of Abraham, and Isaac, and Lot*? It is evident that in the matter of religion they stood very much alone. The family from which they were taken was a family of idolaters. The nations among whom they lived were sunk in gross darkness and sin. When Sodom and Gomorrah were burned there were not five righteous people to be found in the four cities of the plain. When Abraham and Isaac desired to find wives for their sons, there was not a woman in the land where they sojourned to whom they could wish to see them married, And were there many saved in those days? Let any honest reader of the Bible give an answer to that question. There can be no doubt what the answer must be.

How was it with Israel in the *days of the Judges*? No one can read the book of Judges, and not be struck with the sad examples of man's corruption which it affords. Time after time we are told of the people forsaking God, and following idols. In spite of the plainest warnings, they joined affinity with the Canaanites, and learned their works. Time after time we read of their being oppressed by foreign kings, because of their sins, and then miraculously delivered. Time after time we read of the deliverance being forgotten, and of the people returning to their former sins, like the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire. And were there many saved in those days? Let any honest reader of the Bible give an answer to that question. There can be no doubt what the answer must be.

How was it with Israel in the *days of the Kings*? From Saul, the first king, down to Zedekiah, the last king, their history is a melancholy account of backsliding, and declension, and idolatry,—with a few bright exceptional periods. Even under the best kings there seems to have been a vast amount of unbelief and un-

godliness, which only lay hid for a season, and burst out at the first favourable opportunity. Over and over again we find that under the most zealous king; “the high places were not taken away.” Mark how even David speaks of the state of things around him: “Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.” (Psalm xii. 1.) Mark how Isaiah describes the condition of Judah and Jerusalem: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot, even unto the crown of the head, there is no soundness in it.”—“Except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and should have been like unto Gomorrah.” (Isaiah i. 5-9.) Mark how Jeremiah describes his time: “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executed judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon it.” (Jer. v. 1.) Mark how Ezekiel speaks of the men of his times: “The word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, the house of Israel is to become dross: all they are brass, and iron, and tin and lead in the midst of the furnace: they are even the dross of silver.” (Ezek. xxii. 17, 18.) Mark what he says in the sixteenth and twenty-third chapters of his prophecy about the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. And were there many saved in those days? Let any honest reader of the Bible give an answer to that question. There can be no doubt what the answer must be.

How was it with the Jews *when our Lord Jesus Christ was on earth?* The words of Saint John are the best account of their spiritual state: “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” (John i. 11.) He lived as no one born of woman had ever lived before,—a blameless, harmless, holy life. “He went about doing good.” (Acts x. 38.) He preached as no one ever preached before. Even the officers of his enemies confessed, “Never man spake like this man.” (John vii. 46.) He did miracles to confirm His ministry, which, at first sight, we might have fancied would have convinced the most hardened. But, notwithstanding all this, the vast majority of the Jews refused to believe Him. Follow our Lord in all His travels over Palestine, and you will always find the same story. Follow Him into the city, and follow Him into the wilderness; follow him to Capernaum and Nazareth, and follow Him to Jerusalem; follow Him among Scribes and Pharisees, and follow Him among Sadducees and Herodians: everywhere you will arrive at the same result. They were amazed;—they were silenced;—they were astonished;—they wondered; but very few became disciples. The immense proportion of the nation would have none of His doctrine, and crowned all their wickedness by putting Him to death. And were there many saved in those days? Let any honest reader of the Bible give an answer to that question. There can be no doubt what the answer must be.

How was it with the world in the *days of the Apostles?* If ever there was a period when true religion flourished it was then. Never did the Holy Ghost call into the fold of Christ so many souls in the same space of time. Never were there so many conversions under the preaching of the Gospel as when Paul and his fellow labourers were the preachers. But still, it is plain from the Acts of the Apostles, that true Christianity was “everywhere spoken against.” (Acts xxviii. 22.) It is evident that in every city, even in Jerusalem itself, true Christians were a small

minority. We read of perils of all kinds which the Apostles had to go through,—not only perils from without, but perils from within, not only perils from the heathen, but perils from false brethren. We hardly read of a single city visited by Paul where he was not in danger from open violence and persecution. We see plainly, by some of his epistles, that the professing Churches were mixed bodies, in which there were many rotten members. We find him telling the Philippians a painful part of his experience, “Many walk, of whom I tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things.” (Philip. iii. 18, 19.) And were there many saved in those days? Let any honest reader of the Bible give an answer to this question. There can be no doubt what that answer must be.

I ask any honest-minded unprejudiced reader of the volume to weigh well the lessons of the Bible which I have just brought forward. Surely they are weighty and solemn, and deserve serious attention.

Let no one think to evade their force by saying that the Bible only tells the story of the Jews. Think not to comfort yourself by saying that “perhaps the Jews were more wicked than other nations, and many people were probably saved among other nations, though few were saved among the Jews.” You forget that this argument tells against you. You forget that the Jews had light and privileges which the Gentiles had not, and with all their sins and faults, were probably the holiest, and most moral nation upon earth. As to the moral state of people among the Assyrians, and Egyptians, and Greeks, and Romans, it is fearful to think what it must have been. But this we may be sure of, that if many were ungodly among the Jews, the number was far greater among the Gentiles. If few were saved in the green tree, alas, how much fewer must have been saved in the dry?

The sum of the whole matter is this: the Bible and the men of the world speak very differently about the number of the saved. According to the Bible, few will be saved: according to the men of the world, many.—According to the men of the world few are going to hell: according to the Bible few are going to heaven.—According to the men of the world salvation is an easy business: according to the Bible the way is narrow and the gate is strait.—According to the men of the world few will be found at last seeking admission into heaven when too late: according to the Bible many will be in that sad condition, and will cry in vain, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” Yet the Bible was never wrong yet. The most unlikely and improbable prophecies about Tyre, Egypt, Babylon, and Nineveh, have all come true to the letter. And as in other matters, so it will be about the number of the saved. The Bible will prove quite right and the men of the world quite wrong.

IV. Let me show, in the last place, some plain facts about the number of the saved.

I ask particular attention to this part of the subject. I know well that people flatter themselves that the world is far better and wiser than it was 1800 years ago. We have churches, and schools, and books. We have civilization, and liberty, and good laws. We have a far higher standard of morality in society than that which once prevailed. We have the power of obtaining comforts and enjoyments which

our forefathers knew nothing of. Steam, and gas, and electricity, and chemistry, have effected wonders for us. All this is perfectly true. I see it, and I am thankful. But all this does not diminish the importance of the question; *Are there few or many of us likely to be saved?*

I am thoroughly satisfied that the importance of this question is painfully overlooked. I am persuaded that the views of most people about the quantity of unbelief and sin in the world, are utterly inadequate and incorrect. I am convinced that very few people, whether ministers or private Christians, at all realize how few there are in a way to be saved. I want to draw attention to the subject, and I will therefore bring forward a few plain facts about it.

But where shall I go for these facts? I might easily turn to the millions of heathen, who in various parts of the world are worshipping they know not what. But I shall not do so. I might easily turn to the millions of Mahometans who honour the Koran more than the Bible, and the false prophet of Mecca more than Christ. But I shall not do so. I might easily turn to the millions of Roman Catholics who are making the Word of God of none effect by their traditions. But I shall not do so. I shall look nearer home. I shall draw my facts from the land in which I live, and then ask every honest reader whether it be not strictly true that *few are saved*.

I invite any intelligent reader of these pages to imagine himself in any parish in Protestant England or Scotland at this day. Choose which you please, a town parish, or a country parish,—a great parish or a small. Let us take our New Testaments in our hands. Let us sift the Christianity of the inhabitants of this parish, family by family, and man by man. Let us put on one side any one who does not possess the New Testament evidence of being a true Christian. Let us deal honestly and fairly in the investigation, and not allow any one to be a true Christian who does not come up to the New Testament standard of faith and practice. Let us count every man a saved soul in whom we see something of Christ, some evidence of true repentance,—some evidence of saving faith in Jesus,—some evidence of real evangelical holiness. Let us reject every man in whom, on the most charitable construction, we cannot see these evidences, as one “weighed in the balances, and found wanting.” Let us apply this sifting process to any parish in this land, and see what the result would be.

(a) Let us set aside, first of all, those persons in a parish who *are living in any kind of open sin*. By these I mean such as fornicators, and adulterers, and liars, and thieves, drunkards, and cheats, and revilers, and extortioners. About these I think there can be no difference of opinion. The Bible says plainly, that “they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal. v. 21.) Now will these persons be saved? The answer is clear to my own mind. In their present condition they will not.

(b) Let us set aside, in the next place, those persons who are *Sabbath-breakers*. I mean by this expression, those who seldom or never go to a place of worship, though they have the power,—those who do not give the Sabbath to God, but to themselves,—those who think of nothing but doing their own ways, and finding their own pleasure upon Sundays. They show plainly that they are not meet for heaven! The inhabitants of heaven would be company they could not like. The employments of heaven would be a weariness to them, and not a joy. Now will

these persons be saved? The answer is clear to my mind: in their present condition they will not.

(c) Let us set aside, in the next place, all those persons who are *careless and thoughtless Christians*. I mean by this expression, those who attend many of the outward ordinances of religion, but show no signs of taking any real interest in its doctrines and substance. They care little whether the minister preaches the Gospel or not. They care little whether they hear a good sermon or not. They would care little if all the Bibles in the world were burned. They would care little if an Act of Parliament were passed forbidding anyone to pray. In short, religion is not the “one thing needful” with them. Their treasure is on earth. They are just like Galileo, to whom it mattered little whether people were Jews or Christians: he “cared for none of these things.” (Acts xviii. 17.) Now will these persons be saved? The answer is clear to my own mind: in their present condition they will not.

(d) Let us set aside, in the next place, all those who are *formalists and self-righteous*. I mean by this expression, those who value themselves on their own regularity in the use of the forms of Christianity, and depend either directly or indirectly on their own doings for their acceptance with God. I mean all who rest their souls on any work but the work of Christ, or any righteousness but the righteousness of Christ. Of such the Apostle Paul has expressly testified, “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified.” “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (Rom. iii. 20; 1 Cor. iii. 11.)

And dare we say, in the face of such texts, that such as these will be saved? The answer is plain to my own mind: in their present condition they will not.

(e) Let us set aside, in the next place, all those who *know the Gospel with their heads, but do not obey it with their hearts*. These are those unhappy persons who have eyes to see the way of life, but have not will or courage to walk in it. They approve sound doctrine. They will not listen to preaching which does not contain it. But the fear of man, or the cares of the world, or the love of money, or the dread of offending relations, perpetually holds them back. They will not come out boldly, and take up the cross, and confess Christ before men. Of these also the Bible speaks expressly: “Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”—“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” “If any man is ashamed of Me and of my words, of him will the Son of man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels.” (James ii. 17; iv. 17; Luke ix. 26.) Shall we say that such as these will be saved? The answer is clear to my own mind: in their present condition they will not.

(f) Let us set aside, in the last place, all those who are *hypocritical professors*. I mean by that expression, all those whose religion consists in talk and high profession, and in nothing besides. These are they of whom the prophet Ezekiel speaks, saying, “With their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.” “They profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him.”—They “have a form of godliness, but they have not the power” of it. (Ezek. xxxiii. 31; Titus i. 16; 2 Tim. iii. 5.) They are saints at church, and saints to talk to in public. But they are not saints in private, and in their own homes; and worst of all, they are not saints in heart. There can be no dispute about such persons. Shall we say that they will be saved? There can only be one answer: in their

present condition they will not.

And now, after setting aside these classes which I have described, I ask any sensible thinking reader to tell me how many persons in any parish in England will these be left behind? How many, after sifting a parish thoroughly and honestly, how many men and women will remain who are in a way to be saved? How many true penitents, how many real believer's in Christ, how many truly holy people will there be found? I put it to the conscience of every reader of this volume to give an honest answer, as in the sight of God. I ask you whether, after sifting a parish with the Bible in the fashion described, you can come to any conclusion but this,—that few persons, sadly few persons, are in a way to be saved?

It is a painful conclusion to arrive at, but I know not how it can be avoided. It is a fearful and tremendous thought, that there should be so many churchmen in England, and so many dissenters, so many seat-holders, and so many pew-renters, so many hearers, and so many communicants,—and yet, after all, so few in a way to be saved? But the only question is, Is it not true?—It is vain to shut our eyes against facts. It is useless to pretend not to see what is going on around us. The statements of the Bible and the facts of the world we live in will lead us to the same conclusion: *Many are being lost, and few being saved!*

(a) I know well that many do not believe what I am saying, because they *think there is an immense quantity of death-bed repentance*. They flatter themselves that multitudes who do not live religious lives will yet die religious deaths. They take comfort in the thought that vast numbers of persons turn to God in their last illness and are saved at the eleventh hour. I will only remind such persons that all the experience of ministers is utterly against the theory. People generally die just as they have lived. True repentance is never too late: but repentance deferred to the last hours of life is seldom true. A man's life is the surest evidence of his spiritual state, and if lives are to be witnesses, then few are likely to be saved.

(b) I know well that many do not believe what I am saying, because *they find it contradicts the mercy of God*. They dwell on the love to sinners which the Gospel reveals. They point to the offers of pardon and forgiveness which abound in the Bible. They ask us if we maintain, in the face of all this, that only few people will be saved. I answer, I will go as far as any one in exalting God's mercy in Christ, but I cannot shut my eyes against the fact that this mercy profits no man so long as it is wilfully refused. I see nothing wanting, on God's part, for man's salvation. I see room in heaven for the chief of sinners. I see willingness in Christ to receive the most ungodly. I see power in the Holy Ghost to renew the most unholy. But I see on the other hand, desperate unbelief in man: he will not believe what he tells him in the Bible. I see desperate pride in man: he will not bow his heart to receive the Gospel as a little child. I see desperate sloth in man: he will not take the trouble to arise and call upon God. I see desperate worldliness in man: he will not loose his hold on the poor perishable things of time, and consider eternity. In short, I see the words of our Lord continually verified: "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life" (John v. 40), and therefore I am driven to the sorrowful conclusion that few are likely to be saved.

(c) I know well that, many will not believe what I am saying, because *they refuse to obey the evil there is in the world*. They live in the midst of a little circle of

good people: they know little of anything that goes on in the world outside that circle. They tell us the world is a world which is rapidly improving and going on to perfection. They count up on their fingers the number of good ministers whom they have heard and seen in the last year. They call our attention to the number of religious societies, and religious meetings, to the money which is subscribed, to the Bibles and tracts which are being constantly distributed. They ask as if we really dare to say, in the face of all this, that few are in the way to be saved. In reply, I will only remind these amiable people, that there are other people in the world besides their own little circle, and other men and women besides the chosen few whom they know in their own congregation. I entreat them to open their eyes, and see things as they really are. I assure them there are things going on in this country of ours of which they are at present in happy ignorance. I ask them to sift any parish or congregation in England, with the Bible, before they condemn me hastily. I tell them, if they will do this honestly, they will soon find that I am not far wrong, when I say that few are likely to be saved.

(d) I know well that many will not believe me, because *they think such a doctrine very narrow-minded and exclusive*. I utterly deny the charge. I disclaim any sympathy with those Christians who condemn everybody outside their own communion, and appear to shut the door of heaven against everybody who does not see everything with their eyes. Whether Roman Catholics, or Episcopalians, or Free Churchmen, or Baptists, or Plymouth Brethren, whosoever does anything of this kind, I reckon him an exclusive man. I have no desire to shut up the kingdom of heaven against any one. All I say is, that none will enter that kingdom, except converted, believing, and holy souls; and all I take on myself to assert is, that both the Bible and facts combine to prove that such persons are few.

(e) I know well that many will not believe what I am saying, because they *think it a gloomy, uncharitable doctrine*. It is easy to make vague, general assertions of this kind. It is not so easy to show that any doctrine deserves to be called "gloomy and uncharitable" which is scriptural and true. There is a spurious charity, I am afraid, which dislikes all strong statements in religion, a charity which would have no one interfered with, a charity which would have everyone let alone in his sins, a charity which, without evidence, takes for granted that everybody is in a way to be saved, a charity which never doubts that all people are going to heaven, and seems to deny the existence of such a place as hell. But such charity is not the charity of the New Testament, and does not deserve the name. Give me the charity which tries everything by the test of the Bible, and believes nothing and hopes nothing that is not sanctioned by the Word. Give me the charity which St. Paul describes to the Corinthians (1 Cor. xiii. 1, etc.): the charity which is not blind, and deaf, and stupid, but has eyes to see and senses to discern between him that feareth God and him that feareth Him not. Such charity will rejoice in nothing but "the truth," and will confess with sorrow that I tell nothing but the truth when I say that few are likely to be saved.

(f) I know well that many will not believe me, because they *think it presumptuous to have any opinion at all about the number of the saved*. But will these people dare to tell us that the Bible has not spoken plainly as to the character of saved souls? And will they dare to say that there is any standard of truth except the Bi-

ble? Surely there can be no presumption in asserting that which is agreeable to the Bible. I tell them plainly that the charge of presumption does not lie at my door. I say that he is the truly presumptuous man who, when the Bible has said a thing clearly and unmistakably, refuses to receive it.

(g) I know, finally, that many will not believe me, because *they think my statement extravagant, and unwarrantable*. They regard it as a piece of fanaticism, unworthy of the attention of a rational man. They look on ministers who make such assertions, as weak-minded persons, and wanting in common sense. I can bear such imputations unmoved. I only ask those who make them to show me some plain proof that they are right and I am wrong. Let them show me, if they can, that anybody is likely to get to heaven whose heart is not renewed, who is not a believer in Jesus Christ, who is not a spiritually-minded and holy man. Let them show me, if they can, that people of this description are many, compared with those who are not. Let them, in one word, point to any place on EARTH where the great majority of the people are not ungodly, and the truly godly are not a little flock. Let them do this, and I will grant they have done right to disbelieve what I have said. Till they do this, I must maintain the sorrowful conclusion, that few persons are likely to be saved.

And now it only remains to make some practical application of the subject of this paper. I have set forth as plainly as I can the character of saved people. I have shown the painful delusions of the world as to the number of the saved. I have brought forward the evidence of the Bible on the subject. I have drawn from the world around us plain facts in confirmation of the statements I have made.—May the Lord grant that all these solemn truths may not have been exhibited in vain!

I am quite aware that I have said many things in this paper which are likely to give offence. I know it. It must be so. The point which it handles is far too serious and heart-searching to be otherwise than offensive to some. But I have long had a deep conviction that the subject has been painfully neglected, and that few things are so little realized as the comparative numbers of the lost and saved. All that I have written, I have written because I firmly believe it to be God's truth. All that I have said, I have said, not as an enemy but as a lover of souls. You do not count him an enemy who gives you a bitter medicine to save your life. You do not count him an enemy who shakes you roughly from your sleep when your house is on fire. Surely you will not count me an enemy because I tell you strong truths for the benefit of your soul. I appeal, as a friend, to every man or woman into whose hands this volume has come. Bear with me, for a few moments, while I say a few last words to impress the whole subject on your conscience.

(a) Are there few saved? Then, *shall you be one of the few?* Oh, that you would see that salvation is the one thing needful! Health, and riches, and titles, are not needful things. A man may gain heaven without them. But what shall the man do who dies not saved? Oh, that you would see that you must have salvation now, in this present life, and lay hold upon it for your own soul! Oh, that you would see that "saved" or "not saved" is the grand question in religion! High Church or Low Church, Churchman or Dissenter, all these are trifling questions in comparison. What a man needs in order to get to heaven is an actual personal interest in

Christ's salvation. Surely, if you are not saved, it will be better at last never to have been born.

(b) Are there few saved? Then, *if you are not one of the few already, strive to be one without delay.* I know not who and what you are, but I say boldly, Come to Christ and you shall be saved. The gate that leads to life may be strait, but it was wide enough to admit Manasseh, and Saul of Tarsus, and why not you? The way that leads to life may be narrow, but it is marked by the footsteps of thousands of sinners like yourself. All have found it a good way. All have persevered, and got safe home at last. Jesus Christ invites you. The promises of the Gospel encourage you. Oh, strive to enter in without delay!

(c) Are there few saved? Then, *if you are doubtful whether you are one of the few, make sure work at once, and be doubtful no more.* Leave no stone unturned in order to ascertain your own spiritual state. Be not content with vague hopes and trusts. Rest not on warm feelings and temporary desires after God. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Oh, give me leave to say, that if you are content to live on uncertain about salvation, you live the maddest life in the world! The fires of hell are before you, and you are uncertain whether your soul is insured. This world below must soon be left, and you are uncertain whether you have a mansion prepared to receive you in the world above. The judgment will soon be set, and you are uncertain whether you have an Advocate to plead your cause. Eternity will soon begin, and you are uncertain whether you are prepared to meet God. Oh, sit down this day, and study the subject of salvation! Give God no rest till uncertainty has disappeared, and you have got hold of a reasonable hope that you are saved.

(d) Are there few that be saved? Then, *if you are one, be thankful.* Chosen and called of God, while thousands around you are sunk in unbelief,—seeing the kingdom of God, while multitudes around you are utterly blind,—delivered from this present evil world, while crowds are overcome by its love and fear—taught to know sin, and God, and Christ, while numbers, to all appearance as good as you, live in ignorance and darkness. Oh, you have reason every day to bless and praise God! Whence came this sense of sin, which you now experience? Whence came this love of Christ, this desire after holiness, this hungering after righteousness,—this delight in the Word? Has not free grace done it, while many a companion of your youth still knows nothing about it, or has been cut off in his sins? You ought indeed to bless God! Surely Whitefield might well say, that one anthem among the saints in heaven will be “Why me, Lord? Why didst Thou choose me?”

(e) Are there few that be saved? Then, *if you are one, do not wonder that you often find yourself standing alone.* I dare believe you are sometimes almost brought to a standstill, by the corruption and wickedness that you see in the world around you. You see false doctrine abounding. You see unbelief and ungodliness of every description. You are sometimes tempted to say, “Can I really be in the right in my religion? Can it really be that all these people are in the wrong?” Beware of giving way to thoughts like these. Remember, you are only having practical proof of the truth of your Master's sayings. Think not that His purposes are being defeated. Think not that His work is not going forward in the world. He is still taking out a people to His praise. He is still raising up witnesses to Himself,

here and there, all over the world. The saved will yet be found to be a “multitude that no man can number,” when all are gathered together at last. (Rev. vii. 9.) The earth will yet be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. All nations shall serve Him: all kings shall yet delight to do Him honour. But the night is not yet spent. The day of the Lord’s power is yet to come. In the mean time all is going on as He foretold 1100 years ago. Many are being lost and few saved.

(f) Are there few saved? Then, *if you are one, do not be afraid of having too much religion*. Settle it down in your mind that you will aim at the highest degree of holiness, and spiritual-mindedness, and consecration to God, that you will not be content with any low degree of sanctification. Resolve that, by the grace of God, you will make Christianity beautiful in the eyes of the world. Remember that the children of the world have but few patterns of true religion before them. Endeavour, as far as in you lies, to make those few patterns recommend the service of your Master. Oh, that every true Christian would recollect that he is set as a lighthouse in the midst of a dark world, and would labour so to live that every part of him may reflect light, and no side be dim!

(g) Are there few saved? Then, *if you are one, use every opportunity of trying to do good to souls*. Settle it down in your mind that the vast majority of people around you are in awful danger of being lost for ever. Work every engine for bringing the Gospel to bear upon them. Help every Christian machinery for plucking brands from the burning. Give liberally to every Society which has for its object to spread the everlasting Gospel. Throw all your influence heartily and unreservedly into the cause of doing good to souls. Live like one who thoroughly believes that time is short and eternity near, the devil strong and sin abounding,—the darkness very great and the light very small,—the ungodly very many and the godly very few,—the things of the world mere transitory shadows, and heaven and hell the great substantial realities. Alas, indeed, for the lives that many believers live! How cold are many, and how frozen,—how slow to do decided things in religion, and how afraid of going *too far*,—how backward to attempt anything new,—how ready to discourage a good movement,—how ingenious in discovering reasons why it is best to sit still,—how unwilling ever to allow that “the time” for active exertion is come,—how wise in finding fault,—how shiftless in devising plans to meet growing evils! Truly a man might sometimes fancy, when he looks at the ways of many who are counted believers, that all the world was going to heaven, and hell was nothing but a lie.

Let us all beware of this state of mind! Whether we like to believe it or not, hell is filling fast,—Christ is daily holding out His hand to a disobedient people,—many, many are in the way to destruction, few, few are in the way to life. Many, many are likely to be lost. Few, few are likely to be saved.

Once more I ask every reader, as I asked at the beginning of this paper,—*Shall you be saved?* If you are not saved already, my heart’s desire and prayer to God is, that you may seek salvation without delay. If you are saved, my desire is that you may live like a saved soul, and like one who knows that saved souls are few.