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A PASTOR'S ADDRESS TO HIS FLOCK

AT THE

BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR.

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“GOD IS MY RECORD HOW GREATLY I LONG AFTER YOU ALL.”—  
*Philippians* i. 8.

BELOVED FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,

The third year of my ministry among you is coming to an end. Suffer me to use the occasion as I have done before,—suffer me to write to you in all affection about your souls.

The end of a year is a solemn season. It ought to remind us all of eternal things. The day of grace is slipping away,—the day of judgment is drawing near,— the thread of life is winding up;—a few more short years and every soul of us will have gone to his own place,—we shall each of us be in heaven or hell. Surely it is a time for ministers to warn, and for congregations to think;—it is a time for all people to commune with their own hearts and be still. May the Holy Spirit enable me to speak a word in season, and may the same Spirit incline you to receive it.

I cannot reach your hearts, I know well. It is not in me,—it needs the finger of God. But I can set before you my earnest wishes for every class among you, and I will do it, the Lord being my helper. Bear with me if I say things that sound sharp and hard. Set it down to my anxiety for your salvation;—I mean it all for your good. I write none other things but what I have gathered from the Bible, and as such I commend them to your consciences. Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

I. First of all let me say, *there are very many among you whom I long to see awakened.*

You are those who have the name of Christians, but not the character which should go with the name. God is not King of your hearts. You mind earthly things.

I grant you may be quick and clever about the affairs of this life: you are, many of you, good men of business, good at your daily work, good masters, good servants, good neighbours, good subjects of the Queen: all this I fully allow. But it is the eternal part of you that I speak of; it is your never-dying

soul. And about that, if a man may judge by the little you do for it, you are careless, thoughtless, reckless, and unconcerned.

I do not say that God and salvation are subjects that never come across your minds, but this I say, they have not the uppermost place there. Neither do I say that you are all alike in your lives;—some of you doubtless go further in sin than others,—but this I say, you have all turned every one to his own way, and that way is not God's. Brethren, when I look at the Bible I can come to only one conclusion about you,—you are asleep about your souls.

*You do not see the sinfulness of sin, and your own lost condition by nature.* You appear to make light of breaking God's commandments, and to care little whether you live according to His law or not. Yet God says that sin is the transgression of the law,—that His commandment is exceeding broad,—that every imagination of your natural heart is evil,—that sin is the thing He cannot bear, He hates it,—that the wages of sin is death, and the soul that sinneth shall die. Surely you are asleep!

*You do not see your need of a Saviour.* You appear to think it an easy matter to get to heaven, and that God will of course be merciful to you at last some way or other, though you do not exactly know how. Yet God says that He is just, and never changes,—that Christ is the only way, and none can come unto the Father but by Him,—that without His blood there can be no forgiveness of sin,—that a man without Christ is a man without hope,—that those who would be saved must believe on Jesus and come to Him, and that he who believeth not shall be damned. Surely you are asleep!

*You do not see the necessity of holiness.* You appear to think it quite enough to go on as others do, and live like your neighbours. And as for praying and Bible reading, making conscience of words and actions, studying truthfulness and gentleness, humility and charity, and keeping separate from the world, they are things you do not seem to value at all. Yet God says, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord,—that there shall enter into heaven nothing that defileth,—that His people must be a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Surely you are asleep!

And, worst of all, *you do not appear to feel your danger.* You walk on with your eyes shut, and seem not to know that the end of your path is hell. Some dreamers fancy they are rich when they are poor, or full when they are hungry, or well when they are sick, and awake to find it all a mistake. And this is the way that many of you dream about your souls; you flatter yourselves you will have peace, and there will be no peace; you fancy that you are all right, and in truth you will find that you are all wrong. Surely you are asleep!

Dear brethren, what can I say to arouse you? Your souls are in awful peril: without a mighty change they will be lost. When shall that change once be?

You are dying, and not ready to depart;—you are going to be judged, and not prepared to meet God;—your sins are not forgiven, your persons are not justified, your hearts are not renewed. Heaven itself would be no happiness to you if you got there, for the Lord of heaven is not your friend. What pleases Him does not please you. What He dislikes gives you no pain. His word is not your counsellor. His day is not your delight. His law is not your guide. You care little for hearing of Him. You know nothing of speaking with Him. To be for ever in His company would be a thing you could not endure; and the society of saints and angels would be a weariness, and not a joy.—At the rate you live at, the Bible might never have been written, and Christ might never have died, the Apostles were foolish, the New Testament Christians madmen, and the salvation of the Gospel a needless thing.—Oh! awake, and sleep no more!

Think not to say, You cannot believe your case is so bad, or the danger so great, or God so particular. I answer, The devil has been putting this lying delusion into people's hearts for nearly six thousand years. It has been his grand snare ever since the day he said to Eve, "Ye shall not surely die." Do not be so weak as to be taken in by it. God never failed yet to punish sin, and He never will. He never failed to make His word good, and you will find this to your cost, one day, except you repent.

And think not to say, You are a member of Christ's church, and therefore feel no doubt you are as good a Christian as others. I answer, This will only make your case worse, if you have nothing else to plead. You may be written down and registered among God's people; you may be reckoned in the number of the saints; you may sit for years under the sound of the Gospel; you may use holy forms, and even come to the Lord's table at regular seasons;—and still, with all this, unless sin be hateful, and Christ precious, and your heart a temple of the Holy Ghost, you will prove in the end no better than a lost soul. A holy calling will never save an unholy man.

And think not to say, You have been baptized, and so feel confident you are born of God, and have His grace within you. I answer, You have none of the marks which St. John has told me in his first Epistle, distinguish such a person. I do not see you confessing that Jesus is the Christ,—overcoming the world,—not committing sin,—loving your brother,—doing righteousness,—keeping yourself from the wicked one. How then can I believe that you are born of God? If God were your Father you would love Christ: if you were God's son you would be led by His Spirit. I want stronger evidences. Show me some repentance and faith; show me a life hid with Christ in God; show me a spiritual and sanctified conversation:—these are the fruits I want to see, if I am to believe you have the root of the matter in you, and are a living branch of the true vine. But without these your baptism will only add to your condemnation.

Beloved brethren, I speak strongly, because I feel deeply. Time is too short, life is too uncertain, to allow of standing on ceremony. At the risk of offending, I use great plainness of speech. I cannot bear the thought of hearing any of you condemned in the great day of assize;—of seeing any of your faces in the crowd on God’s left hand, among those who are helpless, hopeless, and beyond the reach of mercy. I cannot bear such thoughts,—they grieve me to the heart. Before the day of grace is past, and the day of vengeance begins, I call upon you to open your eyes and repent. Oh! consider your ways and be wise. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?

Here, at the beginning of a new year, I pray you to be reconciled to God. The Lord Jesus who came into the world to save sinners,—Jesus, the appointed mediator between God and man,—Jesus, who loved us and gave Himself for us,—Jesus sends you all a message of peace, He says, “Come unto me.”

“Come” is a precious word indeed, and ought to draw you. You have sinned against heaven,—heaven has not sinned against you: yet, see how the first step towards peace is on heaven’s side,—it is the Lord’s message, “Come unto me.”

“Come” is a word of *merciful invitation*. Does it not seem to say, “Sinner, I am waiting for you, I am not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. I would have all men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Judgment is my strange work—I delight in mercy. I offer the water of life to every one who will take it. I stand at the door of your heart and knock. For long time I have spread out my hands to you. I wait to be gracious. There is yet room in my Father’s house. My long-suffering waits for more of the children of men to come to the mercy-seat before the last trumpet is blown,—for more wanderers to return before the door is closed for ever. Oh! sinner, come to me.”

“Come” is a word of *promise and encouragement*. Does it not seem to say, “Sinner, I have gifts ready for you; I have something of everlasting importance to bestow upon your soul; I have received gifts for men, even for the rebellious; I have a free pardon for the most ungodly; a full fountain for the most unclean; a white garment for the most defiled; a new heart for the most hardened; healing for the broken-hearted; rest for the heavy-laden; joy for those that mourn. Oh! sinner, it is not for nothing that I invite you! All things are ready,—come, come unto me.”

Beloved brethren, hear the voice of the Son of God. See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh. Come away from sin, which can never give you real pleasure, and will be bitter at the last. Come out from a world which will never satisfy you. Come unto Christ. Come with all your sins, however many and however great,—however far you may have gone from God, and

however provoking your conduct may have been. Come as you are,—unfit, unmeet, unprepared as you may think yourself,—you will gain no fitness by delay. Come at once, come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

How indeed shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation? Where will you appear if you make light of the blood of Christ, and do despite to the Spirit of grace? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, but never so fearful as when men fall from under the Gospel. The saddest road to hell is that which runs under the pulpit, past the Bible, and through the midst of warnings and invitations. Oh! beware, lest like Israel at Kadesh, you mourn over your mistake when it is too late; or like Judas Iscariot, find out your sin when there is no space for repentance.

Arise, beloved brethren, and call upon the Lord. Be not like Esau: sell not eternal blessings for the things of today. Surely the time past may suffice you to have been careless and prayerless, Godless and Christless, worldly and earthly-minded; surely the time to come may be given to your soul.

Pray, I beseech you, that with the old year you may put off the old ways and the old habits, and that with the new year you may become new men, new creatures in Christ Jesus. I yield to none in wishes for your happiness, and my best wish is that the year 1847 may see the birth day of your soul. This is a better thing than riches or health, or honour or learning. A man may get to heaven without these, but he cannot get there without conversion. Verily if you die without having been born again, you had far better never have been born at all. No man really lives till he lives unto God.

II. The second thing I have to say is this, *there are many among you whom I long to see decided followers of Christ.*

You are those who are wavering and halting between two opinions. You seem not to have made up your minds. You appear to stand in doubt which is the true way of serving God, and which the false. One day a man might think you loved Christ,—another he might suppose you did not care for Him at all. You are like the twilight,—I cannot call you darkness,—and yet you are not light in the Lord. There is so much right about you, that I cannot speak to you among the openly ungodly; and yet there is so much wrong about you, that without a change you will never be saved. Oh! that this change might begin at once! Oh! that this year might be a year of decision in your hearts.

Wavering brethren, of all classes in a congregation, you are the most difficult to address: no state is so dangerous as yours.

You see something of the evil of sin, and its awful consequences, but not all. You have thoughts about judgment and hell, and you would like to avoid them; but you never really try.

You see something of the blessedness of heaven, but not all. Its peace, and rest, and joy, and happiness, are things that come across your mind, but you never really seek to obtain them.

There have been times when you have appeared convinced; there seemed to be much melting and softening going on in your heart. You have been at Sinai, and been alarmed. You have been at Bochim, and wept. You have been at Calvary, and had prickings of conscience. And yet those times have passed away, and your old things still remain.

You have often looked like men going on pilgrimage: you seemed ready to come out from the world; and then you have suddenly stopped, and gone no further.

You have done many things that are good, but, unhappily like Herod, you leave many undone. You give up many habits that are bad, and yet you keep sufficient to make it plain you have no true grace in your hearts.

Oh! wavering brethren, what can be done for your souls?—I am distressed for you.

Many of you are so like true Christians, that the difference can hardly be seen. You are no opposers of true religion. You have no objection to the preaching of the Gospel, and often take pains to hear it. You can enjoy the company of believers, and appear to take pleasure in their conversation and experience. You can even talk yourself of the things of God as if you valued them. All this you can do.

And yet there is nothing real about your religion,—no real witnessing against sin,—no real separation from the world,—no peculiarity,—no warfare. You can wear Christ's uniform in the time of peace, but, like the tribe of Reuben, you are wanting in the day of battle. Times of trouble prove that you were never really on the Rock. Times of sickness and danger bring out the rottenness of your foundations. Times of temptation and persecution discover the emptiness of your professions. There is no dependence to be placed upon you.—Christians in the company of Christians, you are worldly in the company of the worldly. One week I shall find you reading spiritual books, as if you were all for eternity,—another I shall hear of your mixing in some earthly folly, as if you only thought of time. And so you go on, beating about in sight of land, but never seeming to make up your mind to come into harbour; showing plainly that you have an idea of the way of life, but not decided enough to act upon your knowledge.

Oh! wavering brethren, what can be done for you? I tell you solemnly, I tremble for your souls. In your present course you will never taste peace—you will go on without comfort, and go off without hope.

Truly you are a wonder in creation. You stand alone. The devil wonders at you, how you can see so much of the way to heaven, and not walk in it. The angels wonder at you, how you can know so much of the Gospel, and yet stand still. Ministers wonder at you, how you can march up to the borders of the promised land, and yet not strive to enter in. Believers wonder at you, how you can taste so much of the good word of God, and yet not determine

to eat and live for ever. Take heed, lest at last you prove a wonder to yourselves.

Wavering brethren, let me ask you a simple question. How long do you mean to continue as you are? When do you intend to cease from being almost Christians, and become decided? When do you leave Agrippa, and join Paul? You know in your heart and conscience you are not yet saved,—you have no oil in your lamps,—you have not the marks of Christ's people,—you are not true saints. You dare not deny what I say.

When then do you propose to alter? What is the thing that you are waiting for? Oh! turn not away from my question: sit down and answer it if you can.

Are you waiting *till you are sick and unwell*? Surely you will not tell me that is a convenient season. When your body is racked with pain,—when your mind is distracted with all kinds of anxious thoughts,—when calm reflection is almost impossible,—is this a time for beginning the mighty work of acquaintance with God? Do not talk so.

Are you waiting *till you are old*? Surely you have not considered what you say. You will serve Christ when your members are worn out and decayed, and your hands unfit to work. You will go to Him when your mind is weak, and your memory failing. You will give up the world when you cannot keep it. You will set your affections on things above, when you find nothing to set them on in things below. Is this your plan? Beware, lest you insult God.

Are you waiting *till you have leisure*? And when do you expect to have more time than you have now? Every year you live seems shorter than the last: you find more to think of, or to do, and less power and opportunity to do it. And, after all, you know not whether you may live to see another year. Boast not yourself of tomorrow,—now is the time.

Are you waiting *till your heart is perfectly fit and ready*? That will never be. It will always be corrupt and sinful,—a bubbling fountain, full of evil. You will never make it like a pure white sheet of paper, that you can take to Jesus, and say, "Here I am, Lord, ready to have thy law written on my heart." Delay not.— Better begin as you are.

Are you waiting *till the devil will let you come to Christ without trouble*? That will never be. Satan never gives up a single soul without a struggle. If you would be saved you must fight for it. Stand not another day. Arise and go forward at once.

Are you waiting *till there is no cross to be borne*? That will never be. So long as sin is our enemy, and our own bodies weak and dogged by it, so long we must endure hardness, if we would be good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Go in the strength of the Lord God, and you shall overcome. If there is no cross there will be no crown.

Are you waiting *till all around you become decided*? That will never be. Heaven only is the place where all are saints. Earth is the place where sin

reigns, and God's people are a little flock. You must be content to journey alone, and swim against the stream. "Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Tarry not for friends and neighbours,—see that you are among the few.

Are you waiting *till the gate is wide*? That will never be.—It will not alter,—it is not elastic,—it will not stretch. It is wide enough for the chief of sinners; if he comes in a humble and self-abased spirit. But if there is anything you are resolved not to give up, you will never, with all your struggling, get in. Lay aside every weight,—enter before the door is shut for ever.

And are you waiting *because some few Christians are inconsistent, and some professors fall away*? Their folly is no excuse for you. Their sin will not justify your delay. Hear the word of the Lord Jesus, "What is that to thee, follow thou me."

Oh! wavering brethren, are not your excuses broken reeds—webs that will not cover you—wood, hay, and stubble, that will not abide the fire? Are not your reasonings and defences unprofitable and vain? Be honest,—confess the truth.

Turn not away from good advice. I fear lest the time should come when you will seek to enter in, and not be able. Here, at the beginning of a new year, I charge you throw away indecision,—wait no longer,—become decided for Christ.

No man is *wise* till he is decided. What can be more foolish, than to live on in uncertainty? What can be more childish than to appear not to know what is truth?—to have two ways set before us, and not be able to decide which is right? Christ is on one side, and the world on the other,—the Bible is on the right hand, and man's opinion on the left:—is it not a wonderful and horrible thing that you can think on these things, and yet for a moment doubt? Whether you believe the Gospel true or false, your present position is manifestly wrong. If it be true, you do not go far enough,—if it be false you go too far. Oh! be decided, and be wise.

No man is *safe* till he is decided. All are in peril of ruin who are not real followers of Christ,—who are not converted and made children of God.

Wavering brethren, you fancy there is a middle path between conversion. You are mistaken. There seems to be,—the devil tells you there is,—but in reality there is no such thing. There are but two kingdoms, Christ's kingdom, and Satan's, there is no neutral ground between,—two parties, believers and unbelievers, there is no third. Consider to which you belong.

Some people, I know, will say you are in a hopeful state. I dare not say so, while you stand still. It would be flattery, and not charity. I tell you rather your state is dangerous in the extreme. You have enough religion to satisfy you in a way,—you are not as other men, careless, profligate, and the like,—



but still you have not enough religion to do you good. You have not the Spirit of Christ, and are none of His.

It is small comfort to my mind to hear that you are not far from the kingdom of God, if you stop there. It wants another step to make you safe, and without that, all the rest is useless. I doubt not many were close to the door of the ark, when the flood came, but all alike were drowned who were not inside. Many, I dare say, came up to the gates of the cities of refuge, but none escaped the destroyer except those who really entered in. Be decided. This is the only way to be safe.

And no man is quite *happy* in his religion till he is decided. There is little peace so long as you are halting and irresolute. You please no one altogether. Jesus has no consolations for you: He will have all your heart or none. The world is not satisfied with you, they cannot understand your behaviour. True Christians dare not comfort you: they can only look on you with suspicion and mistrust. You are like the Samaritans of old, who served the Lord and their own idols at the same time; they formed a middle class between the Jews and Gentiles, and yet were friends with neither;—they were too much Gentiles for the Jews, and too much Jews for the Gentiles. This is just your case. You are trying that which cannot be done; you are trying to serve two masters, and no wonder you are ill at ease.

Wavering brethren, here at the beginning of a new year, I invite you to choose the better part. Gird up the loins of your mind. Quit you like men. Be strong. God's conduct in punishing sin has ever been decided. Satan's conduct in tempting sinners has ever been decided:—why then are you not decided too?

Cry mightily unto the Lord, that with the old year you may leave behind your wavering ways. Resolve that, by His grace, you will be true soldiers, real servants, men of God indeed;—that you will never rest until you know in whom you believe. Cease to halt between two opinions. Let your eyes look right on. Cast loose your hold on the world. Lay hold on Christ, and commit yourselves to Him. No man ever came back from the narrow way, and reported that he was sorry for his choice. Thousands have lingered away life, as you are doing now, and have found, too late, that the fruit of indecision is eternal sorrow.

III. The last thing I have to say is this, *there are some true Christians among you whom I long to see more holy and more bright.*

You are those who have found out your own sinfulness and lost estate, and really believe on Jesus for the saving of your souls. The eyes of your understanding have been opened by the Spirit,—He has led you to Christ, and you are new men. You have peace with God. Sin is no longer pleasant to you,—the world has no longer the first place in your heart,—all things are become new. You have ceased from trusting in your own works. You are

willing to stand before the bar of God, and rest your soul on the finished work of Him who died for the ungodly. This is all your confidence, that you have washed your robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. I thank God heartily for what He hath wrought in your souls.

Believing brethren, I write to you *about your sanctification*. There are those who think you are a class in our congregations that require little writing to: you are within the pale of salvation—you may be almost let alone. I cannot see it. I believe you need your minister's care and exhortation as much as any, if not more. I believe that on your growth in grace and holiness, not merely your own comfort, but the salvation of many souls, under God, depends. I believe that the converted members of a church should be preached to, spoken to, warned, counselled, far more than they are. You need many words of direction. You are still in the wilderness. You have not crossed Jordan. You are not yet at home.

I see Paul beseeching the Thessalonians that as they have received of Him, how they ought to walk and please God, so they would abound more and more. I see him warning them not to sleep, as others do, but to watch and be sober. I see Peter telling believers to give diligence to make their calling and election sure; to go on adding one grace to another; to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ. I wish to follow in their steps. I would remind you "that this is the will of God, even your sanctification," and I ask you to make it plain it is your will too. You were not chosen out of the world to go to sleep, but that you might be holy: you were not called of God that you might sit still, but that you might walk worthy of your calling. Recollect those solemn words, "He that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

Why do I say these things? Is it because I think you do not know them? No: but I want to stir you up by putting you in remembrance. Is it because I wish to discourage the poor in spirit, and make the heart of the righteous sad? No: indeed I would not willingly do this. Is it because I think true Christians can ever fall away? God forbid you should suppose I mean such a thing.

But I say what I say because *I am jealous for my Lord's honour*. I wish the elect of God to be indeed a holy nation, and the sons of adoption to live as becomes the children of a King. I want those who are light in the Lord to walk as children of light, shining more and more every day.

And I say it *for the good of the world*. You are almost the only book that worldly people read. Surely your lives should be epistles of Christ, so plain that he who runs may read them. The world cares little for doctrine,—the world knows nothing of experience,—but the world can understand a close walk with God.

And not least I say it *because of the times you live in*. I write it down deliberately, I believe there never were so many lukewarm saints as there are

now;—there never was a time in which a low and carnal standard of Christian behaviour so much prevailed;—there never were so many babes in grace in the family of God,—so many who seem to sit still, and live on old experience,—so many who appear to have need of nothing, and to be neither hungering nor thirsting after righteousness, as at the present time. I write this with all sorrow. It may be too painful to please some; but I ask you, as in God's sight, is it not true?

There is a generation of Christians in this age who grieve me to the heart. They make my blood run cold. I cannot understand them. For anything that man's eye can see, they make no progress. They never seem to get on. Years roll on, and they are just the same,—the same besetting sins, the same infirmities of disposition, the same weakness in trial, the same chilliness of heart, the same apathy, the same faint resemblance to Christ,—but no new knowledge, no increased interest in the kingdom, no freshness, no new strength, no new fruits, as if they grew. Are they not forgetting that growth is the proof of life, that even the yew tree grows and the snail and the sloth move? Are they not forgetting how awfully far a man may go and yet not be a true Christian. He may be like a waxwork figure, the very image of a believer, and yet not have within him the breath of God: he may have a name to live and be dead after all.

Believing brethren, these are the reasons why I write so strongly. I want your Christianity to be unmistakable. I want you all to grow really, and to do more than others. Here, at the beginning of a new year, let us remember Sardis and Laodicea,—let us all resolve to be more holy and more bright. Let us bury our idols. Let us put away all strange gods. Let us cast out the old leaven. Let us lay aside every weight and besetting sin. Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God. Let us renew our covenant with our beloved Lord. Let us aim at the highest and best things. Let us resolve by God's blessing this year to be more holy, and then I know and am persuaded, we shall be more happy, and shall have great peace.

I name some things, for prayerful consideration,

I. Let us then, for one thing, begin with *a humble confession of past unprofitableness and shortcomings.*

Let us acknowledge with shame and contrition that we have not hitherto lived up to our light. We ought to have been the salt of the earth;—but there has been little savour of Christ about us. We ought to have been the light of the world;—but we have most of us been little glimmering sparks that could scarcely be seen. We ought to have been a peculiar people;—but the difference between us and the world has been small and faint. We ought to have been like Levites among professing Christians:—but we have too often

behaved as if we belonged to some other tribe. We ought to have looked on this world as an inn, and we have settled down in it as if it were our home:—it ought to have been counted our school of training for eternity, and we have been at ease in it as if it were our continuing city, or trifled away time in it as if we were meant to play and not to learn. We ought to have been careful for nothing, and we have been careful and troubled about many things,—we have allowed the affairs of this life to eat out the heart of our spirituality and have been cumbered with much serving. How rarely we have heard the gospel like men in earnest,—and read the Bible as if we were feeding on it,—and prayed as if we wanted an answer! How poor and feeble has been our witness against sin! How seldom have we looked like men about our Father’s business! How little we have known of singleness of eye, and wholeness of heart, and walking in the Spirit! How weak has been our faith, how feeble our hope, how cold our charity! How few of us have lived as if we believed all that is written in the Word, and moved through life like pilgrims travelling to a better land!

Oh! brethren believers, have we not good reason to be ashamed when we think on these things? Very grievous are they and we ought to feel it. Let us begin the year with self-abasement,—let us cry “God be merciful to us sinners,—take away our iniquity for we have done very foolishly.”

2. In the next place, *let us all seek to “abide in Christ” more thoroughly than we have hitherto.*

Christ is the true spring of life in every believer’s soul, the head on which every member depends, the corner stone of all real sanctification. Whenever I see a child of God becoming less holy than he was, I know the secret of it, he is clinging less firmly to Christ than he did. Our root must be right, if our fruit is to abound.

Brethren, let us strive after close union and communion with Christ. Let us go to Him oftener, speak with Him more frequently, trust Him more wholly, look to Him more constantly, lean upon Him more entirely. This is the way to go through the wilderness without fainting, and to run the race set before us with patience. Let us live the life of faith in the Son of God. He is the vine and we are the branches:—let all our strength be drawn from Him: separate from Him we can do nothing. He is the sun of righteousness;—let us seek our comfort in Him and not in our own frames and feelings. He is the bread of life;—let us feed on Him day by day, as Israel on the manna, and not on our own experiences. Let Christ become more and more all things to us: His blood our peace,—His intercession our comfort,—His word our warrant,—His grace our strength,—His sympathy our support,—His speedy coming our hope. Let others spend their time on new books if they will, let us rather study to learn Christ.

We know a little of Christ as our Saviour, but Oh! how small a portion have we seen of the fulness that is in Him. Like the Indians, when America was first discovered, we are not aware of the amazing value of the gold and treasure in our hands. Believe me, if we did but realize the blessedness of free and full forgiveness in Him, we should be men of a different stamp. The man who *feels* the blood of atonement sprinkled on his conscience,—the man who enjoys assurance that he is washed, and justified, and accepted in the Beloved, this is the man who will be holy indeed, this is the man who will bear much fruit. He will labour cheerfully,—he will suffer patiently,—he will witness confidently,—he will press on unflinchingly,—he will love warmly. Redemption is ever fresh upon his mind, and his thought is, “what shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits.”

Brethren, let us cleave to Christ more closely. Let us draw nearer to the cross. Let us sit at the feet of Jesus. Let us drink into the spirit of the apostle when he said “to me to live is Christ.” Let us do this, and we shall grow.

3. And let us *beware of excuses.*

Reasons will never be wanting in our minds why we cannot be bright and eminent Christians *just now*. It is very possible to admire a high standard of spirituality in others, while we are content with very low practice ourselves. We persuade ourselves there is something peculiar in our particular case which makes it almost impossible to shine. But let all excuses be received, like Babylonian ambassadors, with great suspicion. They are generally the devil’s coinage. Let us settle it firmly in our hearts, that there are few of us indeed who cannot glorify God just where we are without any change. All our excuses are as dust in the balance when placed against that promise “my grace is sufficient for thee.” Let us not deceive ourselves. By the grace of God we may be bright saints even now.

Let us not say, “*We have bad health.*” Remember the apostle Paul:—he had a thorn in the flesh,—some never-ceasing ailment, probably,—and yet it seemed a spur rather than a hindrance to his soul.

Let us not say, “*We have many trials.*” Remember Job:—Wave upon wave came rolling over him, and yet his faith did not give way; and the record of his patience is on high.

Let us not say, “*We have families and children to make us anxious and keep us back.*” Remember David:—none was ever so tried at home as he was, yet he was a man after God’s own heart.

Let us not say, “*We have press of distracting business to attend on.*” Remember Daniel:—he had far more affairs on his hands probably than any of us, yet he found time to pray three times a day and was a proverb for godliness.

Let us not say, "*I stand alone, the times are evil, and none around me serve God.*" Remember Noah. The whole world was against him, yet he did not give way. By faith he held fast.

Let us not say, "*We live in families where God is not thought of.*" Remember Obadiah in Ahab's house, and Nero's servants at Rome. What are our difficulties compared with theirs.

Let us not say, "*We are poor and unlearned.*" Remember Peter and John. They were as poor and unlearned as any of us, yet they were pillars of the early church, they were of the number of those who turned the world upside down.

No! believing brethren, such excuses for not being more holy will never do while grace may be had. Let us say rather, "We are slothful and take no trouble,—we are unbelieving and make no bold attempt,—we are worldly and our eyes are too dim to see the beauty of holiness,—we are proud and we cannot humble ourselves to take pains." Let us say this and we shall more likely speak the truth. There are always ways in which we may glorify God: there are passive graces as well as active. But the way of the slothful is always a hedge of thorns. The wall of Jerusalem was soon built when the Jews had "a mind to work." We complain of the devil, but there is no devil after all like our own hearts. We have not grace because we do not ask it. The fault is all our own.

4. Let us *be on our guard against false doctrine.*

Unsound faith will never be the mother of really sound practice, and in these latter days departures from the faith abound. See then that your loins be girt about with truth, and be very jealous of receiving anything which cannot be proved by the word. Think not for a moment that false doctrine will meet you face to face, saying "I am false doctrine and I want to come into your heart." Satan does not go to work in that way. He dresses up false doctrine like Jezebel,—he paints her face and tires her head, and tries to make her like truth. Think not that those who preach error will never preach anything that is true. Error would do little harm if that was the case. No! error will come before you mingled with much that is sound and scriptural. The sermon will be all right excepting a few sentences. The book will be all good excepting a few pages. And this is the chief danger of religious error in these times,—it is like the subtle poisons of days gone by,—it works so deceitfully that it throws men off their guard. Brethren, take care. Remember that even Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Keep clear of any system of religion which confounds the world and true believers, and makes no broad distinction between those who are true children of God in a congregation, and those who are not. Be not carried away by an appearance of great self-denial and humility. It is far easier to fast and

wear sackcloth and be of a sad countenance than to receive thoroughly the doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law.

Call no man father upon earth. Build not your faith on any minister or set of ministers. Let no man become your Pope. Make no Christian living your standard of what is right in faith or practice, however high his name, his rank, or his learning. Let your creed be the Bible and nothing but the Bible, and your example Christ and nothing short of Him.

Take heed, lest your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Be careful what books you read on religious subjects: many books of this day are leavened with doctrines which spoil the Gospel. Examine yourselves often whether you are standing in the old paths. Our lost estate by nature,—our recovery through our Saviour's kindness and love,—our need of regeneration and renewal,—our justification through grace;—these are the grand doctrines, as Paul told Titus; and these are the points on which we must be sound, if we would maintain good works.

5. Let us resolve to *make conscience of little things in our daily religion.*

Let us not neglect little duties,—let us not allow ourselves in little faults. Whatever we may like to think, nothing is really of small importance that affects the soul. All diseases are small at the beginning. Many a deathbed begins with “a little cold.” Nothing that can grow is large all at once,—the greatest sin must have a beginning. Nothing that is great comes to perfection in a day,—characters and habits are all the result of little actions. Little strokes made that ark which saved Noah. Little pins held firm that tabernacle which was the glory of Israel. We too are travelling through a wilderness,—let us be like the family of Merari, and be careful not to leave *the pins* behind.

Believers, do not forget how full the Epistles are of instruction about the particulars of Christian life. The apostles seem to take nothing for granted. They do not think it sufficient to say, “be holy,”—they take care to specify and name the things in which holiness is shown. See how they dwell on the duties of husbands and wives, masters and servants, parents and children, rulers and subjects, old people and young. See how they single out and urge upon us industry in business, kindness in temper, forgivingness in disposition, honesty, truthfulness, temperance, meekness, gentleness, humility, charity, patience, courtesy. See how they exhort us to honour all men, to govern our tongues, to season our speech with grace, to abstain from foolish talking and jesting, not to please ourselves only, to redeem the time, to be content with such things as we have, and whether we eat or drink, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Brethren, some people think that to dwell on such things is bondage; but I believe it good to remind you of them—I am sure it is safe. If the Spirit of God thought it wise to dwell so much on them in the Word, I cannot doubt it must be wise for us to attend to them in our walk. It is much more easy to

profess holiness in a general way, than to carry it out in particulars; and I fear that many talk familiarly of sanctification in the lump, who know but little of it in the piece.

I firmly believe that looseness about these little things in our daily behaviour, is a special means of grieving the Spirit of God, and of bringing upon us, in consequence, barrenness and leanness of soul.

6. Let us be *more active in endeavours to do good to the world.*

Surely we may all do far more for unconverted souls than we have ever done yet. Many of us, alas! take things so quietly, that a man might suppose every one about us was converted, and the kingdom of Christ fully set up. I pray you let us lay aside these lazy habits.

Are all our friends and relations in Christ? Are all our neighbours and acquaintances inside the ark? Have all within our reach received the truth in the love of it? Have we asked them all to come in? Have we told them all the way of salvation, and our own experience that the way is good? Have we done all that we can? Have we tried every means? Is there no one left to whom we can show Christian kindness, and offer the Gospel? Can we lift up our hands to God as, one by one, souls around us are taken away, and say, "Our eyes, O Lord, have not seen this blood, and its loss cannot in any wise be laid at our door!" Surely, my brethren, grace ought to be as active a principle in trying to spread godliness as sin is in trying to spread evil. Surely if we had a tenth part of the zeal which Satan shows to enlarge his kingdom, we should be far more full of care for other men's souls. Where is our mercy and compassion, if we can see disease of soul about us and not desire to make it less?

Let us awake to a right understanding of our responsibility in this matter. We complain of the world being full of wickedness. It is so. But do we each do our own part in trying to make it better? Do we act upon the old saying, "The city is soon clean when every man sweeps before his own door?" "Let us try more to do good to all. Let us reckon it a painful thing to go to heaven alone—let us endeavour, as far as we can, to take companions with us. Let us no longer be silent witnesses and muffled bells. Let us warn, and beseech, and invite, and rebuke, and advise, and testify of Christ, on the right hand and on the left, according as we have opportunity; saying to men, "Come with us, and we will do you good; the light is sweet, come and walk in the light of the Lord." Let us not suppose no good is done in this way, because our eyes do not see it: we must walk by faith, and not by sight. Let us not be weary in well-doing, because we appear to labour in vain; we may rest assured we are in the hands of a good master, in due time we shall reap if we faint not.

Activity in doing good is one receipt for being cheerful Christians: it is like exercise to the body, it keeps the soul in health.



It is one great proof of love towards the Lord Jesus, and a proof that can only be given while we are alive. *Now* is the time for doing good to others, and not hereafter. In heaven there will be no missionary societies, no Bible societies, no visiting societies, no careless to warn, no ignorant to instruct, no sick to minister to, no mourners to comfort, no fainting saints to cheer. In heaven there will be love, joy, peace, thankfulness; but in heaven there will be no place for faith, zeal, courage, labour, patience,—their occupation will be over:—if ever we mean to show these graces it must be *now*. Oh! let us make haste, for the time is short. Let us be like Christian, in Pilgrim's Progress,—when his burden fell off at the sepulchre, his first act was to try to awaken sleeping souls.

7. Lastly let us *take more pains to edify other believers*.

It is wonderful and sad to see how Scripture speaks on this matter, and then to observe the conduct of many of Christ's people.

Paul tells the Corinthians, "That the members of Christ should have the same care one for another." He says to the Thessalonians, "Edify one another, even as also ye do." He says to the Hebrews, "Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," and again, "Consider one another to provoke unto love and good works;—exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching."

Brethren, I fear we fall very short of the New Testament Christians in this respect. We are sadly apt to lose sight of this edifying one another, when we are in the company of believing friends. Prayer, and the Word, and godly conversation, are not put in the foremost place, and so we separate, nothing better, but rather worse. Far too often there is so much coldness, and restraint, and reserve, and backwardness, that a man might fancy we were ashamed of Christ, and that we thought it proper to hold our tongues, and not make mention of the name of the Lord.

These things ought not so to be. We profess that we are all fighting the same fight—contending with the same enemies—plagued with the same evil hearts—trusting in the same Lord—led by the same Spirit—eating the same bread—journeying towards the same home. Then why should we not show it? Why should we not be always ready to commune with each other? Why should we not try to help each other forward—to profit by each other's experience—to bear each other's burdens—to strengthen each other's hands—to quicken each other's hearts—to speak with each other, like Moses and Jethro, of the things pertaining to our King. There is a fault among us here, and one that ought to be amended.

Let us bring out the Bible more when we get together. We none of us know it all yet; our brother may have found some pearl in it which has escaped our eyes, and we perhaps may show him something in return. It is the common map by which we all journey; let us not behave as if we had each a

private map to be studied in a corner, and kept to ourselves. Oh! that the Word were like a burning fire shut up in our bones, so that we could not forbear speaking of it!

Let us speak oftener about the eternal home towards which we travel. Children, before their holidays, love to talk of home,—their hearts are full, they cannot help it,—why should not we? Surely it ill becomes the citizens of heaven to say nothing of heaven to those with whom they expect to dwell for ever. The men of this world are not shy about mentioning their plans for the future; why then should we hold our peace?

Let us then aim this year at closer communion with all true believers. This will go far to procure Christ's presence with us on our journey. The two disciples who went to Emmaus were talking of holy things when they were joined by the Lord. Let us too speak often one to another and the Lord will hearken and remember it. This too will mightily promote the growth and comfort of our souls. The fire within us needs constant stirring as well as feeding to keep it bright. Many can testify that they find communion a special means of grace. As iron sharpeneth iron so doth the countenance of a man his friend;—and the weakest too may sharpen the strongest, even as the whetstone does the scythe. He that tries to promote holiness in others shall reap a blessed reward in his own soul, he waters others and he shall be watered himself.

Brethren believers, I have thought it good to name these things in writing to you about sanctification. I desire to do it in all humility. I need reminding of them as much as any. Let us all resolve to set them before us, and I am sure we shall not repent it.

And now, beloved brethren, I have done, I have told you one and all the longings and desires of my heart. Conversion for the unconverted, decision for the wavering, growth in grace for the believer,—this seals up the sum of my wishes for you in the coming year.

I *can* wish you nothing better, for this is the way to true happiness. I *will* wish you nothing less, for without these things I am sure there is no peace.

Whether or not this may be the last address you may read from me, God only knoweth. I may not live to write another;—you may not live to read another;—all before us in uncertain;—no man can tell what will be on the morrow.

Death *may* be busy among us this year,—let us all be found in Christ and prepared. Satan *will* be busy among us no doubt,—let us all watch and pray. Let us beware of a spirit of slumber and formality, and especially in private reading and praying. Let our path to the fountain be worn with daily journeys, let our key to the treasury of grace be bright with constant use. Let the year 1847 be a year of many prayers. Let us pray more, and let us pray more

earnestly. Let those who never prayed begin to pray. Let those who have prayed pray better.

Pray for *yourselves*,—that you may know the Lord Jesus and cleave to Him,—that you may be kept from falling,—that you may serve your generation,—that you may be sober in prosperity, patient in trial, and humble at all times.

Pray for *our congregation*,—that the word of the Lord may have free course in it, and be glorified, that the household of faith may become stronger and stronger, and the household of unbelief weaker and weaker.

Pray for *your country*,—that her ministers may preach the Gospel, and be sound in the faith,—that her rulers may value the Bible and govern according to it,—and that so her candlestick may not be taken away.

And pray not least for *your minister*,—that he may be strong to work, and willing to labour for your good,—that all his sicknesses may be sanctified, and all his health given to the Lord,—that he may be ever taught of the Spirit, and thus be able to teach others,—that he may be kept faithful unto death, and so be ready to depart when he is called.

Let us all pray, one for the other,—I for you, and you for me,—and we shall be blessed in our deed.

I REMAIN,  
BELOVED FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,  
YOUR AFFECTIONATE MINISTER,  
J. C. RYLE.

*Helmingham Rectory, Stoneham,  
December, 1846.*

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