

WHEAT OR CHAFF?

A QUESTION FOR

1854,

BY THE

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"Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."—MATT. iii. 12.

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READER,

You see a question at the head of this page. For whom do you think it is meant? Is it for corn merchants and farmers only, and for none else? If you think so, you are much mistaken. It is meant for every man, woman, and child in the world. And among others, it is meant for you.

The question is drawn from a verse of Scripture which is now before your eyes. The words of that verse were spoken by John the Baptist. They are a prophecy about our Lord Jesus Christ, and a prophecy which has not yet been fulfilled. They are a prophecy which we shall all see fulfilled one day, and God alone knows how soon.

Reader, I invite you to begin the new year by looking at the great truths which this verse contains. I invite you to listen to me, while I unfold them, and set them before you in order. Who knows but this text may prove a word in season to your soul? Who knows but my question may help to make this year the happiest year in your life?

Listen, before you begin once more to walk your appointed path of duty. Listen, before you start once more on some round of business. Listen, before you plunge once more into some course of useless idleness and folly. Listen to one who loves your soul, and would fain help to save it, or draw it nearer to Christ. Who knows what a year may bring forth? Who can tell whether you will live to see another one? Be still, and listen to me a few minutes, while I show you something out of the word of God.

I. Let me show you, *in the first place, the two great classes into which this world may be divided.*

There are only two classes of people in the world, in the sight of God, and both are mentioned in the text which begins this tract. There are those who are called *the wheat*, and there are those who are called *the chaff*.

Viewed with the eye of man, the earth contains many different sorts of inhabitants. Viewed with the eye of God, it only contains two. Man's eye looks at the outward appearance:—this is all he thinks of. The eye of God looks at the heart:—this is the only part of which he takes any account. And tried by the state of their hearts, there are but two classes into which people can be divided:—either they are wheat, or they are chaff.

Reader, who are the wheat in the world? Listen to me, and I will tell you.

The wheat means all men and women who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ,—all who are led by the Holy Spirit,—all who have felt themselves

sinner, and fled for refuge to the salvation offered in the Gospel,—all who love the Lord Jesus, and live to the Lord Jesus, and serve the Lord Jesus,—all who have taken Christ for their only confidence, and the Bible for their only guide, and regard sin as their deadliest enemy, and look to heaven as their only home. All such, of every church, name, nation, people, and tongue,—of every rank, station, condition, and degree,—all such are God's wheat.

Show me men of this kind anywhere, and I know what they are. I know not that they and I may agree in all particulars, but I see in them the handiwork of the King of kings, and I ask no more. I know not whence they came, and where they found their religion; but I know where they are going, and that is enough for me. They are the children of my Father in heaven. They are part of his wheat.

All such, though sinful, and vile, and unworthy in their own eyes, are the precious part of mankind. They are the sons and daughters of God the Father. They are the delight of God the Son. They are the habitation of God the Spirit. The Father beholds no iniquity in them:—they are the members of His dear Son's body; in Him He sees them, and is well pleased. The Lord Jesus discerns in them the fruit of His own travail and work upon the cross, and is well satisfied. The Holy Ghost regards them as spiritual temples, which He Himself has reared, and rejoices over them. In a word, they are the wheat of the earth.

Reader, who are the chaff in the world? Listen to me once more, and I will tell you this also.

The chaff means all men and women who have no saving faith in Christ, and no sanctification of the Spirit, whosoever they may be. Some of them perhaps are infidels, and some are formal Christians. Some are sneering Sadducees, and some self-righteous Pharisees. Some of them make a point of keeping up a kind of Sunday religion, and others are utterly careless of everything except their own pleasure and the world. But all alike who have the two great marks already mentioned,—no faith and no sanctification,—all such are chaff.

From Paine and Voltaire to the dead churchman who can think of nothing but outward ceremonies,—from Julian and Porphyry to the unconverted admirer of sermons in the present day,—all, all, are standing in one rank before God; all, all are chaff.

They bring no glory to God the Father. They honour not the Son, and so do not honour the Father that sent Him. They neglect that mighty salvation, which countless millions of angels admire. They disobey that word which was graciously written for their learning. They listen not to the voice of Him who condescended to leave heaven and die for their sins. They pay no Tribute of service and affection to Him who gave them life, and breath, and all

things. And therefore God takes no pleasure in them. He pities them, but He reckons them no better than chaff.

Yes! you may have rare intellectual gifts, and high mental attainments. You may sway kingdoms by your counsel, move millions by your pen, or keep crowds in breathless attention by your tongue. But if you have never submitted yourself to the yoke of Christ, and never honoured His Gospel by heartfelt reception of it, you are nothing in His sight. Natural gifts without grace are like a row of cyphers without a unit before them: they look big, but they are of no value. The meanest insect that crawls is a nobler being than you are. It fills its place in creation, and glorifies its Maker with all its powers, and you do not. You do not honour God with heart and will, and intellect and members, which are all His. You invert His order and arrangement, and live as if time was of more importance than eternity, and body better than soul. You dare to neglect God's greatest gift, His own incarnate Son. You are cold about that subject which fills all heaven with hallelujahs. And so long as this is the case, you belong to the worthless part of mankind. You are the chaff of the earth.

Reader, let this thought be graven deeply in your mind, whatever else you forget in this tract. Remember there are only two sorts of people in the world. There are wheat, and there are chaff.

There are many nations in Europe. Each differs from the rest. Each has its own language, its own laws, its own peculiar customs. But God's eye divides Europe into two great parties,—the wheat and the chaff.

There are many classes in England. There are peers and commoners,—farmers and shop-keepers,—masters and servants,—rich and poor. But God's eye only takes account of two orders,—the wheat and the chaff.

There are many and various minds in every congregation that meets for religious worship. There are some who attend for a mere form, and some who really desire to meet Christ,—some who come there to please others, and some who come to please God,—some who bring their hearts with them and are not soon tired, and some who leave their hearts behind them, and reckon the whole service weary work. But the eye of Jesus only sees two divisions in the congregation,—the wheat and the chaff.

There were thousands of visitors to the great exhibition of 1851. From Europe, Asia, Africa, and America,—from North, and South, and East, and West,—crowds came together to see what skill and industry could do. Children of our first father Adam's family, who had never seen each other before, for once met under one roof. But the eye of the Lord saw only two companies thronging that large palace of glass,—the wheat and the chaff.

Reader, I know well the world dislikes this way of dividing professing Christians. The world tries hard to fancy there are three sorts of people, and not two. To be very good and very strict does not suit the world:—they can-

not, will not be saints. To have no religion at all does not suit the world:—it would not be respectable;—“thank God,” they will say, “we are not so bad as that.” But to have religion enough to be saved, and yet not go into extremes,—to be sufficiently good, and yet not be peculiar,—to have a quiet, easy-going, moderate kind of Christianity, and go comfortably to heaven after all,—this is the world’s favourite idea. There is a third class,—a safe, middle class,—the world fancies, and in this middle class, the majority of men persuade themselves, they will be found.

Reader, I denounce this notion of a middle class as an immense and soul-ruining delusion. I warn you strongly not to be carried away by it. It is as vain an invention as the Pope’s purgatory. It is a refuge of lies,—a castle in the air,—a Russian ice-palace,—a vast unreality,—an empty dream. This middle class is a class of Christians nowhere spoken of in the Bible.

There were two classes in the day of Noah’s flood,—those who were inside the ark, and those who were without; two in the parable of the Gospel net, those who are called the good fish, and those who are called the bad;—two in the parable of the ten virgins, those who are described as wise, and those who are described as foolish;—two in the account of the judgment-day, the sheep and the goats;—two sides of the throne, the right hand, and the left;—two abodes when the last sentence has been passed, heaven and hell.

And just so there are only two classes in the visible church on earth,—those who are in the state of nature, and those who are in the state of grace,—those who are in the narrow way, and those who are in the broad,—those who have faith, and those who have not faith,—those who have been converted, and those who have not been converted,—those who are with Christ, and those who are against Him,—those who gather with Him, and those who scatter abroad,—those who are wheat, and those who are chaff. Into these two classes the whole professing church of Christ may be divided. Besides these two classes there is none.

Reader, dear Reader, see now what cause there is for self-inquiry. Are you among the wheat, or among the chaff? Neutrality is impossible. Either you are in one class, or in the other. Which is it of the two?

You attend church perhaps. You go to the Lord’s table. You like good people. You can distinguish between good preaching and bad. You think Popery false, and oppose it warmly. You think Protestantism true, and support it cordially. You subscribe to religious societies. You attend religious meetings. You sometimes read religious books. It is well: it is very well. It is good: it is all very good. It is more than can be said of many. But still this is not a straightforward answer to my question,—Are you wheat, or are you chaff?

Have you been born again? Are you a new creature? Have you put off the old man, and put on the new? Have you ever felt your sins, and repented of them? Are you looking simply to Christ for pardon and life eternal? Do you love Christ? Do you serve Christ? Do you loathe heart-sins, and fight against them? Do you long for perfect holiness, and follow hard after it? Have you come out from the world? Do you delight in the Bible? Do you wrestle in prayer? Do you love Christ's people? Do you try to do good to the world? Are you vile in your own eyes, and willing to take the lowest place? Are you a Christian in business, and on weekdays, and by your own fire-side? Oh! think, think, think on these things, and then perhaps you will be better able to tell the state of your soul.

Reader, I beseech you not to turn away from my question, however unpleasant it may be. Answer it, though it may prick your conscience, and cut you to the heart. Answer it, though it may prove you in the wrong, and expose your fearful danger. Rest not, rest not, till you know how it is between you and God. Better a thousand times find out that you are in evil case, and repent betimes, than live on in uncertainty, and be lost eternally.

Reader, remember my question,—meditate on it at the beginning of a new year. Are you wheat or chaff?

II. Let me show you, in the second place, *the time when the two great classes of mankind shall be separated.*

The text at the beginning of this tract foretells a separation. It says that Christ shall one day do to His professing Church what the farmer does to his corn. He shall winnow and sift it. He shall thoroughly purge His floor. And then the wheat and the chaff shall be divided.

There is no separation yet. Good and bad are now all mingled together in the visible Church of Christ. Believers and unbelievers,—converted and unconverted,—holy and unholy,—all are to be found now among those who call themselves Christians. They sit side by side in our assemblies. They kneel side by side in our pews. They listen side by side to our sermons. They sometimes come up side by side to the Lord's table, and receive the same bread and wine from our hands.

But it shall not always be so. Christ shall come the second time with His fan in His hand. He shall purge His Church, even as He purified the temple. And then the wheat and the chaff shall be separated, and each go to its own place.

Before Christ comes separation is impossible. It is not in man's power to effect it. There lives not the minister on earth who can read the hearts of every one in his congregation. About some he may speak decidedly,—he cannot about all. Who have oil in their lamps, and who have not,—who have grace as well as profession, and who have profession only and no

grace,—who are children of God, and who of the devil,—all these are questions which, in many cases, we cannot accurately decide. The fan is not put into our hands.

Grace is sometimes so weak and feeble, that it looks like nature. Nature is sometimes so plausible and well-dressed, that it looks like grace. I believe we should many of us have said that Judas was as good as any of the Apostles; and yet he proved a traitor. I believe we should have said that Peter was a reprobate when he denied his Lord, and yet he repented immediately, and rose again. We are but fallible men. We know in part, and prophesy in part. We scarcely understand our own hearts. It is no great wonder if we cannot read the hearts of others.

But it will not always be so. There is One coming who never errs in judgment, and is perfect in knowledge. Jesus shall purge His floor. Jesus shall sift the chaff from the wheat. I wait for this. Till then I will lean to the side of charity in my judgments. I would rather tolerate much chaff in the Church, than cast out one grain of wheat. He shall soon come who has His fan in His hand, and then the certainty about every one shall be known.

Before Christ comes I do not expect to see a perfect Church. There cannot be such a thing. The wheat and the chaff, in the present state of things, will always be found together. I pity those who leave one Church and join another, because of a few faults and unsound members. I pity them because they are fostering ideas which can never be realized. I pity them, because they are seeking that which cannot be found. I see chaff everywhere. I see imperfections and infirmities of some kind in every communion on earth. I believe there are few tables of the Lord, if any, where all the communicants are converted. I often see loud-talking professors exalted as saints. I often see holy and contrite believers set down as having no grace at all. I am satisfied if men are too scrupulous, they may go fluttering about like Noah's dove all their days and never find rest.

Reader, do you desire a perfect Church? You must wait for the day of Christ's appearing. Then, and not till then, you will see a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Then, and not till then, the floor will be purged.

Before Christ comes I do not look for the conversion of the world. How can it be, if He is to find wheat and chaff side by side in the day of His second coming? I believe some Christians expect that missions will fill the earth with the knowledge of Christ, and that little by little sin will disappear, and a state of perfect holiness gradually glide in. I cannot see with their eyes. I think they are mistaking God's purposes, and sowing for themselves bitter disappointment. I expect nothing of the kind. I see nothing, in the Bible, or in the world around me, to make me expect it. I have never heard of a single parish entirely converted to God, in England, or Scotland, or of any-

thing like it?—And why am I to look for a different result from the preaching of the Gospel in other lands? I only expect to see a few raised up as witnesses to Christ in every nation, some in one place and some in another. Then I expect the Lord Jesus will come in glory, with His fan in His hand. And when He has purged His floor, and not till then, His kingdom will begin.

No separation and no perfection till Christ comes! This is my creed. I am not moved when the infidel asks me why all the world is not converted, if Christianity is really true. I answer, it was never promised that it would be so in the present order of things. The Bible tells me that believers will always be few,—that corruptions, and divisions, and heresies, will always abound, and that when my Lord returns to earth, He will find plenty of chaff.

No perfection till Christ comes! I am not disturbed when men say, “Make all the people good Christians at home before you send missionaries to the heathen abroad.” I answer, if I am to wait for that, I may wait forever. When we have done all at home, the Church will still be a mixed body,—some wheat and much chaff.

But Christ will come again. Sooner or later there shall be a separation of the visible Church into two companies, and fearful shall that separation be. The wheat shall make up one company. The chaff shall make up another. The one company will be all godly. The other company will be all ungodly. Each shall be by themselves, and a great gulf between, that none can pass. Blessed indeed shall the righteous be in that day! They shall shine like stars, no longer obscured with clouds. They shall be beautiful as the lily, no longer choked with thorns. Wretched indeed will the ungodly be! How corrupt will corruption be when left without one grain of salt to season it! How dark will darkness be when left without one spark of light! Ah! Reader, it is not enough to respect and admire the Lord’s people. You must belong to them, or you will one day be parted from them forever. There will be no chaff in heaven. Many, many are the families where one will be taken and another left.

Who is there now among the readers of this tract that loves the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity? If I know anything of the heart of a Christian, your greatest trials are in the company of worldly people,—your greatest joys in the company of the saints. Yes! there are many weary days, when your spirit feels broken and crushed by the earthly tone of all around you,—days when you could cry with David, “Woe is me that I dwell in Mesech, and have my habitation in the tents of Kedar.” And yet there are hours when your soul is so refreshed and revived by meeting some of God’s dear children, that it seems like heaven on earth. Do I not speak to your heart? Are not these things true? See then how you should long for the time when Christ shall

come again. See how you should pray daily that the Lord would hasten His kingdom, and say to Him, "Come quickly, Lord Jesus." Then, and not till then, shall be a pure unmixed communion. Then, and not till then, the saints shall all be together, and shall go out from one another's presence no more. Wait a little. Wait a little. Scorn and contempt will soon be over. Laughter and ridicule shall soon have an end. Slander and misrepresentation will soon cease. Your Saviour shall come and plead your cause. And then, as Moses said to Korah, "the Lord will show who are His."¹

Who is there among the readers of this tract that knows his heart is not right in the sight of God? See how you should fear and tremble at the thought of Christ's appearing. Alas! indeed for the man that lives and dies with nothing better than a cloak of religion! In the day when Christ shall purge His floor, you will be shown up and exposed in your true colours. You may deceive ministers, and friends, and neighbours,—but you cannot deceive Christ. The paint and varnish of a heartless Christianity will never stand the fire of that day. The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed. You will find that the eye which saw Achan and Gehazi, has read your secrets, and searched out your hidden things. You will hear that awful word, "Friend, how earnest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?" Oh! tremble at the thought of the day of sifting and separation. Surely hypocrisy is a most losing game. Surely it never answers to act a part. Surely it never answers, like Ananias and Sapphira, to pretend to give God something, and yet to keep back your heart. It all fails at last. Your joy is but for a moment. Your hopes are no better than a dream; Oh tremble, tremble, tremble, and repent.

Reader, think on these things. Remember my question. Meditate on it, as you begin a new year. Are you wheat or chaff?

III. Let me show you in the third place, *the portion which Christ's people shall receive, when He comes to purge His floor.*

The text at the beginning of this tract tells us this in good and comfortable words. It tells us that Christ shall "gather His wheat into the garner."

When the Lord Jesus comes the second time, He shall collect His believing people into a place of safety. He will send His angels and gather them from every quarter. The sea shall give up the dead that are in it, and the graves the dead that are in them, and the living shall be changed. Not one poor sinner of mankind who has ever laid hold on Christ by faith shall be wanting in that company. Not one single grain of wheat shall be missing and

¹ "This is certain, when the elect are all converted, then Christ will come to judgment. As he that rows a boat, stays till all the passengers are taken into his boat, and then he rows away; so Christ stays till all the elect are gathered in, and then he will hasten away to judgment." *Thomas Watson*. 1660.

left outside, when judgments fall upon a wicked world. There shall be a garner for the wheat of the earth, and into that garner all the wheat shall be brought.

Ah! Reader, it is a sweet and comfortable thought, that “the Lord careth for the righteous.” But how much the Lord cares for them, I fear is little known, and dimly seen. They have their trials beyond question, and these both many and great. The flesh is weak. The world is full of snares. The cross is heavy. The way is narrow. The companions are few. But still they have strong consolations, if their eyes were but open to see them. Like Hagar they have a well of water near them, even in the wilderness, though they often do not find out. Like Mary, they have Jesus standing by their side, though often they are not aware of it for very tears.

Bear with me, while I try to tell you something about Christ’s care for poor sinners that believe in Him. Alas! indeed that it should be needful. But we live in a day of weak and feeble statements. The danger of the state of nature is feebly exposed. The privileges of the state of grace are feebly set forth. Hesitating souls are not encouraged. Disciples are not established and confirmed. The man out of Christ is not rightly alarmed. The man in Christ is not rightly built up. The one sleeps on, and seldom has his conscience pricked. The other creeps and crawls all his days, never thoroughly understands the riches of his inheritance. Truly this is a sore disease, and one that I would gladly help to cure. Truly it is a melancholy thing that the people of God should never go up to mount Pizgah, and never know the length and breadth of their possessions. To be brethren of Christ, and sons of God by adoption;—to have full and perfect forgiveness, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost;—to have a place in the book of life, and a name on the breast-plate of the Great High Priest in heaven;—all these are glorious things indeed. But still they are not the whole of a believer’s portion. They are upper springs indeed, but still there are nether springs beside.

The Lord takes pleasure in His believing people. Though black in their own eyes, they are comely and honourable in His. They are all fair. He sees no spot in them. Their weaknesses and shortcomings do not break off the union between Him and them. He chose them, knowing all their hearts. He took them for His own with a perfect understanding of all their debts, liabilities, and infirmities, and He will never break His covenant and cast them off. When they fall, He will raise them again. When they wander, He will bring them back. Their *prayers* are pleasant to Him. As a father loves the first stammering efforts of his child to speak, so the Lord loves the poor feeble petitions of His people. He endorses them with His own mighty intercession, and gives them power on high. Their *services* are pleasant to Him. As a father delights in the first daisy that his child picks up and brings him, even so the Lord is pleased with the weak attempts of His people to serve

Him. Not a cup of cold water shall lose its reward. Not a word spoken in love shall ever be forgotten. He told the Hebrews of Noah's faith, but not of his drunkenness,—of Rahab's faith, but not of her lie. Oh! Reader, it is a blessed thing to be God's wheat!

The Lord cares for His believing people *in their lives*. Their dwelling-place is well known. The street, called strait, where Judas dwelt, and Paul lodged,—the house by the sea-side, where Peter prayed, were all familiar to their Lord. None have such attendants as they have:—angels rejoice when they are born again; angels minister to them; and angels encamp around them. None have such food:—their bread is given them, and their water is sure and they have meat to eat of which the world knows nothing. None have such company as they have.—The Spirit dwelleth with them. The Father and the Son come to them, and make their abode with them. Their steps are all ordered from grace to glory. Those that persecute them persecute Christ Himself, and those that hurt them hurt the apple of the Lord's eye. Their trials and temptations are all measured out by a wise Physician:—not a grain of bitterness is ever mingled in their cup, that is not good for the health of their souls. Their temptations, like Job's, are all under God's control:—Satan cannot touch a hair of their head without their Lord's permission, nor even tempt them above that which they shall be able to bear. As a father pitieth his own children, so does the Lord pity them that fear Him. He never afflicts them willingly. He leads them by the right way. He withholds nothing that is really for their good. Come what will, there is always a needs-be. When they are placed in the furnace, it is that they may be purified. When they are chastened, it is that they may become more holy. When they are pruned, it is to make them more fruitful. When they are transplanted from place to place, it is that they may bloom more brightly. All things are continually working together for their good. Like the bee they extract sweetness even out of the bitterest flowers. Ah! Reader, it is a blessed thing to be Christ's wheat.

The Lord cares for His believing people *in their deaths*. Their times are all in the Lord's hand. The hairs of their heads are all numbered, and not one can ever fall to the ground without their Father. They are kept on earth till they are ripe and ready for glory, and not one moment longer. When they have had sun and rain enough, wind and storm enough, cold and heat enough,—when the ear is perfected,—then, and not till then, the sickle is put in. They are all immortal till their work is done. There is not a disease that can loosen the pins of their tabernacle, until the Lord gives the word. A thousand may fall at their right hand, but there is not a plague that can touch them till the Lord sees good. There is not a physician that can keep them alive, when the Lord gives the word. When they come to their death-bed, the everlasting arms are round about them, and make all their bed in their

sickness. When they die, they die like Moses, according to the word of the Lord, at the right time and in the right way. And when they breathe their last, they fall asleep in Christ, and are at once carried, like Lazarus, into Abraham's bosom. Ah! Reader, it is a blessed thing to be Christ's wheat. When the sun of other men is setting, the sun of the believer is rising. When other men are laying aside their honours, he is putting his on. Death locks the door on the unbeliever, and shuts him out from hope. But death opens the door to the believer, and lets him into paradise.

And the Lord will care for His believing people *in the dreadful day of His appearing*. The flaming fire shall not come nigh them. The voice of the Arch-angel and the trump of God shall proclaim no terrors to their ears. Sleeping or waking, quick or dead, mouldering in the coffin, or standing at the post of daily duty,—believers shall be secure and unmoved. They shall lift up their heads with joy, when they see redemption drawing nigh. They shall be changed, and put on their beautiful garments in the twinkling of an eye. They shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Jesus will do nothing to a sin-laden world till all His people are safe. There was an ark for Noah when the flood began. There was a Zoar for Lot when the fire fell on Sodom. There was a Pella for early Christians when Jerusalem was besieged. There was a Zurich for English Reformers when Popish Mary came to the throne. And there will be a garner for all the wheat of the earth in the last day.

Ah! Reader, it is a blessed thing to be Christ's wheat.

I often wonder at the miserable faithlessness of those among us who are believers. Next to the hardness of the unconverted heart, I call it one of the greatest wonders in the world. I wonder that with such mighty reasons for confidence we can still be so full of doubts. I marvel above all things, how any can deny the doctrine that Christ's people persevere unto the end, and can fancy that He who loved them, so as to die for them upon the cross, will ever let them be cast away. I cannot think so. I do not believe the Lord Jesus will ever lose one of His flock. He will not let Satan pluck away from Him so much as one sick lamb. He will not allow one bone of His mystical body to be broken. He will not suffer one jewel to fall from His crown. He and His bride have once been joined in an everlasting covenant, and they shall never, never be put asunder. The trophies won by earthly conquerors have often been wrested from them, and carried off; but this shall never be said of the trophies of Him, who triumphed for us on the cross. "My sheep," He says, "shall never perish." (John x. 28.) I take my stand on that text. I know not how it can be evaded. If words have any meaning, the perseverance of Christ's people is there.

I do not believe when David had rescued the lamb from the paws of the lion, that he left it weak and wounded to perish in the wilderness. I cannot

believe when the Lord Jesus has delivered a soul from the snare of the devil, that He will ever leave that soul to take his chance, and wrestle on in his feebleness against sin, the devil, and the world.

Reader, I dare be sure, if you were present at a shipwreck, and seeing some helpless child tossing on the waves, were to plunge into the sea, and save him at the risk of your own life,—I dare be sure you would not be content with merely bringing that child safe to shore. You would not lay him down when you had reached the land, and say, “I will do no more;—he is weak,—he is insensible,—he is cold;—it matters not:—I have done enough,—I have delivered him from the waters,—he is not drowned.” You would not do it. You would not say so. You would not treat that child in such a manner. You would lift him in your arms. You would carry him to the nearest house. You would try to bring back warmth and animation. You would use every means to restore health and vigour. You would never leave him till his recovery was a certain thing.

And can you suppose the Lord Jesus Christ is less merciful, and less compassionate? Can you think He would suffer on the cross and die, and yet leave it uncertain whether believers in Him would be saved? Can you think He would wrestle with death and hell and go down to the grave for our sakes, and yet allow our eternal life to hang on such a thread as our poor miserable endeavours.

Oh! No! He does not do so. He is a perfect and complete Saviour. Those whom He loves, He loves unto the end. Those whom He washes in His blood He never leaves nor forsakes. He puts His fear into their hearts, so that they shall not depart from Him. Where He begins a work there He also finishes. All whom He plants in His garden enclosed on earth, He transplants sooner or later into paradise. All whom He quickens by His Spirit He will also bring with Him when He enters His kingdom. There is a garner for every grain of the wheat. All shall appear in Zion before God.

From false grace man may fall, and that both finally and foully. I never doubt this. I see proof of it continually. From true grace men never do fall totally. They never did and they never will. If they commit sin like Peter they shall repent and rise again. If they err from the right way, like David, they shall be brought back. It is not any strength or power of their own, that keeps them from apostasy. They are kept because the power, and love, and promises of the Trinity are all engaged on their side. The election of God the Father shall not be fruitless:—the intercession of God the Son shall not be ineffectual:—the love of God the Spirit shall not be labour in vain. The Lord shall keep the feet of His saints. They shall all be more than conquerors

through Him that loved them. They shall all conquer and none die eternally.²

Reader, if you have not yet taken up the cross and become Christ's disciple, you little know what privileges you are missing. Peace with God now and glory hereafter,—the everlasting arms to keep you by the way, and the garner of safety in the end;—all these are freely offered to you without money and without price. You may say that Christians have tribulations;—you forget that they have also consolations. You may say they have peculiar sorrows;—you forget they have also peculiar joys. You see but half the Christian life. You see not all. You see the warfare;—but not the meat and the wages. You see the tossing and conflict of the outward part of Christianity; you see not the hidden treasures which lie deep within. Like Elisha's servant, you see the enemies of God's children; but you do not, like Elisha, see the chariots and horses of fire which protect them. Oh! judge not by outward appearances. Be sure that the least drop of the water of life is better than all the rivers of the world. Remember the garner and the crown. Be wise in time.

Reader, if you feel that you are a weak disciple, think not that weakness shuts you out from any of the privileges of which I have been speaking. Weak faith is true faith, and weak grace is true grace; and both are the gift of Him who never gives in vain. Fear not, neither be discouraged. Doubt not, neither despair. Jesus will never break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. The babes in a family are as much loved and thought of as the elder brothers and sisters. The tender seedlings in a garden are as diligently looked after as the old trees. The lambs in the flock are as carefully tended by the good shepherd as the old sheep. Oh! rest assured it is just the same in Christ's family, in Christ's garden, in Christ's flock. All are loved. All are tenderly thought of. All are cared for. And all shall be found in His garner at last. Reader, think on these things. Remember my question at the beginning of a new year. Meditate upon it. Are you wheat or chaff?

IV. Let me show you, in the last place, *the portion which remains for all who are not Christ's people.*

The text at the beginning of this tract describes this in words which should make our ears tingle,—Christ shall “burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable.”

² “Blessed forever and ever be that mother's child whose birth hath made him the child of God. The earth may shake, the pillars of the world may tremble under us, the countenance of the heaven may be appalled, the sun may lose his light, the moon her beauty, the stars their glory: but concerning the man that trusteth in God,—what is there in the world that shall change his heart, overthrow his faith, alter his affection towards God, or the affection of God to him?”—*Richard Hooker*. 1685.

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes to purge His floor, He shall punish all who are not His disciples with a fearful punishment. All who are found impenitent and unbelieving,—all who have held the truth in unrighteousness—all who have clung to sin,—stuck to the world and set their affections on things below,—all who are without Christ,—All such shall come to an awful end. Christ shall “burn up the chaff.”

Their punishment shall be *most severe*. There is no pain like that of burning. Put your finger in the candle for a moment if you doubt this and try. Fire is the most destructive and devouring of all elements. Look into the mouth of a blast furnace and think what it would be to be there. Fire is of all elements most opposed to life. Creatures can live in air, and earth, and water; but nothing can live in fire. Yet fire is the portion to which the Christless and unbelieving will come. Christ will “burn up the chaff with fire.”

Their punishment shall be *eternal*. Millions of ages shall pass away, and the fire into which the chaff is cast shall still burn on. That fire shall never burn low and become dim. The fuel of that fire shall never waste away and become consumed. It is “unquenchable fire.”

Oh! reader, these are sad and painful things to speak of. I have no pleasure in dwelling on them. I could rather say with the apostle Paul, “I have great sorrow.” But they are things written for our learning, and it is good to consider them. They are a part of that Scripture which is all profitable, and they ought to be heard. Painful as the subject of hell is, it is one about which I dare not, cannot, must not be silent. Who would desire to speak of hell-fire if God had not spoken of it? When God has spoken of it so plainly, who can safely hold his peace?

I dare not shut my eyes to the fact, that a deep-rooted infidelity lurks in men’s minds on the subject of hell. I see it oozing out in the utter apathy of some: they eat, and drink, and sleep as if there was no wrath to come. I see it creeping forth in the coldness of others about their neighbours’ souls; they show little anxiety to pluck brands from the fire. I desire to denounce such infidelity with all my might. Believing that there are terrors of the Lord, as well as the recompense of reward, I call on all who profess to believe the Bible, to be on their guard.

I know that some do not believe there is any hell at all. They think it impossible there can be such a place. They call it inconsistent with the mercy of God. They say it is too awful an idea to be really true. The devil of course rejoices in the views of such people. They help his kingdom mightily. They are preaching up his old favourite doctrine, “ye shall not surely die.”

I know furthermore that some do not believe that hell is eternal. They tell us it is incredible, that a compassionate God will punish men forever. He will surely open the prison-doors at last. This also is a mighty help to the

devil's cause. "Take your ease," he whispers to sinners,—“if you do make a mistake never mind, it is not forever.”

I know also that some believe there is a hell, but never allow that anybody is going there. All people with them are good as soon as they die,—all were sincere,—all meant well, and all, they hope, got to heaven. Alas! what a common delusion is this! I can well understand the feeling of the little girl who asked her mother where all the wicked people were buried, “for she found no mention on the gravestones of any except the good.”

And I know very well that some believe there is a hell, but never like it to be spoken of. It is a subject that should always be kept back in their opinion. They see no profit in bringing it forward, and are rather shocked when it is mentioned. This also is an immense help to the devil. “Hush, hush!” says Satan, “say nothing about hell.” The fowler wishes to hear no noise when he lays his snares. The wolf would like the shepherd to sleep while he prowls around the fold. The devil rejoices when Christians are silent about hell.

Reader, all these notions are the opinions of man. What is it to you and me what man thinks in religion? Man will not judge us at the last day. Man's fancies and traditions are not to be our guide in this life. There is but one point to be settled, “what says the word of God.”

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, *hell is real and true*. It is as true as heaven,—as true as justification by faith,—as true as the fact that Christ died upon the cross,—as true as the Dead Sea. There is not a fact or doctrine which you may not lawfully doubt if you doubt hell. Disbelieve hell, and you unscrew, unsettle, and unpin everything in Scripture. You may as well throw your Bible aside at once. From “no hell” to “no God” there is but a series of steps.

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it *hell will have inhabitants*. The wicked shall certainly be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God. These shall go away into everlasting punishment. The same blessed Saviour who now sits on a throne of grace, will one day sit on a throne of judgment, and men will see there is such a thing as the wrath of the Lamb. The same lips which now say “come, come unto me,” will one day say “depart, ye cursed!” Alas! how awful the thought of being condemned by Christ Himself, judged by the Saviour, sentenced to misery by the Lamb!

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, *hell will be intense and unutterable woe*. It is vain to talk of all the expressions about it being only figures of speech. The pit, the prison, the worm, the fire, the thirst, the blackness, the darkness, the weeping, the gnashing of teeth, the second death,—all these may be figures of speech if you please. But Bible figures mean something beyond all question, and here they mean something which man's mind can never fully conceive. Oh! reader, the miseries of mind and

conscience are far worse than those of the body. The whole extent of hell, the present suffering, the bitter recollection of the past, the hopeless prospect of the future, will never be thoroughly known except by those who go there.

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, *hell is eternal*. It must be eternal, or words have no meaning at all. Forever and ever,—everlasting,—unquenchable,—never-dying,—all these are expressions used about hell, and expressions that cannot be explained away. It must be eternal, or the very foundations of heaven are cast down. If hell has an end, heaven has an end too. They both stand or fall together. It must be, or else every doctrine of the Gospel is undermined. If a man may escape hell at length without faith in Christ, or sanctification of the Spirit, sin is no longer an infinite evil, and there was no such great need for Christ making an atonement.—And where is there warrant for saying that hell can ever change a heart, or make it fit for heaven? It must be eternal, or hell would cease to be hell altogether. Give a man hope, and he will bear anything. Grant a hope of deliverance however distant, and hell is but a drop of water. Ah! reader, these are solemn things. Well said old Caryl, “FOREVER is the most solemn saying in the Bible.” Alas! for that day which will have no tomorrow,—that day when men shall seek death and not find it, and shall desire to die, but death shall flee from them! Who shall dwell with devouring fire! Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings!

Do you believe the Bible? Then depend upon it, hell is a subject that ought not to be kept back. It is striking to observe the many texts about it in Scripture. It is striking to observe that none say so much about it as our Lord Jesus Christ, that gracious and merciful Saviour, and the apostle John, whose heart seems full of love. Truly it may well be doubted whether we ministers speak of it as much as we ought. I cannot forget the words of a dying hearer of Mr. Newton’s, “Sir, you often told me of Christ and salvation: why did you not oftener remind me of hell and danger?”

Let others hold their peace about hell if they will: I dare not do so. I see it plainly in Scripture, and I must speak of it. I fear that thousands are on that broad way that leads to it, and I would fain arouse them to a sense of the peril before them. What would you say of the man who saw his neighbour’s house in danger of being burned down, and never raised the cry of “fire?” What ought to be said of us ministers if we call ourselves watchmen for souls, and yet see the fires of hell raging in the distance, and never give the alarm? Call it bad taste, if you like, to speak of hell. Call it charity to make things pleasant, and speak smoothly, and soothe men with constant lullaby of peace. From such notions of taste and charity may I ever be delivered! My notion of charity is to warn men plainly of danger. My notion of taste in the ministerial office, is to declare all the counsel of God. If I never spoke.

of hell, I should think I had kept back something that was profitable, and should look on myself as an accomplice of the devil.

Reader, I beseech you, in all tender affection, beware of false views of the subject on which I have been dwelling. Beware of new and strange doctrines about hell and the eternity of punishment. Beware of manufacturing a God of your own—a God who is all mercy but not just,—a God who is all love, but not holy,—a God who has a heaven for everybody, but a hell for none,—a God who can allow good and bad to be side by side in time, but will make no distinction between good and bad in eternity. Such a God is an idol of your own, as really as Jupiter, or Juggernaut,—as true an idol as any snake or crocodile in an Egyptian temple,—as true an idol as was ever moulded out of brass or clay. The hands of your own fancy and sentimentality have made Him. He is not the God of the Bible, and beside the God of the Bible there is no God at all. Your heaven would be no heaven at all. A heaven containing all sorts of characters indiscriminately would be miserable discord indeed. Alas! for the eternity of such a heaven. There would be little difference between it and hell. Ah! reader, there is a hell! There is a fire for the chaff! Take heed lest you find it out to your cost too late.

Beware of being wise above that which is written. Beware of forming fanciful theories of your own, and then trying to make the Bible square in with them. Beware of making selections from your Bible to suit your taste—refusing, like a spoilt child, whatever you think bitter,—seizing, like a spoilt child, whatever you think sweet. What is all this but taking Jehoiakim's penknife? What does it amount to but telling God, that you, a poor short-lived worm, know what is good for you better than He. It will not do. It will not do. You must take the Bible as it is. You must read it all, and believe it all. You must come to the reading of it in the spirit of a little child. Dare not to say, "I believe this verse, for I like it. I reject that, for I do not like it. I receive this, for I can understand it. I refuse that, for I cannot reconcile it with my views." Nay! but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? By what right do you talk in this way. Surely it were better to say over every chapter in the Word, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."—Ah! reader, if men would do this, they would never deny hell, the chaff, and the fire.

Think on these things once more. Meditate upon them. Remember my question, "Are you wheat or chaff?"

And now, reader, let me say four things in conclusion, and then I have done. I have shown you the two great classes of mankind, the wheat and the chaff. I have shown you the separation which will one day take place. I have shown you the safety of the Lord's people. I have shown you the fearful portion of the Christless and unbelieving. I commend these things to your conscience as in the sight of God.

1. And now settle it down in your mind that the things of which I have been speaking are *all real and true*.

I do believe that many never see the great truths of religion in this light. I firmly believe that many never listen to the things they hear from ministers as realities. They regard it all, like Gallio, as a matter of names and words, and nothing more,—a huge shadow,—a formal part-acting,—a vast sham. Macaulay's History of England, Dickens's last Novel, the latest news from California, New Zealand, or New York,—all these are things they realize. They feel interested and excited about them. But as to the Bible and heaven, and the kingdom of Christ, and the judgment-day,—these are subjects that they hear unmoved. They do not really believe them. If Layard had dug up at Nineveh anything damaging the truth and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, it would not have interfered with their peace for an hour..

Reader, if you have unhappily got into this frame of mind, I charge you to cast it off forever. Whether you mean to hear or forbear, awaken to a thorough conviction that the things I have brought before you are real and true. The wheat, the chaff, the separation, the garner, the fire,—all these are great realities,—as real as the sun in heaven,—as real as the paper which your eyes behold. For my part, I believe in heaven, and I believe in hell. I believe in a coming judgment. I believe in a day of sifting. I am not ashamed to say so. I believe them all, and therefore write as I do. Oh! reader, take a friend's advice, live as if these things were true.

2. Settle it down in your mind, in the second place, that the things of which I write *concern yourself*. They are your business, your affair, and your concern.

Many, I am satisfied, never look on religion as a matter that concerns themselves. They attend on its outward part, as a decent and proper fashion. They hear sermons. They read religious books. They have their children christened. But all the time they never ask themselves, "What is all this to me?" They sit in our churches like spectators in a theatre or court of law. They read our writings as if they were reading a report of an interesting trial, or of some event far away. But they do not say to themselves, "I am the man."

Reader, if you have this kind of feeling, depend upon it, it will never do. There must be an end of all this if ever you are to be saved. You are the man I write to, whoever you may be that reads this tract. I write not specially to the rich. I write not specially to the poor. I write to everybody who will read, whatever his rank may be. It is on your soul's account that I am pleading, and not another's. You are spoken of in the text that begins this tract. You are this very day either among the wheat or among the chaff. Your portion will one day either be the garner or the fire. Oh! that men were wise, and would lay these things to heart! Oh! that they would not trifle, dally,

linger, live on half-and-half Christians, meaning well, but never acting boldly, and at last awake when it is too late.

3. Settle it down in your mind in the third place, that if you are willing to be one of the wheat of the earth, *the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to receive you.*

Does any man suppose that Jesus is not willing to see His garner filled? Do you think He does not desire to bring many sons to glory? Oh! but you little know the depth of His mercy and compassion, if you think such a thought. He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem. He mourns over the impenitent and the thoughtless in the present day. He sends you invitations by my mouth this hour. He invites you to hear and live, to forsake the way of the foolish, and go in the paths of understanding. "As I live," He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

Oh! reader, if you never came to Christ for life before, come to Him this very year. Come to Him with the penitent's prayer for mercy and grace. Come to Him without delay. Come to Him while the name of the new year is still strange to you. Come to Him before the winter is past, and let the spring find you a new creature.

If you are determined to have the world, and the things of the world,—its pleasures and its rewards,—its follies and its sins;—if you must have your own way, and cannot give up anything for Christ and your soul;—if this be your case, there is but one end before you. I fairly warn you. I plainly tell you. You will sooner or later come to the unquenchable fire.

But if any man is willing to be saved, the Lord Jesus Christ stands ready to save him. "Come unto me," He says, "weary soul, and I will give you rest. Come, guilty and sinful soul, and I will give you free pardon. Come, lost and ruined soul, and I will give you eternal life."

Oh! reader, let this message be a word in season. Arise and call upon the Lord. Let the angels of God rejoice over one more saved soul. Let the courts of heaven bear the good tidings that one more lost sheep is found.

4. Settle it down in your mind last of all that if you have committed your soul to Christ, *Christ will never allow that soul to perish.*

The everlasting arms are round about you. Lean back in them and know your safety. The same hand that was nailed to the cross is holding you. The same wisdom that framed the heavens and the earth is engaged to maintain your cause. The same power that redeemed the tribes from the house of bondage is on your side. The same love that bore with and carried Israel from Egypt to Canaan is pledged to keep you. Ah! reader, they are well kept whom Christ keeps. Our faith may repose calmly on such a bed as Christ's omnipotence.

Take comfort, doubting believer. Why are you cast down? The love of Jesus is no summer-day fountain: no man ever yet saw its bottom. The compassion of Jesus is a fire that never yet burned low; the cold, grey ashes of that fire have never yet been seen.. Take comfort. In your own heart you may find little cause for rejoicing. But you may always rejoice in the Lord.

You say your faith is so small. But where is it said that none shall be saved except their faith be great? And after all, “who gave thee any faith at all?” The very fact that you have any faith is a token for good.

You say your sins are so many. But where is the sin, or heap of sins that the blood of Jesus cannot wash away? And after all, “who told thee thou hadst any sins? That feeling never came from thyself.” Blessed indeed is that mother’s child who really knows and feels that he is a sinner.

Take comfort, I say once more, if you have really come to Christ. Take comfort, and know your privileges. Cast every care on Jesus. Tell every want to Jesus. Roll every burden on Jesus,—sins,—unbelief,—doubts,—fears,—anxieties,—lay them all on Christ. He loves to see you doing so. He loves to be employed as your high priest. He loves to be trusted. He loves to see His people ceasing from the vain effort to carry their burdens for themselves.

I commend these things to your notice. Only be among Christ’s wheat now, and then as sure as the Bible is true, you shall be in Christ’s garner hereafter.

Reader, I heartily pray that this tract may do you good. If it does, I have one request to make. Name the writer before the throne of grace. Pray for me.

I remain, your affectionate friend,
J. C. RYLE.