

THE SOUL-WINNER;

OR,

HOW TO LEAD SINNERS TO THE SAVIOUR.

BY C. H. SPURGEON

“The salvation of one soul is worth more than the framing of a Magna Charta of a thousand worlds.”—*Keble*.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

This volume is issued in accordance with a plan formed by Mr. Spurgeon; indeed, he had already prepared for the press the greater part of the material here published, and the rest of his manuscripts have been inserted after only slight revision. It was his intention to deliver to the students of the Pastors' College a short course of Lectures upon what he termed "that most royal employment"—Soul-Winning,—and, having completed the series, he purposed to collect his previous utterances to other audiences upon the same theme, and to publish the whole for the guidance of all who desired to become soul-winners, and with the hope also of inducing many more professing Christians to engage in this truly blessed service for the Saviour.

This explanation will account for the form in which the topic is treated in the present book. The first six chapters contain the College Lectures; then follow four Addresses delivered to Sunday-school teachers, open-air preachers, and friends gathered at Monday evening prayer-meetings at the Tabernacle; while the rest of the volume consists of Sermons in which the work of winning souls is earnestly commended to the attention of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For more than forty years, Mr. Spurgeon was, by his preaching and writing, one of the greatest soul-winners; and by his printed words still continues to be the means of the conversion of many all over the world. It is believed, therefore, that thousands will rejoice to read what he spoke and wrote concerning what he called "the chief business of the Christian minister."

OBSTACLES TO SOUL-WINNING.

I have spoken to you, brethren, at different times, about soul-winning—that most royal employment. May you all become, in this sense, mighty hunters before the Lord, and bring many sinners to the Saviour! I want, at this time, to say a few words upon—

THE OBSTACLES THAT LIE IN OUR PATH AS WE SEEK TO WIN SOULS FOR CHRIST.

They are very many, and I cannot attempt to make a complete catalogue of them; but the first, and one of the most difficult is, doubtless, *the indifference and lethargy of sinners*. All men are not alike indifferent; in fact, there are some persons who seem to have a sort of religious instinct, which influences them for good, long before they have any real love to spiritual things. But there are districts, especially rural districts, where indifference prevails; and the same state of things exists in various parts of London. It is not infidelity; the people do not care enough about religion even to oppose it. They are not concerned as to what you preach, or where you preach, for they have no interest whatever in the matter. They have no thought of God; they care nothing about Him, or His service, they only use His name in profanity. I have often noticed that any place where there is little business doing is bad for religious effort. Among the negroes of Jamaica, whenever they had not much work, there was little prosperity in the churches. I could indicate districts, not far from here, where business is slack; and there you will find that there is very little good being done. All along the valley of the Thames, there are places where a man might preach his heart out, and kill himself; but there is little or nothing of good being accomplished in those regions, just as there is no active business life there.

Now, whenever you meet with indifference, as you may do, my dear brother, in the place where you go to preach,—indifference affecting your own people, and even your own deacons seeming to be tinged with it,—what are you to do? Well, your only hope of overcoming it is, to be doubly in earnest yourself. Keep your own zeal all alive, let it be even vehement, burning, blazing, all-consuming. Stir the people up somehow; and if all your earnestness seems to be in vain, still blaze and burn; and if that has no effect upon your hearers, go elsewhere as the Lord may direct you. This indifference or lethargy, that possesses the minds of some men, is very likely to have an evil influence upon our preaching; but we must strive and struggle against it, and try to wake both ourselves and our hearers up. I would far rather have a man an earnest, intense opposer of the gospel than have him careless and indifferent. You cannot do much with a man if he will not speak about religion, or will not come to hear what you have to

say concerning the things of God. You might as well have him a downright infidel, like a very leviathan covered with scales of blasphemy, as to have him a mere earthworm wriggling away out of reach.

Another very great obstacle to soul-winning is *unbelief*. You know that it is written of the Lord Jesus when in "His own country" that "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." This evil exists in all unregenerate hearts, but in some men it takes a very pronounced form. They do think about religion, but they do not believe in the truth of God which we preach to them. Their opinion is to them more weighty, more worthy of belief, than God's inspired declarations. They will not accept anything that is revealed in the Scriptures. These people are very hard to influence; but I would warn you not to fight them with their own weapons. I do not believe that infidels are ever won by argument; or, if so, it very seldom happens. The argument that convinces men of the reality of religion, is that which they gather from the holiness and earnestness of those who profess to be Christ's followers. As a rule, they barricade their minds against the assaults of reason; and if we give our pulpits over to arguing with them, we shall often be doing more harm than good. In all probability, only a very small portion of our audience will understand what we are talking about; and while we are trying to do them good, most likely we shall be teaching infidelity to others who do not know anything about such things, and the first knowledge they ever have of certain heresies will have come to them from our lips. Possibly our refutation of the error may not have been perfect, and many a young mind may have been tintured with unbelief through listening to our attempted exposure of it. I believe that you will rout unbelief by your faith rather than by your reason; by your belief, and your acting up to your conviction of the truth, you will do more good than by any argument, however strong it may be. There is a friend who sits to hear me generally every Sabbath. "What do you think?" he said to me, one day, "you are my only link with better things; but you are an awful man in my estimation, for you have not the slightest sympathy with me." I replied, "No, I have not; or, rather, I have not the least sympathy with your unbelief." "That makes me cling to you, for I fear that I shall always remain as I am; but when I see your calm faith, and perceive how God blesses you in exercising it, and know what you accomplish through the power of that faith, I say to myself, 'Jack, you are a fool.'" I said to him, "You are quite right in that verdict, and the sooner you come to my way of thinking, the better, for nobody can be a bigger fool than the man who does not believe in God." One of these days I expect to see him converted; there is a continual battle between us, but I never answer one of his arguments. I said to him once, "If you believe that I am a liar, you are free to think so if you like; but I testify what I do know, and state what I have seen, and tasted, and handled, and felt, and you ought to believe my testimony, for I have no possible object to serve in deceiving you." That man would have beaten me long ago if I had fired at him

with the paper pellets of reason. So, I advise you to fight unbelief with belief, falsehood with the truth, and never to cut and pare down the gospel to try to make it fit in with the follies and fancies of men.

A third obstacle in the way of winning souls is that fatal *delay* which men so often make. I do not know whether this evil is not on the whole more widespread and mischievous than the indifference and lethargy and unbelief of which I have spoken. Many a man says to us what Felix said to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Such an individual gets into the border country, he seems to be within a few steps of Emmanuel's land, and yet he parries our home-thrusts, and puts us off by saying, "Yes, I will think the matter over, it shall not be long before I decide." There is nothing like pressing men for a speedy decision, and getting them to settle at once this all-important question. Never mind if they do find fault with your teaching; it is always right to preach what God says, and His word is, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

This leads me to mention another obstacle to soul-winning, which is the same thing in another form, viz., *carnal security*. Many men fancy that they are quite safe; they have not really tested the foundation on which they are building, to see that it is sound and firm, but they suppose that all is well. If they are not good Christians, they can at least say that they are rather better than some who are Christians, or who call themselves by that name; and if there is anything lacking in them, they can at any time put on the finishing touch, and make themselves fit for God's presence. Thus they have no fear; or, if they do fear at all, they do not live in constant dread of that eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power, which will certainly be their portion unless they repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Against these people we ought to thunder day and night. Let us plainly proclaim to them that the unbelieving sinner is "condemned already," and that he is certain to perish everlastingly if he does not trust in Christ. We ought so to preach as to make every sinner tremble in his seat; and if he will not come to the Saviour, he ought at least to have a hard time of it while he stops away from Him. I am afraid that we sometimes preach smooth things, too soothing and agreeable, and that we do not set before men their real danger as we should. If we shun in this respect to declare all the counsel of God, part at least of the responsibility of their ruin will lie at our door.

Another obstacle to soul-winning is *despair*. The pendulum swings first one way and then the other; and the man who yesterday had no fear, today has no hope. There are thousands who have heard the gospel, and yet live in a kind of despair of its power being ever exerted upon them. Perhaps they have been brought up among people who taught them that the work of salvation was something of God altogether apart from the sinner; and so they say that, if they are to be saved, they will be saved. You know that this teaching contains a great truth,

and yet, if it is left by itself, without qualification, it is a horrible falsehood. It is fatalism, not predestination, that makes men talk as if there is nothing whatever for them to do, or that there is nothing that they can do. There is no likelihood of anyone being saved while he gives you this as his only hope, "If salvation is for me, it will come to me in due time." You may meet with people who talk thus; and when you have said all you can, they will remain as if they were cased in steel, with no sense of responsibility, because there is no hope awakened in their spirit. Oh, if they would but hope that they might receive mercy by asking for it, and so be led to cast their guilty souls on Christ, what a blessing it would be! Let us preach full and free salvation to all who trust in Jesus, so that we may, if possible, reach these people. If the carnally secure should be tempted to presume, some who are quietly despairing may pluck up heart, and hope, and may venture to come to Christ.

No doubt a great obstacle to soul-winning is *the love of sin*. "Sin lieth at the door." There are many men who never get saved because of some secret lust; it may be that they are living in fornication. I remember well the case of a man, of whom I thought that he would certainly come to Christ. He was fully aware of the power of the gospel, and seemed to be impressed under the preaching of the Word; but I found out that he had become entangled with a woman who was not his wife, and that he was still living in sin while professing to be seeking the Saviour. When I heard that, I could easily understand how it was that he could not obtain peace; whatever tenderness of heart he may have felt, there was this woman always holding him in the bondage of sin.

There are some men who are guilty of dishonest transactions in business; you will not see them saved all the while they continue to act so. If they will not give up that trickery, they cannot be saved. There are others who are drinking to excess. People who drink, you know, are often very easily affected under our preaching; they have a watery eye, their drinking has made them soft-headed, and there is a maudlin kind of sensitiveness in them; but as long as a man clings to "the cup of devils" he will not be likely to come to Christ. With others it is some secret sin, or some hidden lust that is the great difficulty. One says that he cannot help flying into a passion, another declares that he cannot give up getting drunk, while another laments that he cannot find peace, whereas the root of the mischief is that there is a harlot who stands in his way. In all these cases, we have only to keep on preaching the truth, and God will help us to aim the arrow at the joint in the sinner's harness.

Another obstacle is put in our way by *men's self-righteousness*. They have not committed any of these sins I have mentioned. They have kept all the commandments from their youth up; what lack they yet? There is no room for Christ in a full heart; and when a man is clothed from head to foot with his own righteousness, he has no need of the righteousness of Christ; at least, he is not conscious of his need, and if the gospel does not convince him of it, Moses must

come with the law, and show him what his true state is. That is the real difficulty in many, many cases; the man does not come to Christ because he is not conscious that he is lost, he does not ask to be lifted up because he does not know that he is a fallen creature. He does not feel that he has any need of divine mercy or forgiveness, and therefore he does not seek it.

Once more, there are some with whom all we say has no effect because of their *utter worldliness*. This worldliness takes two shapes; in the poor, it is the result of grinding poverty. When a man has scarcely enough bread to eat, and hardly knows how to get clothes to put on, when at home he hears the cries of his little children, and looks into the face of his overworked wife, we must preach very wonderfully if we are to secure his attention, and make him think about the world to come. "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and where-withal shall we be clothed?" are questions that press very heavily upon the poor. To a hungry man, Christ is very lovely when He has a loaf of bread in His hand. Our Lord so appeared when He was breaking the bread and fish for the multitude, for even He did not disdain to feed the hungry; and when we can relieve the wants of the destitute, we may be doing a necessary thing to them, and placing them where they may be capable of listening with profit to the gospel of Christ. The other kind of worldliness comes of having too much of this world, or at least of making too much of this world. The gentleman must be fashionable, his daughters must be dressed in the best style, his sons must learn to dance, and so on. This sort of worldliness has been the great curse of our Nonconformist churches.

Then there is another kind of man who is from morning to night grinding away at the shop; his one business seems to be to put up the shutters, and take them down again; he will rise early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, so as to make money. What can we do for these covetous persons? How can we ever hope to touch the hearts of these men whose one aim is to be rich, the people who scrape up the halfpennies and farthings? Economy is good, but there is an economy that becomes parsimony, and that parsimony becomes the habit of these miserly folk. Some will even go to chapel because it is the proper and respectable thing, and they hope to gain customers by going. Judas remained unconverted even in the company of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we have some people still among us in whose ears the thirty pieces of silver chink so loudly that the sound of the gospel cannot be heard by them.

I may mention one more obstacle to soul-winning, that is, the obstacle there is with some men through *their habits, and resorts, and company*. How can we expect a working-man to go home, and sit all the evening in the one room that he has to live in, and sleep in? Perhaps there are two or three children crying, and linen drying, and all sorts of things to produce discomfort. The man comes in, and his wife is scolding, his children are crying, and the linen is drying; what would you do if you were in his place? Suppose you were not Christian men,

would you not go somewhere or other? You cannot walk the streets, and you know that there is a cosy room at the public-house, with its flashing gaslight, or there is the gin-palace at the corner, where everything is bright and cheerful, and where there are plenty of jolly companions. Well, now, you cannot hope to be the means of saving men while they go to such places, and while they meet with the company that is found there. All the good that they receive from the hymns they heard on the Sabbath is driven away as they listen to the comic songs in the drink-shop, and all remembrance of the services of the sanctuary is obliterated by the very questionable tales that are told in the bar-parlour. Hence the great mercy of having a place where working-men can come and sit in safety, or of having a Blue Ribbon meeting, a gathering where it may not be all singing, nor all preaching, nor all praying, but where there is something of all these things. Here the man is enabled to get out of the former habits which seemed to hold him fast, and by-and-by he does not go to the public-house at all, but he has two rooms, or perhaps a little cottage, so that his wife can dry the linen in the backyard, and now he finds that the baby does not cry so much as he used to do, probably because his mother has more to give him; and everything gets better and brighter now that the man has forsaken his former resorts. I think a Christian minister is quite justified in using all right and lawful means to wean the people from their evil associations, and it may be well sometimes to do that which seems to be extraordinary, if thereby we can by any means win men to the Lord Jesus Christ. That must be our one aim in all that we do; and whatever obstacles may be in our pathway, we must seek the aid of the Holy Spirit that they may be removed, and that thus souls may be saved, and God may be glorified.