

CONVERSION NO. 45

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, OCTOBER 7, 1855
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AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK

*“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;
Let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way,
shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”
James 5:19-20*

THE true believer is always pleased to hear of anything which concerns the salvation of his own soul. He rejoices to hear of the covenant plan drawn up for him from all eternity, of the great fulfillment on the cross at Calvary, of all the stipulations of the Savior, of the application of them by the Holy Spirit, of the security which the believer has in the person of Christ, and of those gifts and graces which accompany salvation to all those who are heirs thereof.

But I feel certain that, deeply pleased as we are when we hear of things touching our own salvation and deliverance from hell, we, as preachers of God and as new creatures in Christ, being made like unto Him, have true benevolence of spirit, and therefore are always delighted when we hear, speak, or think concerning the salvation of others.

Next to our own salvation, I am sure, as Christians, we shall always prize the salvation of other people. We shall always desire that what has been so sweet to our own taste, may also be tasted by others. And what has been of so inestimably precious a value to our own souls, may also become the property of all those whom God may please to call unto everlasting life.

I am sure, beloved, now that I am about to preach concerning the conversion of the ungodly, you will take as deep an interest in it as if it were something that immediately concerned your own souls, for after all, such were some of you once. You were unconverted and ungodly, and had not God taken thought for you and set His people to strive for your souls, where had you been? Seek then, to exercise that charity and benevolence towards others which God and God’s people first exercised towards you.

Our text has in it, first of all, *a principle involved*—that of *instrumentality*—“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him, let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death.” Secondly, here is *a general fact stated*—“He who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” And thirdly, there is *a particular application of this fact made*—“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him,”—that is the same principle as when a sinner is converted “from the error of his way.”

I. First then, here is A GREAT PRINCIPLE INVOLVED—a very important one—that of INSTRUMENTALITY.

God has been pleased in His inscrutable wisdom and intelligence to work the conversion of others by instrumentality. True, He does not in all cases so do, but it is His general way. Instrumentality is the plan of the universe. In the new creation, it is almost always God’s invariable rule to convert by means of instruments. Now we will make one or two brief remarks upon this first principle.

First then, we say that *instrumentality is not necessary with God*. God can, if He pleases, convert souls without any instruments whatsoever. The mighty Maker who chooses to use the sword sometimes can, if He pleases, slay without it. He who uses the workman, the trowel, and the hammer can, if He so sees fit, build the house in a moment, And from the foundation-stone even to the topstone thereof, can complete it by the words of His own mouth.

We never hear of any instrumentality used in the conversion of Abraham. He lived in a far-off land in the midst of idolaters, but he was called from Ur of the Chaldees and thence God called him and brought him to Canaan by an immediate voice, doubtless from above, by God's own agency, without the employment of any prophet. For we read of none who could, as far as we can see, have preached to Abraham and taught him the truth.

Then in modern times we have a mighty instance of the power of God in converting without human might. Saul, on his journey towards Damascus upon his horse, fiery and full of fury against the children of God, is hastening to hail men and women and cast them into prison, to bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

But on a sudden a voice is heard from heaven, "Saul! Saul! why persecutest thou me?" and Saul was a new man. No minister was his spiritual parent, no book could claim him as its convert. No human voice, but the immediate utterance of Jesus Christ Himself, at once, there and then, and upon the spot, brought Saul to know the truth.

Moreover, there are some men who never seem to need conversion at all. For we have one instance in Scripture of John the Baptist, of whom it is said, "He was filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." And I do not know but what there are some who very early in life have a change of heart. It is quite certain that all infants. (who, doubtless, being each of them elect, do ascend to heaven) undergo a change of heart without instrumentality, and so there may be some concerning whom it may be written, that though they were born in sin and shaped in iniquity, yet they were so early taught to know the Lord, so soon brought to His name, that it must have been almost without instrument at all. God can, if He pleases, cast the instrument aside.

The mighty Maker of the world, who used no angels to beat out the great mass of nature and fashion it into a round globe, He who without hammer or anvil fashioned this glorious world, can if He pleases, speak, and it is done—command, and it shall stand fast. He needs not instruments, though He uses them.

Secondly, we make another remark, which is that *instrumentality is very honorable to God, and not dishonorable*. One would think, perhaps, at first sight, that it would reflect more glory to God if He effected all conversions Himself, without the use of men, but that is a great mistake. It is as honorable to God to convert by means of Christians and others, as it would be if He should effect it alone.

Suppose a workman has power and skill with his hands alone to fashion a certain article, but you put into his hands the worst tools you can find. You know he can do it well with his hands, but these tools are so badly made, that they will be the greatest impediment you could lay in his way. Well now, I say, if a man with these bad instruments or these poor tools—things without edges—that are broken, that are weak and frail, is able to make some beautiful fabric, he has more credit from the use of those tools, than he would have had if he had done it simply with his hands, because the tools, so far from being an advantage, were a disadvantage to him—so far from being a help, are on my supposition, even a detriment to him in his work.

So with regard to human instrumentality. So far from being any assistance to God, we are all hindrances to Him. What is a minister? He is made by God a means of salvation, but it is a wonderful thing that any one so faulty, so imperfect, so little skilled, should yet be blessed of God to bring forth children for the Lord Jesus.

It seems as marvelous as if a man could fashion rain from fire, or if he should fabricate some precious alabaster vase out of the refuse of the dunghill. God in His mercy does more than make Christians without means. He takes bad means to make good men with, and so He even reflects credit on Himself, because His instruments are all of them such poor things. They are all such earthen vessels that they do not even set out the glory of the gold which they hold, like the foil that sets forth the jewel, or like the dark spot in the painting that makes the light more brilliant. And yet the dark spot and the foil are not in themselves costly or valuable. So God uses instruments to set forth His own glory and to exalt Himself.

This brings us to the other remark, that *usually God does employ instruments*. Perhaps in one case out of a thousand, men are converted by the immediate agency of God—and so indeed are all in one sense—but usually, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, God is pleased to use the instrumentality of His ministering servants, of His Word, of Christian men, or some other means to bring us to the Savior.

I have heard of some—I remember them now—who were called like Saul, at once from heaven. We can remember the history of the brother who in the darkness of the night was called to know the Savior by what he believed to be a vision from heaven, or some effect on his imagination. On one side he saw a black tablet of his guilt and his soul was delighted to see Christ cast a white tablet over it. And he thought he heard a voice that said, “I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake and will not remember thy sins.” There was a man converted almost without any instrumentality, but you do not meet with such a case often.

Most persons have been convinced by the pious conversation of sisters, by the holy example of mothers, by the minister, by the Sabbath-school teacher, or by the reading of tracts or perusing Scripture. Let us not therefore believe that God will often work without instruments. Let us not sit down silently and say, “God will do His own work.” It is quite true He will, but then He does His work by using His children as instruments.

He does not say to the Christian man when he is converted, “Sit you down. I have nought for you to do, but I will do all Myself and have all the glory.” No. He says, “You are a poor weak instrument. You can do nothing. But lo! I will strengthen you and I will make you thrash the mountains and beat them small, and make the hills as chaff, and so shall I get more honor through your having done it than if I should had Mine own strong arm smitten the mountains and broken them in pieces.”

Now another thought, and that is—*If God sees fit to make use of any of us for the conversion of others, we must not therefore be too sure that we are converted ourselves*. It is a most solemn thought that God makes use of ungodly men as instruments for the conversion of sinners. And it is strange that some most terrible acts of wickedness have been the means of the conversion of men. When Charles II ordered the Book of Sports to be read in churches, and after the service, the clergyman was required to read to all the people to spend the afternoon in what are called harmless diversions and games, that I will not mention here—even that was made the means of conversion.

For one man said within himself, “I have always disported myself thus on the Sabbath-day, but now to hear this read in church! How wicked we must have become! How the whole land must be corrupt.” It led him to think of his own corruption and brought him to the Savior. There have been words proceeding, I had almost said from devils, which have been the means of conversion.

Grace is not spoiled by the rotten wooden spout it runs through. God did once speak by an ass to Balaam, but that did not spoil His words. So He speaks, not simply by an ass, which He often does, but by something worse than that. He can fill the mouths of ravens with food for an Elijah and yet the raven is a raven still. We must not suppose because God has made us useful that we are therefore converted ourselves.

But then another thing. *If God in His mercy does not make us useful to the conversion of sinners, we are not therefore to say we are sure we are not the children of God*. I believe there are some ministers who have had the painful labor of toiling from year to year without seeing a single soul regenerated. Yet those men have been faithful to their charge and have well discharged their ministry. I do not say that such cases often occur, but I believe they have occurred sometimes.

Yet, mark you, the end of their ministry has been answered after all. For what is the end of the Gospel ministry? Some will say it is to convert sinners. That is a collateral end. Others will say it is to convert the saints. That is true. But the proper answer to give is—it is to glorify God and God is glorified even in the damnation of sinners.

If I testify to them the truth of God and they reject His Gospel, if I faithfully preach His truth and they scorn it, my ministry is not therefore void. It has not returned to God void, for even in the punishment of those rebels, He will be glorified, even in their destruction He will get Himself honor.

And if He cannot get praise from their songs, He will at last get honor from their condemnation and overthrow, when He shall cast them into the fire forever.

The true motive for which we should always labor is the glory of God in the conversion of souls and building up of God's people. But let us never lose sight of the great end. Let God be glorified and He will be, if we preach His truth faithfully and honestly. So, therefore, while we should seek for souls, if God denies them unto us, let us not say, "I will not have other mercies that He has given," but let us comfort ourselves with the thought—that though they be not saved, though Israel be not gathered in, God will glorify and honor us at last.

One thought more upon this subject—*God by using us as instruments confers upon us the highest honor which men can receive.* O beloved! I dare not dilate upon this. It should make our hearts burn at the thought of it. It makes us feel thrice honored that God should use us to convert souls and it is only the grace of God which teaches us on the other hand, that it is grace and grace alone which makes us useful, which can keep us humble under the thought that we are bringing souls to the Savior.

It is a work which he who has once entered, if God has blessed him, cannot renounce. He will be impatient. He will long to win more souls to Jesus. He will think that toil is but rest, he will think that labor is but ease, so that by any means he may save some and bring men to Jesus. Glory and honor, praise and power be unto God, that He thus honors His people. But when He exalts us most, we will still conclude with, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the glory for ever and ever."

II. Secondly, we come to the GENERAL FACT.

"He which converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." The choicest happiness which mortal breast can know is the happiness of benevolence—of doing good to our fellow creatures. To save a body from death is that which gives us almost heaven on earth.

Some men can boast that they have sent so many souls to perdition, that they have hurled many of their fellows out of the world. We meet, now and then, a soldier who can glory that in battle he struck down so many foemen, that his swift and cruel sword reached the heart of so many of his enemies. But I count not that glory.

If I thought I had been the means of the death of a single individual, methinks I would scarcely rest at night, for the uneasy ghost of that murdered wretch would stare me in mine eyes. I should remember I had slain him and perhaps sent his soul unshriven and unwashed into the presence of his Maker. It seems to me wonderful that men can be found to be soldiers. I say not if it be right or wrong, still I wonder where they can find the men.

I know not how, after a battle, they can wash their hands of blood, wipe their swords, and put them by, and then lie down to slumber, and their dreams be undisturbed. Methinks the tears would fall hot and scalding on my cheek at night, and the shrieks of the dying, and the groans of those approaching eternity would torture mine ear. I know not how others can endure it. To me it would be the very portal of hell, if I could think I had been a destroyer of my fellow creatures.

But what bliss it is to be the instrument of saving bodies from death! Those monks on Mount St. Bernard, surely must feel happiness when they rescue men from death. The dog comes to the door and they know what it means. He has discovered some poor weary traveler who has lain him down to sleep in the snow, and is dying from cold and exhaustion.

Up rise the monks from their cheerful fire, intent to act the good Samaritan to the lost one. At last they see him, they speak to him, but he answers not. They try to discover if there is breath in his body and they think he is dead. They take him up, give him remedies, and hastening to their hostel, they lay him by the fire, and warm and chafe him, looking into his face with kindly anxiety, as much as to say, "Poor creature! Are you dead?"

When, at last, they perceive some heaving of the lungs, what joy is in the breast of those brethren, as they say, "His life is not extinct!" I think if there could be happiness on earth, it would be the privilege to help to chafe one hand of that poor, almost dying man, and be the means of bringing him to life again.

Or suppose another case. A house is in flames and in it is a woman with her children, who cannot by any means escape. In vain she attempts to come down stairs. The flames prevent her. She has lost all presence of mind and knows not how to act. The strong man comes and says, "Make way! Make way! I must save that woman!"

And cooled by the genial streams of benevolence, he marches through the fire. Though scorched and almost stifled, he gropes his way. He ascends one staircase, then another, and though the stairs totter, he places the woman beneath his arm, takes the child on his shoulder, and down he comes. Twice a giant, having more might than he ever possessed before.

He has jeopardized his life, and perhaps an arm may be disabled, or a limb taken away, or a sense lost, or an injury irretrievable done to his body, yet he claps his hands, and says "I have saved lives from death!" The crowd in the street hail him as a man who has been the deliverer of his fellow creatures, honoring him more than the monarch who had stormed a city, sacked a town, and murdered myriads.

But ah! brethren, the body which was saved from death today, may die tomorrow. Not so the soul that is saved from death, it is saved everlastingly. It is saved beyond the fear of destruction. And if there be joy in the breast of a benevolent man when he saves a body from death, how much more blessed must he be when he is made the means in the hands of God of saving "a soul from death, and hiding a multitude of sins."

Suppose that by some *conversation* of yours, you are made the means of delivering a soul from death. My friends, you are apt to imagine that all conversion is under God done by the minister. You make a great mistake. There are many conversions effected by a very simple observation from the most humble individual. A single spoken word may be more the means of conversion than a whole sermon.

There you sit before me. I thrust at you, but you are too far off. Some brother, however, addresses an observation to you—it is a very stab with a short poignard in your heart. God often blesses a short pithy expression from a friend, more than a long discourse from a minister.

There was once in a village, where there had been a revival in religion, a man who was a confirmed infidel. Notwithstanding all the efforts of the minister and many Christian people, he had resisted all attempts, and appeared to be more and more confirmed in his sin. At length, the people held a prayer meeting specially to intercede for his soul. Afterwards God put it into the heart of one of the elders of the church to spend a night in prayer in behalf of the poor infidel.

In the morning, the elder rose from his knees, saddled his horse, and rode down to the man's smithy. He meant to say a great deal to him, but he simply went up to him, took him by the hand, and all he could say was, "O sir! I am deeply concerned for your salvation. I am deeply concerned for your salvation. I have been wrestling with God all this night for your salvation." He could say no more, his heart was too full.

He then mounted on his horse and rode away again. Down went the blacksmith's hammer and he went immediately to see his wife. She said, "What is the matter with you?" "Matter enough," said the man, "I have been attacked with a new argument this time. There is elder B___ has been here this morning, and he said, 'I am concerned about your salvation.' Why, now, if he is concerned about my salvation, it is a strange thing that I am not concerned about it."

The man's heart was clean captured by that kind word from the elder. He took his own horse and rode to the elder's house. When he arrived there, the elder was in his parlor, still in prayer, and they knelt down together. God gave him a contrite spirit and a broken heart, and brought that poor sinner to the feet of the Savior. There was "a soul saved from death, and a multitude of sins covered."

Again, you may be the means of conversion by a letter you may write. Many of you have not the power to speak or say much, but when you sit down alone in your chamber, you are able, with God's help, to write a letter to a dear friend of yours. Oh! I think that is a very sweet way to endeavor to be useful.

I think I never felt so much earnestness after the souls of my fellow creatures as when I first loved the Savior's name, and though I could not preach and never thought I should be able to testify to the

multitude, I used to write texts on little scraps of paper and drop them anywhere, that some poor creatures might pick them up and receive them as messages of mercy to their souls.

There is your brother. He is careless and hardened. Sister, sit down and write a letter to him. When he receives it, he will perhaps smile, but he will say, "Ah, well! It is Betsy's letter after all!" And that will have some power.

I knew a gentleman whose dear sister used often to write to him concerning his soul. "I used," said he, "to stand with my back up against a lamppost, with a cigar in my mouth, perhaps at two o'clock in the morning, to read her letter. I always read them. And I have," he said, "wept floods of tears after reading my sister's letters. Though I still kept on the error of my ways, they always checked me. They always seemed like a hand pulling me away from sin, a voice crying out, 'Come back! Come back!'" And at last a letter from her, in conjunction with a solemn providence, was the means of breaking his heart and he sought salvation through his Savior.

Again. How many have been converted by *the example of true Christians*. Many of you feel that you cannot write or preach, and you think you can do nothing. Well, there is one thing you can do for your Master—you can live Christianity. I think there are more people who look at the new life in Christ written out in you, than they will in the old life that is written in the Scriptures.

An infidel will use arguments to disprove the Bible, if you set it before him. But if you do to others as you would that they should do to you, if you give of your bread to the poor and disperse to the needy, living like Jesus, speaking words of kindness and love, and living honestly and uprightly in the world, he will say, "Well, I thought the Bible was all hypocrisy, but I cannot think so now, because there is Mr. So-and-so, see how he lives. I could believe my infidelity if it were not for him. The Bible certainly has an effect upon his life and therefore I must believe it."

And then how many souls may be converted by what some men are privileged to *write and print*. There is *Dr. Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion*. Though I decidedly object to some things in it, I could wish that everybody had read that book, so many have been the conversions it has produced. I think it more honor to have written *Watt's Psalms and Hymns*, than *Milton's Paradise Lost*, and more glory to have written that book of old Wilcock's, *A Drop of Honey*, or the tract that God has used so much, "*The Sinner's Friend*"—than all the books of Homer.

I value books for the good they may do to men's souls. Much as I respect the genius of Pope, or Dryden, or Burns, give me the simple lines of Cowper, that God has owned in bringing souls to Him. Oh! to think that we may write and print books which shall reach poor sinners' hearts.

The other day my soul was gladdened exceedingly by an invitation from a pious woman to go and see her. She told me she had been ten years on her bed and had not been able to stir from it. "Nine years," she said, "I was dark, and blind, and unthinking, but my husband brought me one of your sermons. I read it and God blessed it to the opening of my eyes. He converted my soul with it. And now, all glory to Him! I love His name! Each Sabbath morning," she said, "I wait for your sermon. I live on it all the week, as marrow and fatness to my spirit." Ah! thought I, there is something to cheer the printers and all of us who labor in that good work."

One good brother wrote to me this week, "Brother Spurgeon, keep your courage up. You are known in multitudes of households of England and you are loved, too. Though we cannot hear you or see your living form, yet throughout our villages your sermons are scattered. And I know of cases of conversion from them, more than I can tell you."

Another friend mentioned to me an instance of a clergyman of the Church of England, a canon of a cathedral, who frequently preaches my sermons on the Sabbath—whether in the cathedral or not, I cannot say, but I hope he does. Oh! who can tell, when these things are printed what hearts they may reach, what good they may effect? Words that I spoke three weeks ago, eyes are now perusing, while tears are gushing from them as they read! "Glory be to God most high!"

But after all, *preaching is the ordained means for the salvation of sinners* and by this ten times as many are brought to the Savior as by any other. Ah! my friends, to have been the means of saving souls from death by preaching—what an honor.

There is a young man who has not long commenced his ministerial career. When he enters the pulpit, everybody notices what a deep solemnity there is upon him, beyond his years. His face is white and blanched by an unearthly solemnity. His body is shriveled up by his labor. Constant study and midnight lamps have worn him away, but when he speaks he utters wondrous words that lift the soul up to heaven.

And the aged saint says, “Well! Ne’er did I go so near to heaven as when I listened to his voice!” There comes in some gay young man, who listens and criticizes his aspect. He thinks it is by no means such as to be desired, but he listens. One thought strikes him, then another. See you that man? He has been moral all his life long, but he has never been renewed. Now tears begin to flow down his cheeks. Just put your ear against his breast and you will hear him groan out, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Ah! good reward for a withered frame or a ruined constitution!

Or take another case. A man is preaching the Word of God. He is standing up to deliver his Master’s message and in steals some poor harlot. Such a case I knew not long ago. A poor harlot determined she would go and take her life on Blackfriars Bridge. Passing by these doors one Sunday night, she thought she would step in and for the last time hear something that might prepare her to stand before her Maker.

She forced herself into the aisle and she could not escape until I rose from the pulpit. The text was, “Seest thou this woman?” I dwelt upon Mary Magdalene and her sins, her washing the Savior’s feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hair of her head. There stood the woman, melted away with the thought that she should thus hear herself described and her own life painted.

Oh! to think of saving a poor harlot from death, to deliver such a one from going down to the grave, and then, as God pleased, to save her soul from going down to hell! Is it not worth ten thousand lives, if we could sacrifice them all on the altar of God? When I thought of this text yesterday, I could only weep to think that God should have so favored me.

Oh! men and women, how can you better spend your time and wealth than in the cause of the Redeemer? What holier enterprise can you engage in than this sacred one of saving souls from death and hiding a multitude of sins? This is a wealth that you can take with you—the wealth that has been acquired under God, by having saved souls from death and covered a multitude of sins.

I know there are some now before the throne who first wept the penitential tear in this house of prayer, and who thanked God that they had listened to this voice. And methinks they have a tender and affectionate love still for him whom God honored thus.

Minister of the Gospel, if you on earth are privileged to win souls, I think when you die, those spirits will rejoice to be your guardian angels. They will say, “Father, that man is dying whom we love, may we go and watch him?” “Yes,” says God, “you may go and carry heaven with you.” Down come the spirits, ministering angels, and oh! how lovingly they look on us. They would, if they could, strike out the furrow from the forehead and take the cold clammy sweat with their own blessed hands away. They must not do it, but oh! how tenderly they watch that suffering man who was made the means of doing good to their souls.

And when he opens his eyes to immortality, he shall see them like guards around his bed and hear them say, “Come with us, thrice welcome, honored servant of God. Come with us.” And when he speeds his way upwards towards heaven on strong wings of faith, these spirits who stand by him will clap their wings behind him, and he will enter heaven with many crowns upon his head, each of which he will delight to cast at the feet of Jesus.

Oh, brethren, if you turn a sinner from the error of his ways, remember you have saved a soul from death, and hidden a multitude of sins.

III. The APPLICATION, I can only just mention.

It is this, that he who is the means of the conversion of a sinner does, under God, “save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins.” Particular attention ought to be paid to *backsliders*, for in bringing backsliders into the church, there is as much honor to God as in bringing in sinners. “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him.” Alas! the poor backslider is often the most forgotten.

A member of the church has disgraced his profession, the church excommunicated him, and he was accounted “a heathen and a publican.” I know of men of good standing in the Gospel ministry who, ten years ago, fell into sin. And that is thrown in our teeth to this very day. Do you speak of them? You are at once informed, “Why, ten years ago they did so-and-so.”

Brethren, Christian men ought to be ashamed of themselves for taking notice of such things so long afterwards. True, we may use more caution in our dealings, but to reproach a fallen brother for what he did so long ago is contrary to the spirit of John, who went after Peter, three days after he had denied his Master with oaths and curses.

Nowadays it is the fashion, if a man falls, to have nothing to do with him. Men say, “He is a bad fellow, we will not go after him.” Beloved, suppose he is the worst, is not that the reason why you should go most after him? Suppose he never was a child of God—suppose he never knew the truth—is not that the greater reason why you should go after him? I do not understand your mawkish modesty, your excessive pride, that won’t let you go after the chief of sinners. The worse the case, the more is the reason why we should go.

But suppose the man is a child of God and you have cast him off—remember, he is your brother. He is one with Christ as much as you are. He is justified, he has the same righteousness that you have. And if, when he has sinned, you despise him, you despise his Master. Take heed! you yourself may be tempted and may one day fall. Like David, you may walk on the top of your house rather too high and you may see something which shall bring you to sin. Then what will you say if the brethren pass *you* by with a sneer and take no notice of *you*?

Oh! if we have one backslider connected with our church, let us take special care of him. Don’t deal harshly with him. Recollect you would have been a backslider too if it were not for the grace of God. I advise you, whenever you see professors living in sin to be very shy of them, but if after a time, you see any sign of repentance, or if you do not, go and seek out the lost sheep of the house of Israel. For remember, that if one of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him remember, that “he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.”

“Backsliders, who your misery feel,” I will come after you one moment. Poor backslider, you were once a Christian. Do you hope you were? “No,” say you, “I believe I deceived myself and others. I was no child of God.” Well, if you did, let me tell you that if you will acknowledge that, God will forgive you.

Suppose you did deceive the church, you are not the first that did it. There are some members of this church, I fear, who have done so and we have not found them out. I tell you, your case is not hopeless. That is not the unpardonable sin. Some who have tried to deceive the very elect have yet been delivered, and my Master says He is able to save to the uttermost (and you have not gone beyond the uttermost) all who come unto Him. Come you, then, to His feet, cast yourself on His mercy, and though you did once enter His camp as a spy, He will not hang you up for it, but will be glad to get you anyhow as a trophy of mercy.

But if you were a child of God and can say, honestly, “I know I did love Him and He loved me,” I tell you, He loves you still. If you have gone ever so far astray, you are as much His child as ever. Though you have run away from your Father, come back, come back, He is your Father still. Think not He has unsheathed the sword to slay you. Say not, “He has cast me out of the family.” He has not.

His heart yearns over you now. My Father loves you. Come then to His feet and He will not even remind you of what you have done. The prodigal was going to tell his Father all his sins and ask him to

make him one of his hired servants, but the Father stopped his mouth. He let him say that he was not worthy to be called his son, but he would not let him say, “Make me as a hired servant.”

Come back and your Father will receive you gladly. He will put His arms around you and kiss you with the kisses of His love. And He will say, “I have found this My son that was lost. I have recovered this sheep that had gone astray.” My Father loved you without works, He justified you irrespective of them. You have no less merit now than you had then. Come and trust and believe in Him.

Lastly, you who believe you are not backsliders, if you are saved, remember that a soul is saved from death and a multitude of sins hidden. Oh, my friends, if I might but be a hundred-handed man to catch you all, I would love to be so. If aught I could say could win your souls—if by preaching here from now till midnight, I might by any possibility capture some of you to the love of the Savior, I would do it.

Some of you are speeding your way to hell blindfolded. My hearers, I do not deceive you, you are going to perdition as fast as time can carry you. Some of you are deceiving yourselves with the thought that you are righteous, and you are not so. Many of you have had solemn warnings and have never been moved by them. You have admired the way in which the warning has been given, but the thing itself has never entered your heart.

Hundreds of you are without God and without Christ, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, and may I not plead with you? Is a gloomy religious system to hold me captive and never let me speak? Why, poor hearts, do you know your sad condition? Do you know that “God is angry with the wicked every day”? That, “the way of transgressors is hard”? That, “He that believeth not is condemned already”? Has it never been told you that “he that believeth not shall be damned”?

And can you stand damnation? My hearers, could you make your bed in hell? Could you lie down in the pit? Do you think it would be an easy portion for your souls to be rocked on waves of flame forever and to be tossed about with demons in the place where hope cannot come? You may smile now, but will not smile soon.

God sends me as an ambassador now, but if you listen not to me, He will not send an ambassador next time, but an executioner. There will be no wooing words of mercy soon, the only exhortation you will hear will be the dull cold voice of death, that shall say, “Come with me.” Then you will not be in the place where we sing God’s praises and where righteous prayers are daily offered. The only music you will hear will be the sighs of the damned, the shrieks of fiends, and the yellings of the tormented. O may God in His mercy snatch you as brands from the fire to be trophies of His grace throughout eternity.

The way to be saved is to “renounce your works and ways with grief” and fly to Jesus. And if now you are a conscience-stricken sinner, that is all I want. If you will confess that you are a sinner, that is all God requires of you and even that He gives you. Jesus Christ says, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Do you hear His wooing words? Will you turn from His sweet looks of mercy? Has His cross no influence? Have His wounds no power to bring you to His feet? Ah! then what can I say? The arm of the Spirit, which is mightier than man, alone can make hard hearts melt and bow stubborn wills to the ground.

Sinners, if you confess your sins this morning, there is a Christ for you. You need not say, “Oh, that I knew where to find him.” The Word is nigh you, on your lips, and in your heart. If you will with your heart believe, and with your mouth confess the Lord Jesus, thou shalt be saved, for “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.