Steps Across; Or,  
Guidance and Help to the Anxious and Doubtful

George Everard, 1874

How May I Know That I Am Forgiven?

The more earnestly a soul is seeking after God, the more intense will be the interest felt in this question. It is a matter that ought not to be left in uncertainty. It is certain that many and grievous sins may justly be laid to the charge of each of us. It is certain that every act and word and thought of evil is registered in God's book of remembrance. It is certain that death will soon come, and then that judgment follows! Is it not then most needful that we have a sure testimony and witness that our debt is paid, and our account with God settled forever?

But is it the will of God that Christians should know for a certainty that their sin has been cancelled and blotted out? Is it His will that the Christian should be able, with full assurance, to rejoice that his own sin is forever put away?

False humility would demur to this. Men admit that we ought to believe in a general way that God forgives sinners; but to believe positively, "God has forgiven my sin" — "I am safe in Christ, and for me there is no condemnation" — for any Christian to say or feel this, they would imagine borders very closely on pride or presumption. "It is not good to be too sure," is often the language we meet with from those who do not understand the ground of a Christian's hope.

But can we be too sure of anything which God has positively declared? Can it be wrong to rest with certainty on that for which we have the plain warrant of God's Word?

Holy Scripture makes it very clear that God would have His people rejoice in the full assurance of His pardoning mercy. David, speaking by the Holy Spirit, has said, "Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, and whose sin is covered." But why is this blessedness revealed, but that God's people may know it and rejoice in it, and that others may see their joy and seek for the same happy privilege?

When Christ was upon earth He loved to relieve the burdened consciences of sinners by giving them this assurance. To the woman who was a sinner, He spoke the word of absolution: "Go in peace — your sins are forgiven." To the palsied man He gave first of all the great blessing of a full remission of guilt: "Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven." We have a picture of the forgiveness granted to sinners, in the touching story of the Prodigal's return and welcome. Could there be room for a single doubt whether or not his father had forgiven him, after the embrace of the fatherly arms and the kiss of fatherly love?

And what do we find to be the tone of early Christianity, as set before us in the Acts of the Apostles, and in the Epistles? Was it fear and doubt and uncertainty? Or was it not, for the most part, the comfort and joy of a sure and present salvation, sealed upon the heart by the Holy Spirit?

Those who believed on the day of Pentecost "ate their food with gladness and singleness of heart," which they could only do for the joy of sin forgiven.

The Ethiopian Eunuch and the Philippian jailor, when they heard of Christ and believed in Him, at once rejoiced.

The Corinthians, aforetime sinners beyond most, were addressed as being "washed, justified, and sanctified."

The Apostle joins the Ephesians with himself, as being in possession of a present salvation: "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

He assures the Colossians that the Lord had "forgiven them all trespasses."

The Apostle John writes even to the youngest in the faith in the same strain: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for His name's sake." And again he tells those who believe, that he writes to them that "they might know they have eternal life."

And as we must believe that a true assurance of salvation is according to the teaching of Holy Scripture — so too it is not difficult to see that it brings glory to God.

It exceedingly magnifies His free and abounding mercy, when a vile sinner once far off, self-condemned for innumerable sins and transgressions — can look up to Heaven with holy confidence and joy, and praise Him for turning away His anger, and blotting out all his iniquities!

It magnifies also His justice, for as we see the medium of forgiveness — the finished work and perfect Atonement of the Cross, we rejoice that He is just, as well as merciful to forgive us our sins.

It magnifies equally His faithfulness and truth. It becomes manifest that He fails not to fulfill His gracious promises, when the word on which we have trusted is accomplished in us.

Another thought also has often occurred to me, in answer to those who question the right of a Christian to know assuredly that he is accepted by God. Has not our Father bidden us come boldly to the throne of grace, and there pour out before Him our heart's cravings, sorrows, and desires? But how can I possibly do this, without a certainty of a present forgiveness?

If I had to go and make my request to a King, and I was uncertain whether the crime of rebellion, in which I had taken part, had been forgiven, or whether he were still angry with me on account of it — how could I approach him with any assurance of being heard and favorably received?

Just so, if i don't know whether God has pardoned the guilt of my rebellion against Him in years that are past, what comfort can I have in pouring out my heart before His mercy-seat?

Still more, without an assured forgiveness, is it possible to abound in praise and thanksgiving, and to rejoice in the Lord always. A guilty conscience, sin unforgiven, is like a heavy stone upon the heart — but the assurance of forgiveness removes the weight, and unlocks the lips. Then can we sing with David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me — bless His holy name, who forgives all your iniquities, and heals all your diseases."

But if it is God's will that Christians should be able to rejoice in the assurance of His mercy — then how may they best attain it? Remember, you must be forgiven — before you can know it. You must have wealth — before you can be conscious of its possession.

To be forgiven is the first thing; and this comes through trusting the blood-atonement of our Surety. He who condemns himself, and accepts as the punishment due to himself, the stripes laid on Christ, and thus draws near to God — that man is at once completely absolved from all his transgressions. He stands clear from all guilt — he is justified by faith in the atoning-blood — God remembers no more his sins and iniquities.

We have God's own testimony, confirmed and repeated in every possible way, to the complete forgiveness and justification of those that are thus trusting in Christ. "He who believes on the Son has everlasting life." ([John 3:36](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 3.36).) "By Him all who believe are justified from all things." ([Acts 13:38](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 13.38).) "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins." ([Acts 10:43](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 10.43).)

And here it is that we see the true ground of assurance. It is the Holy Spirit sealing upon the heart the reality, the eternal verity, and the personal application of such truths as these — so that they become to the soul a pillar of strength, a foundation of immovable security.

It is not the Spirit without the Word. It is not some undefined feeling that we are forgiven, without knowing how or why. This is sometimes found — and we fear it is usually a very perilous delusion — a counterfeit of true peace.

Neither is it the Word without the Spirit. It becomes merely a dead letter, a sealed book — unless the Spirit brings home the truth to the heart. It may be read by the eye, it may be heard by the ear — but until applied by the Spirit, it is totally ineffectual for the salvation of the soul. But where there is true solid consolation and good hope through grace, the Comforter has been the teacher, and has brought the sinner by the Word home to God.

Try distinctly to see the steps by which the Spirit works. Sometimes they are very distinct, sometimes one accompanies the other; but we may easily discern the difference between them.

1. The Spirit comes as the Spirit of conviction of sin. See how it was at Pentecost: men who had been hitherto rejecting the Son of God, yes, and joining together to crucify and mock Him — are pierced to the quick. They see their sin; they see their fearful peril; they are pricked in their heart, and exclaim, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And it is still the Spirit's work to humble men by convincing them of their sin. Often has it been that those who have been altogether careless, are led to feel the burden of their sin, and seek to know by what means they may be forgiven.

2. The Spirit comes also as a Spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Christ. He opens the spiritual eye to discern the suitableness, the all-sufficiency, the readiness of Christ to save. He reveals the power of His blood to cleanse — and the might of His arm to redeem and save even to the uttermost!

Then comes faith — the anxious soul looks up and trusts. Still unbelief may suggest its varied doubts and possibilities of rejection, but faith takes hold of Christ in spite of them, and takes refuge under the shadow of His Cross.

3. The Spirit has yet another work in bringing full peace. He comes as the Spirit of sealing — the Spirit of Adoption. "After you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the pledge of our inheritance." "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts." "You have not received the Spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!" "The Spirit also itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

The teaching of Paul in these passages is very plain. To believers an inward voice testifies of their relationship to God — a voice within the heart, responds to the voice of God in the Word. God says to each of those who trust in the atoning sacrifice and mediation of Jesus, "You are in Christ my son, my daughter, my well-beloved child." Then comes the echo from within: "You are my Father, my God! You have brought me near to You by the blood of Your Son. Behold, what manner of love You have bestowed upon us, that we should be called Your children!"

Neither is there any room here for vain and groundless hopes and imaginations. The witness of the Spirit within. is in exact harmony with the witness of the Word — it only affirms to the soul that which is plainly written. The Word declares that men "are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," and "that as many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in His Name." And it is only when we know that by God's grace we trust in that precious blood, that we can have assurance of forgiveness and sonship in God's family. Here, then, as it seems to me, is the means whereby we may know that our sin has been forgiven. By the grace of the Spirit, take firm hold of God's testimony, and humbly wait upon God for the power of the Spirit to seal the truth more and more upon the heart.

From all that has been already said, we see that the assurance of forgiveness is not to be found through an absolution pronounced by a human Catholic priest. The only absolution which the ministers of Christ are warranted in giving is by the ministry of God's Holy Word. They are to declare to man the certainty of God's promises to those who truly repent and believe in Christ. But they have no warrant for assuming the position of judge, or of giving such an absolution that the sinner can rely upon it as a ground of assured forgiveness.

There are also *auxiliary evidences*of forgiven sin, which ought not to be overlooked.

1. Where sin has been forgiven, the conscience will be able to testify of its undivided reliance on the blood of the Cross.

2. Where sin has been forgiven, it makes men frank, honest, open with the heart-searching God. "Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven — and in whose spirit there is no deceit." The unforgiven soul needs a cloak, and numberless excuses, and a self-righteous covering for its sin and neglect. But the forgiven man desires to lay bare before the eye of the divine Heart-searcher, every evil in thought, in motive, in word, and in deed. If you had but an old suit of clothes you might wish to make the best of them, however ragged and unfit for use — but if a new and clean suit were given you, you would be quite willing to cast away the former.

He who has in his possession the new and clean robe of a perfect justification in Christ, abhors and casts away his former coverings of vain and worthless dependencies.

3. Where sin has been forgiven, there will ever be an earnest desire to serve God. "The blood of Christ purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God." ([Hebrews 9:14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 9.14).) "He who is married to Christ, will bring forth fruit unto God." ([Romans 7:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom 7.4).)

The faith which justifies, works by love — and love is a very diligent and active servant. The same Spirit, too, who witnesses of pardon and adoption, is the Spirit of zeal and obedience. And he who truly possesses it, cannot fail to catch the spirit of those heavenly hosts who ever obey His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His Word.

Dear reader, judge yourself. If you trust that you have been graciously forgiven — is there something of all this manifest in your life and conversation?

It may be that someone who reads these pages has not yet found full assurance. Still, if you are humbly drawing near to God through Christ, be not discouraged. Do not unchristianize yourself because your are not yet absolutely sure of your acceptance. Do not be content with uncertainty, but go forward to learn more of Christ and His free mercy, and pray for the presence of the Spirit in your heart. Meanwhile give no heed to despairing thoughts.

I can imagine many an Israelite, though securely sheltered beneath the blood of the Paschal Lamb, might have a trembling fear as he thought of the angel of destruction passing through the land. Be sure you take shelter beneath the blood, and by and by God will give you the full assurance of faith and hope by the power of the Spirit.

But if, on the other hand, you are enabled to rejoice and to appropriate to yourself, with full confidence, the blessing of Christ's salvation — let it have a very wholesome sanctifying effect. You have a joy that many Christians have not — therefore let the joy of the Lord be your strength in working, or in suffering for His name's sake. Watch against the uprising of anything like spiritual pride. Temper joy with a holy fear of grieving the Spirit, or dishonoring the Savior. Do not let your joy effervesce in mere excitement, or even in speaking always about it. But let it take the direction of much prayer, praise, and witness-bearing in an evil world.

When steam is generated, it may escape without effecting any good result — or it may work machinery which is fashioning valuable fabrics. Thus we may see the importance of the Christian's joy having a practical tendency. Let there be no waste of power. Let sound judgment, and a spirit of self-denial and willing toil come in and utilize the joy and peace that the Lord has granted you. Think of your friends who are yet without Christ, and pray for them — and endeavor to win them for Christ. Think of the myriads in our large towns, and the scattered ones of our villages and hamlets, who have no saving knowledge of God — and strive to guide the footsteps of some among them into the way of peace.

"Now, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Stones in the Way

We imagine a highway to the Heavenly City, with travelers are here and there passing along — but there are many difficulties and hindrances.

Some carry heavy burdens, and do not always see the Friend who would carry them for them.

Some are tired and weary by the length of the way, or the burning heat of the sun.

Besides this, there are stones — large rough stones — here and there placed by one who hates the pilgrims; and when night comes, and the light is dim, many a pilgrim is apt to stumble and fall, and thus lose much time and be sore troubled.

Now it would be a great advantage if we could remove these stones, or some of them, or at least warn travelers of the danger they are likely to meet with — so that they may not dash the foot against them, but pass by on the other side. Besides, it was the command of the King that we should take up the stumbling-block out of the way of His people — and we ought to do our best to obey this command.

There are many of these stones of stumbling, and I will do my best to remove a few. Very thankful shall I be, dear reader, if I could remove any one that may hinder you.

(1) "I can't pray." Here is a very common difficulty. You kneel down and try to be very earnest, and wish to confess your sins and ask God for His grace and mercy — but your heart feels cold and dead, and wandering thoughts come in, and you think about things you ought not, and you rise from your knees with less hope and comfort than when you knelt down!

It may help you to overcome this, to remember when you kneel down that Jesus is close by, and places His ear so as to catch your faintest whisper. Do not think too much about your praying — but rather think of Jesus, and His loving invitations, and how great is the privilege He grants you of asking whatever you will in His name. If you think of this, you will find that it helps you in prayer. And be assured, too, that a wish, a look, a sigh is acceptable to Him.

It may help you, too, if, before you begin to pray, you call to mind some promise, as [Matthew 11:28](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 11.28), or [Hebrews 4:16](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 4.16), or [John 14:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.13), [14](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.14).

Or try to think of Christ as your High Priest standing before the throne of God, presenting your petitions.

Then, too, it is a comfort to remember God has promised His Spirit to help us pray. He will give you, by and by, such happy, trustful thoughts of the Father and of Jesus, that prayer will cease to be a burden and become to you a real pleasure.

(2) "I fear I am not one of the elect." Here is another objection to the exercise of faith in Christ. It is the purpose of our great enemy, by any means, to keep back souls from trusting the Savior — and so we find he often strives to pervert the doctrines of the Bible for this purpose. But you never find the doctrine of election so taught in Scripture as to discourage anyone — it is never placed between the sinner and Christ. You are never told to find out that you are one of God's elect before you may trust Christ. It is never intended to interfere with the free promise, "Him that comes unto Me, I will never cast out." You must rise up from the lower step to the higher — you must begin with acknowledging your sin and simply trusting in Christ — and you will rise at length to the assurance of your election.

We read in the Epistle of Peter, that those to whom he wrote were "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." Take hold of these lower links of the chain: see that you go to Jesus to sprinkle you with His blood; see that you look for the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit; see that you are walking in obedience to God's commands — and then you may be assured that God holds in His hand the uppermost link of your salvation — His own everlasting purpose of mercy towards you. This is the only possible way. No one can look into the book of God's purposes. But if we trust Jesus, and follow Him, and long to love God and walk in His commands — then we need not doubt for a moment, His everlasting love to us.

If any reader is tempted to stay away from Christ because of this fear, I would remind such a one of the woman of Canaan. The Savior Himself seemed to place a barrier somewhat of this kind in her way. He said, "I am sent only unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But what did she do? Did she go away saying, "I see it is useless for me to expect the blessing"? Nay! She went closer — she fell at His feet and worshiped Him. She cried, "Lord, help me!" Her persevering faith overcame this and every obstacle, and Christ crowned her faith with a glorious reward.

Even thus let it be with you — let nothing keep you back. Only trust Christ — only continue at His footstool — and this and every other hindrance will be removed.

(3) "I often think I have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, and that God has forsaken me. Therefore it is of no avail for me to think of being saved."

Such a temptation as this is a fearful stumbling block in the path of some few. It comes about in many ways — very often from having made an inconsistent profession, or from having been drawn back into a worldly life, or from some particular sin. Or perhaps from reading the life of some very devoted Christian who has risen to a very high standard of love and holiness. It is very often grounded on a mistaken view of such passages as [Hebrews 6:4-6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 6.4-6), or [Hebrews 10:26-29](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb 10.26-29).

I have no doubt whatever that these solemn words were spoken to warn the Hebrews against apostasy from faith. After having embraced the Gospel, if they cast it off and rejected it — where could they look for help? Other sacrifice but that of Christ, there was none; and if they refused this, and trampled on the precious blood, they must perish in their sins.

Besides, they might grieve the Spirit in so doing that He might leave them to utter indifference, blindness, and impenitency — and then with a hardened heart and seared conscience, they would live and die in their sins. But from the whole tenor of Scripture, it is quite out of the question that such passages are intended to shut the door against any who have fallen, however greatly or willfully, if only they will yet turn again.

I feel perfectly certain that if any person is anxious with reference to this sin, or if they have one desire to be forgiven and saved by Christ — it is a manifest proof that, however sinful and unworthy they may be, they have not committed the unpardonable sin.

(4) "I am too wicked to hope for mercy." There was once a man in Wolverhampton lying on a sick bed, and a friend came to speak with him about the Savior. When the friend entered his room, he fixed his eyes on him and said, "I am such a sinner that even God Almighty can't save me!"

"Very well," said the friend, "then you can do something greater than God; if your sin is greater than His mercy — then you must be greater than God." The thought startled him, and he was led to see the evil of limiting the Holy One of Israel.

Dear reader, do not be guilty of the same thing. God delights in mercy, and He will abundantly pardon. You are but a man, and therefore your sins — however great — are but finite. But God is God, and His mercies are infinite.

Remember, too, the infinite efficacy of the blood of the cross. So precious is that blood in the sight of God, that if your sins were as many as the united sins of the whole world, and at the moment you read these lines you take shame to yourself on account of them and come near to God, trusting only in that precious blood — this very hour, this very moment, they shall all be cast into the depth of the sea, and you may stand before God as free from all charge of guilt as if you had never sinned!

(5) "If I were to come to Christ, I would never be able to persevere, and therefore it is wiser not to begin." Until the last few years of my ministry, I had no idea that a thought of this kind was so great an obstacle to many, who are yet very seriously impressed. It takes various shapes: sometimes it refers to one particular hindrance in a man's family, or business, or in the society in which he mingles. It may be a quarrel that has long existed, or a bitter feeling cherished in the heart of a relative, or a course of petty dishonesty in trade that a man knows not how to break through. Sometimes it is a kind of general persuasion, that the religion of Christ demands a walk and conversation which is impossible in the common routine of daily life — and this being so, a man argues, that as backsliding is so dangerous a sin, he will not yet enter on a Christian course.

But this objection arises very much from a partial view of Christ's salvation. People do not see how completely Jesus saves those who come to Him. Take an illustration — it is a thought I lately met with, but it may be carried further than was done by the writer.

Suppose you were drowning in the water, and the sea-shore not far off. But this shore was a long distance from your own home and the journey home was a very dangerous one. A friend comes to rescue and save you from a watery grave. But would you refuse his help, because you might meet with perils afterward on your way home?

But suppose that friend not only offered to save your life, but to accompany you along your way and not leave you until he had conducted you in safety to the town or village you desired to reach. Surely now you will thankfully accept his offered help.

But how is it with Jesus? He sees you perishing in your sins; He comes near; He offers at once to lift you up from your present condition of guilt and condemnation, and place your foot on the solid rock of acceptance and justification before God. But He offers more than this:

He will be your Guide, Protector, Shepherd.

He will go with you every step of your homeward journey.

He will shield you in the hour of temptation.

He will keep you from the power of the great adversary.

He will not leave you until He has done all that He has promised.

Let not then the fear of the future keep you from Christ. Cast upon Him . . .  
the Past, for He will forgive;  
the Present, for He is near, by your very side;  
the Future, for He can keep and save to the uttermost.

Not a sorrow lies before you — but His arm will sustain you in the endurance of it. Not a temptation will meet you — but He will be ready to supply grace to overcome it.

A few years ago a young lady was anxiously seeking Christ; but her chief anxiety was a fear that she would fall back. She could not see how it was possible she could overcome all the snares that might entangle her. But one day she opened a small Testament which she carried in her pocket. She noticed the precious assurance given in [Jude 24](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jude 24) verse: "Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy." This was enough. She saw that Christ could keep the soul that leaned on Him, even to the day of His appearing. She trusted the Savior fully. She honored Him by a holy, devoted life. And not long ago, after a very happy Christian course, she fell asleep in Christ.

There is one other stone in the way that ought not to be passed over.

(6) Many inquirers find little comfort because they have a divided heart. "Their heart is divided — now shall they be found faulty." "Woe be to the double-minded and to the sinner that goes two ways." "The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."

A partial obedience like that of Saul in the matter of Amalek, or a partial surrender as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira — brings great disquietude, and fails to impart any true rest of spirit. Too many are determined to hold the world fast — and yet wish to have the peace of Christ. Too many wish to live for themselves and to walk in their own ways — and yet would have Christ by their side to forgive and to save. And so they journey on — sometimes with a ray of hope, and sometimes all in darkness, because Christ will not be the minister of sin, or give His Spirit to abide with those that keep back from Him a part of their heart, or walk in ways that grieve and dishonor Him.

Perhaps, dear reader, conscience whispers, "This has been my case — but what can I do? The world has great power over me — but I would follow Christ fully if I could."

Then I would say: Let there be a full trust in His love, a full reliance on all His gracious promises, an entire dependence on Him for everything — for pardon, for holiness, for happiness, for things temporal and things spiritual. And then in the strength of this faith, make an unreserved surrender of yourself and all you have to His service. Be assured, it is the lack of faith that leads to this half-heartedness and reserve in our obedience. He who asks with a wavering and doubting spirit, is the double-minded man. (See [James 1:6-8](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/James 1.6-8).)

On the other hand, Abraham, so strong in faith, was a very Prince among those remarkable for their obedience. And it is easy to see why this is so. Faith puts men in possession of riches and peace and joy in God — and where a man has these, he is satisfied, though all else should fail. While unbelief robs men of their true portion, or of their enjoyment of it — and so they run hither and thither to find a little comfort and help in some earthly thing.

Be it yours then to find your all in God. Drink more and more deeply of His deep river of pleasure. When disappointment and sorrow darken your path, flee immediately to your Hiding-Place, and find in God the solace for all human woe. When cares and anxieties oppress your spirit, spread them before the mercy-seat, as Hezekiah spread the letter of the King of Assyria — and with an eye of humble expectation wait for deliverance from God alone.

Beware of all human reliances and the very least departures from a plain obedience to His commands. Trust in God, wait on God, keep the strait path of His precepts — and in the end, the rough shall be made smooth, and all that seems for a time dark and gloomy shall be made as clear as the day.

The Stray One Recalled!

In the whole revelation which God has given to us, there is nothing which brings home to us our Father's tender compassion for sinners, more than His appeals to the backsliding. We find this especially the case in the books of Jeremiah and Hosea. He complains of the strange ingratitude of His people in thus turning away from Him: "You of this generation, consider the word of the LORD: "Have I been a desert to Israel or a land of great darkness? Why do my people say, 'We are free to roam; we will come to you no more'?" [Jeremiah 2:31](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.31)

He reminds them how foolish and unwise it is thus to forsake the sole source of true happiness. "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters — and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

[Jeremiah 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 2.13). It is a very forcible image that is here employed. God is a Fountain, a Well of Life — He is the source and spring of all true life, pleasure, holiness, hope. In Him is a continual freshness of all that can fill the soul with joy. In Him are inexhaustible streams of mercy, grace, and consolation. But men forsake this Fountain for cisterns — yes, more, for broken cisterns, from which soon leak out the few drops of water they may contain.

A traveler in the Holy Land tells us that in one part he found the land riddled and honeycombed with the remains of these broken cisterns, and that the foot of his horse was again and again caught in one of them. When water was needed, they would just dig in the earth one of these little clay cisterns; it would hold water for a time, but soon, when the sun was hot and weather dry, it would crack and leak — and so another and another would be needed.

Ah, what pains and trouble men take in hewing out cisterns like these . . .  
wealth unsanctified by true riches,  
the acquisition of knowledge with no end beyond its possession,  
a position and name that shall dazzle those around,  
schemes of self-indulgence and pleasure,  
a comfortable home where God is forgotten,  
some object of affection which engrosses every thought —  
how often something of this kind steals the heart from God!

But before long there is sure to be a crack, a leak — and the joy and the comfort is dried up and gone! So God in His tender compassion would have men see this, and remember that nothing can ever take the place of Himself as their Well-spring of joy.

And how marvelous in pitiful compassion are the exhortations and entreaties which God addresses to His people, beseeching them to return back to Him. He does not hide from them the greatness of their sin — He sets it before them in all its aggravation.

He speaks of it as the adultery of the wife treacherously forsaking a faithful husband.

He tells them how repeated has been the provocation, for they have sought after many lovers.

He reminds them how utterly hardened and shameless they had become, and how they had polluted the whole land with their wickedness!

And then, over against this dark background of their iniquity, He reveals His free mercy and willingness to restore them to His fatherly love: "Will you not from this time cry unto Me: My Father, you are the guide of my youth?" "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, O backsliding Israel, says the Lord; and I will not cause My anger to fall upon you — for I am merciful, says the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever." "Return, O backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto You; for You are the Lord our God." ([Jeremiah 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jer 3.4), [12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jeremiah 3.12), [22](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Jeremiah 3.22). See the whole chapter.)

Surely no words could express God's mercy to Israel more clearly, in spite of all their backslidings against Him. And it is a pattern of God's mercy and longsuffering toward backsliders in all ages. He is ever the same. It is true there is grievous ingratitude and great peril in this sin:  
it grieves the Spirit,  
it hardens the heart,  
it discourages young beginners,  
it puts a stumbling-block in the way of the ungodly,  
it may lead to a total and final apostasy from which there is no recovery.

But, nevertheless, where conscience still wakes, and there is the very least desire to return to the fold — God will never reject the trembling penitent.

Let us consider for a while this backsliding spirit, and how it arises, and how the soul may be restored from it. The idea is taken from the heifer: "Israel slides back as a backsliding heifer." The heifer has the yoke placed on its neck, to go forward into the field and plough the land — but instead of this, it pulls back, rebels against the yoke, and endeavors to cast it off — it slides back little by little, and shrinks from its appointed work.

And thus it is often seen in the Church of God: men are called to bear the easy yoke of Christ; they profess to accept it — and yet instead of going forward, faithfully obeying the Savior's precepts — they turn away, cast aside His yoke, and go back to a life of worldliness or sin.

This spirit is often found in two classes of people. I believe it is most frequently found among those who have never gone far. Perhaps they have had Christian parents, and religious privileges; they have had convictions of sin; they have seen the blessedness of having their portion in Christ; they have outwardly enrolled themselves among His followers — and this is all. They have never . . .  
had close, personal dealings with Christ;  
cast themselves upon Him for salvation;  
yielded their hearts to Him, desiring to be His alone.  
So that in this case, we need not be surprised that they go back. They have the form — but not the power and life of godliness — and so after a little temporary profession, we find them gone back to the world which they had renounced.

It was thus with the followers of Christ who were offended because of the hard saying. They had never cast in their lot with Him, to follow Him wherever He went. They had never trusted in His mercy, nor seen His true glory. So, after a while, they went back and walked no more with Him. It was precisely the same with Judas. His heart was not whole with Christ — he was a covetous man from the beginning. So, by and by, his sin grew stronger and led him even to betray his Master.

But in Christ's true disciples, we often see something of the same spirit. Perhaps we would have imagined that after conversion it would have been impossible for the Christian ever to go back — but practically this is not the case.

One of the greatest Saints in the Old Testament, and one of the chief pillars of the Church in the New Testament — have both left us an example of the danger of falling back.

With David for two long years the altar was unfrequented, prayer either omitted or but a dead form, no Psalm penned, no holy desire arising — all was dark and heavy overhead, and God and he were as strangers one to the other.

It was the same with the Apostle chosen to open the door of faith both to Jew and Gentile. The warm-hearted, zealous Peter looked for a season as if he were altogether an apostate from His Lord.

Nor need we be surprised that the people of God are exposed to this danger. Consider what mighty agencies are brought to bear upon the young believer with the purpose of utterly overthrowing his faith! He wrestles not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers! The great adversary has in his hand ways and means to overthrow the weak one, which at present we can little comprehend. Then there is the dead weight of the old nature still striving for the mastery in dragging the soul down to the world's level! A thousand influences for evil are about us on every side!

So that . . .  
if the Christian is not strengthened abundantly with grace from above,  
if he fails to watch and pray,  
if secret duties are lightly passed by —  
then it is no wonder if the power of evil get the upper hand, and his religion becomes a dry and withered thing. And instead of being like the tree growing and flourishing by the rivers of water — he becomes like the dried up heath in a desert land.

A few thoughts on the story of Peter's fall and recovery may keep back someone who is in danger, and may be a word in season to restore another who has turned aside.

Ah, Peter, I see you a rock, standing firm and confident in your own strength! You were to be a rock, because you are knit to the great Rock, and one with Him. But now you boast of your own goodness and purpose: "Though all shall fall away — yet I will not!" "Even if I should die with You, I will never deny You!"

Have you not learned your lesson yet, Peter? Remember the winds and waves, and how soon your faith failed you! Is it not wise to be more humble — more distrustful of your own heart?

Here is our first lesson. Our weakness is our strength. Self-reliance is a sure precursor of a fall.

Believer, keep on low ground — never speak of the triumphs you will win, or the temptations you will overcome. The Master must hold you up — but pride and self-glorying will drive Him from your side.

"Hold me up, and I shall be safe!"  
  
"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

But I see Peter in another light: not now a rock, standing firm — but a reed, shaken by the wind. Once, twice, thrice I hear him denying the Lord who loved him — ashamed of the Lord of glory for fear of a maid-servant; and when His Lord was about to lay down His life for his sake, turning his back upon Him, yes, with oaths and curses!

And is this, Simon, all the proof you can give of your faithfulness? Is this your boasted supremacy over all the rest? Is this your willingness even to die with Christ? A strange contrast this to your confession of Christ as the Son of the blessed, and the honor your Savior gave you: "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father who is in Heaven!"

But let me trace the downward steps. This fearful fall did not come all at once. In the garden I see you sleeping, instead of praying: "Simon, are you asleep?" I hear the Master saying — Satan is just about to assault you, and it were well for you to be girding on your armor to resist him. "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." Let me remember this: if I would be safe, I must keep up prayer — it must be a reality. I must pray for the spirit of prayer; I must guard against interruptions in prayer; I must watch, lest sloth and indolence and forgetfulness of danger lull me into a false security, and Satan find me sleeping at my post.

But another step downward. I see Peter showing off his zeal by rash and hasty blows. The sword is quickly unsheathed — without asking counsel from the Master, he begins to fight bravely, as he thinks, that he may fulfill his vow. "Nay, Peter, put up your sword! I have not bidden you do this; but I ask you to be faithful. Only follow Me and hold fast your faith in my name."

I must beware here also. Christ does not want a showy, noisy zeal — but He wants me to do His bidding and tread in His footsteps. When He calls me to the very fiercest conflict, let me be ready to go — let me be ready to gird on the sword of the Spirit and go forth in His name when the time comes. Meanwhile let me be willing to suffer with Him — and then I shall reign with Him.

Yet another downward step. Peter follows afar off. He is now afraid of the consequences of his own conduct. He trembles lest he should be recognized — so he falls back in the crowd. O Savior, keep me very near You! May I never lose sight of You — Your loving smile, Your power to help by a look, by a word. May I never leave Your companionship because there may be danger — but may I cleave to You the closer for help to be faithful!

Then see Peter seeking His own comfort. While the Master is witnessing a good confession, and is bearing the taunts and indignities of the chief priests — Peter stands by the fire warming himself, instead of standing close to the Master and showing that at least there is one not afraid to own His cause.

Just so, if I would be faithful I must beware of this snare also. The Lord delights in the happiness and comfort of His servants, and would not have me refuse, without a needs-be, the blessings He gives. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving." But I must ever be ready at His bidding to relinquish all. To honor Him I must deny myself and take up my cross daily. Rest, friends, yes, food and clothing, yes, life itself — let me be willing to sacrifice to Him who gave Himself for me.

Then, too, we see Peter mingling with the servants — he is making friends of those who share the guilt of crucifying the Lord. He talks with them in tone and manner as if he were one with them. Thus another downward step is taken. We must ever avoid the company of the Lord's enemies. "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers." [Psalm 1:1](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 1.1)

Then comes the climax. The fear of man has supplanted the fear of God. He is ashamed of the Master — lie after lie comes from the lips of him who had once witnessed so good a confession. An oath is employed to confirm the lie — and Peter has fallen as low as he can.

O Lord, keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me! Never let the fear of man rule in my heart! Why shall I fear one who soon shall return to the dust whence he was taken — when I have You as my faithful and Almighty Friend? Oh, let me confess Your name even before Kings, and never, never be ashamed of Your Word, Your Gospel, or Your service!

But we have yet to look at Peter in another light: A wandering sheep restored by the faithful care of the Good Shepherd. His sin was all his own — his recovery was all of grace. His self-confidence, his neglect of prayer, his fear of man brought him into the pit — but the hand of his unfailing Guardian rescued him!

Judas falls — and finally, for in him there was no root of true grace — Satan enters into him and brings him to destruction both of body and soul.

Peter falls — but the Savior leaves him not in the hands of his adversary, but lifts him up and places his foot again upon the rock.

Christ pleads beforehand. He foresees the plot of the enemy for the overthrow of His disciple, and He prays for him: "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not."

It is a comforting thought that Jesus foresees . . .  
all our temptations,  
all the assaults of the enemy,  
all our backslidings.

And in view of all, He pleads for each soul that relies on His all-prevailing name. Hence there is a limit placed to the power of Satan — and there is restoring grace granted to the stumbled believer. The fall is great — but not final. The mercy that called the sinner at first, recalls him from his backsliding. The Savior uses means to recall His disciple — it was but a simple thing, the crowing of the rooster, but it was enough to bring back all the past, and especially the Master's warning, and his own broken vows.

Then there was the look: "Jesus turned and looked at Peter." Chiding, remembrance, pity and tenderest love — all mingled in that look.

And withal the Spirit of God is at work. Without this, all else were in vain — but He works, and none shall hinder it. He teaches and humbles as none else can. And we see Peter, who just before is denying his Master so boldly and daringly — now leaving the High Priest's palace, going home to weep and lament his treachery, his falseness, and the grief he has thus caused the Lord who loved him.

And Christ sees it all. He has heard the threefold denial, the oaths, the curses — but He hears also his sighs, his confessions, and marks every tear he sheds. He who heard the prayer of Nathanael beneath the fig-tree — hears equally the sorrowful sighing of His repentant disciple — and He freely loves, and freely forgives all.

"Go and tell my disciples and Peter," is His first command. He commits again to him the care of His Church when He bids him "feed His sheep;" and He gives him grace boldly to confess His name before the great assembly of the chief priests and elders.

The narrative has its lesson of blessed hope and encouragement to any who would retrace their steps after forsaking Christ. The Good Shepherd still loves to restore wanderers to His fold. To those who have turned back and would return to Him — as to those who seek Him for the first time, He still declares, "Him that comes to Me, I will never cast out."

He points you to the example of Peter, and reminds you that, after the greatest fall, He still opens to you the door of mercy. Whether in former days you have ever truly known His love or not — whether you have only gone a little way and then turned back — or whether you have turned aside after having experienced very much of His special goodness — in either case He invites you to come home, and find your everlasting rest in Himself as a merciful and faithful Redeemer.

The story of Peter's restoration shows plainly the track by which you may return to the fold: "Peter went out and wept bitterly." He went out — he sought where He might be alone. Perchance he went to the lonely garden where awhile before, his Master had been apprehended, and under the quiet shade of olive trees poured out his soul before God. He was alone with God and his own conscience — and as he confessed his sin, and wept, and prayed — doubtless the Omniscient Savior marked it all. He who marked Nathanael under the fig-tree, marked Peter also — and we may be sure met him with the comfort of His forgiving mercy.

Here is the true Confessional! Alone with God! Alone with my great High Priest! Keeping back nothing from Him — but telling everything unto His merciful ear. Alas, that men should introduce another confessional, and should teach that Christian people must tell their sins to a human priest, and obtain through him the absolution which Christ loves to bestow freely on all who come to Him; what is this, but the overthrow of the blessed Gospel of grace and salvation! What is this, but to deny that Christ is as ready and willing to give pardon to the penitent as He proclaims Himself to be! What is this, but to give the lie to His blessed promise, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"? What is this setting up of a man-made Confessional, but to usurp and throw into the shade the true Confessional which the saints in all ages have loved to frequent?

But if, like Peter, you have fallen back and forsaken the Savior — remember the way of return is open. Christ is still the same as ever — a great Savior for great sinners! Do not hearken to the suggestions of unbelief — do not suppose that because of special aggravations of your offence, it is impossible Christ should pardon and save you. In Peter's case there was almost every possible aggravation of his sin — yet in spite of all, he was mercifully welcomed.

Do not think that because you have thus departed from God, your heart is now so hardened and insensible that you can never again experience the power of His love. Only believe . . .  
that He is ready to pardon,  
that He delights to give His Spirit to those who call upon Him,  
that He still beholds you with fatherly compassion —  
and His love will rekindle yours. And with a deeper self-abasement, with more entire dependence upon Divine grace, you will still prove more than conqueror over all evil, within and without.

A young man in India was fearfully persecuted by his relations for desiring to be a Christian. For a season he stood firm, but at last gave way, and forsook Christ. But he had no peace. He felt an aching void within — he knew that none but Christ could really satisfy. About ten months after he met his old teacher: he said, "Will Christ take me back again? Did He not take Peter, and will He not take me?" So he once again came back to the Savior. He renounced Hinduism; He cast away his sacred Brahmin thread. He was openly baptized in the Church, and the one desire of his life hereafter was to follow Christ. In some such words as these he expressed it:

"Nothing on earth to me be given;  
 Nothing I want, but Christ and Heaven."

On Confessing Christ

Is it needful openly and boldly to confess Christ? NO! if your wish be simply to pass muster among others, and to have a religion that men will approve. In such a case keep free from any very plain violations of the world's standards — go to church, and be on good terms with those that are Christians, and those that are not; never speak a word that will touch the conduct of anyone; and then perhaps all men may speak well of you, and reckon you a very good sort of Christian.

But if your wish is to be saved, to have a clear title to the heavenly inheritance, and to gain the favor and win the smile of Christ — then I would answer emphatically, YES! A thousand times, Yes! You must confess Christ, you must not be ashamed of His name, you must not shrink from the reproach which it may bring. He has said, "Whoever shall confess Me before men — him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men — shall be denied before the angels of God." And the great Apostle who loved to set forth the glory of a free justification by faith — yet has included

 confession as an absolutely essential condition of fellowship with Christ: "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead — you shall be saved."

The soldier cannot conceal the name of the sovereign, or the country, whose uniform he bears. The servant cannot refuse to acknowledge the master in whose service he is engaged. So how can the Christian desire to hide the fact of his allegiance to a heavenly King and a heavenly Master?

And this confession of Christ is very important as the test of a man's sincerity. If Christianity had only its side of privileges — then how could we discover the hypocrite from the true believer? But when persecution or reproach comes, then the leaves fall off, and the singing birds fly away, and nothing remains but the stem and the branches of the tree well-rooted and grounded in the soil.

Just so, all mere profession, all mere talking is in vain — unless there is a heart to cleave fast to the Lord. And when we look and see . . .  
the depraved condition of the world,  
how small a number comparatively are on the Lord's side,  
how the King's enemies abound,  
the standard of the adversary is everywhere unfurled,  
that abominable vice stalks through our streets, and  
infidelity and rank superstition unblushingly lift up their heads  
— is it a time for the followers of the Lamb to hide His righteousness within their hearts, and shut their lips, and lower their banner to please an adulterous and sinful generation?

Nor may we doubt that where the heart is filled with a Savior's love — the lips will be touched to speak of His beauty.

I remember staying one night with a friend who had lost many of those who once had brightened his home, and now all his affections were centered upon his one remaining child. And it was his one thought, and his one theme. Wherever the conversation began, it soon went back to the "dear boy at school." And I learned the lesson — it is still true of earthly and of heavenly things, that "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks."

If the fountain is full — the waters will flow out. If the thoughts of Christ are welling up from within — it will not be very difficult to say a word for Him. When the leper who had been healed was commanded to be silent — yet he could not refrain from telling out the goodness the Lord had shown to him. How much rather should we, who are bidden to confess His name.

It is quite true that there are great hindrances that stand in the way of this duty.

With one person there is a natural timidity, a reserve, a shyness, that finds it a trial in any way to attract notice. Both Moses and Jeremiah felt this, though called to positions of peculiar difficulty, and compelled to brave much opposition. It is a comfort to remember that the Lord knows our frame and He gives more grace. And we may be assured that in this case, a feeble word spoken in Christ's name will be doubly acceptable, and perhaps may be more effectual than many words spoken by one whose disposition is less retiring.

Perhaps a still greater obstacle arises from our own felt inconsistencies, or from the false and hollow profession which some around us may make.

Do we not usually find it much easier to speak to a stranger than to those in our own homes? And is not one reason for this, because they see most our defects and inconsistencies? They have marked . . .  
our breaches of temper,  
our inconsiderate words,  
our petty unrealities,  
our yielding to some besetting infirmity —  
and so when we would speak to them, a still small voice within says, "Better not — your words will do no good, for you have not been as careful as you should to practice what you speak."

But this fear ought not to bar our way, if we honestly strive against such failings, and are praying for grace to overcome them. Those about us may see Reality in our religion — if they cannot see Perfection.

Neither should we be deterred from confessing Christ because many Christians around us are very poor specimens of what Divine grace can effect.

Because Judas proved to be a hypocrite, and Peter denied Christ — was this any reason why the other disciples should refuse to confess Him and preach His Gospel?

It is very true that even the regenerate man, is very far below the standard we would desire. Equally true is it that tares and wheat are mingled in the field, and will be until the Lord's appearing. But what should we learn from this?

Let us reason in this way: If others profess to be Christ's — and yet by works deny Him — then will I confess His name also, and strive that my life may confirm that which my lips confess.

If Christ is wounded in the house of His friends by their inconsistencies of word and deed — then will I watch that in my house I may adorn His doctrine in all things.

But the chief difficulty of all is the fear of man, and it is against this that we must resolutely contend. Man can do much to harm or benefit us — much for our comfort or discomfort. Besides, there is a certain amount of right feeling in the desire to please others, or in the fear of offending them — which is apt to creep in where it ought not, and to prevent our being bold enough in confessing Christ.

It is helpful to consider that God sees this danger, and provides for it in His Word. A very large portion of the book of Psalms is intended to make us realize how much better it is to fear God than man, and that to trust in God is better than to trust in princes. Nor should we forget the appeal of God by the Prophet Isaiah: "I, even I, am He who comforts you! Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?"

Listen again to the words of Christ, reminding His disciples of His friendship, and then bidding them not fear the frown of man, but rather the displeasure of God: "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into Hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!" [Luke 12:4-5](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Luke 12.4-5)

I have thought over this matter of confessing Christ, and I would like to suggest to the reader a few of those ways in which it has seemed to me most important to do so.

(1) We must trust Christ with the **heart**, before we can possibly confess His name before men. "With the heart man believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." He has died, the Just for the unjust, bearing the huge load of iniquity. And you must lay your guilt on Him by faith. You must rely upon His atonement as the one answer to every remembrance of your guilt. You must draw near to God with no hope but in His blood, and then believe that God looks upon you through His wounds.

Since therefore I can scarcely bear  
What in myself I see;  
How vile and black must I appear,  
Most Holy God, to Thee.

But since the Savior stands between  
With garments dyed in blood,  
'Tis He instead of me is seen  
When I approach to God!

(2) Confess Christ by letting His fair image be seen upon you. Let His name be on your forehead. Let men see in you a true copy, however imperfect, of . . .  
His kindness,  
His holiness,  
His prayerfulness,  
His meekness,  
His justice,  
His truth, and  
His integrity.

Without this, all other ways of confessing Christ will rather do harm than good.

A few words from an old writer tell of the life that each Christian must strive after. "A sanctified person is holy in a continued course: he walks with God; he applies himself to keep the commandments continually. ([Psalm 119:112](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.112).) He is not holy upon extraordinary occasions — his duties are not like a miser's feast, all at one time, nothing at another.

"He is not holy by fits and starts; upon a rainy day reading only; moved passionately with a powerful sermon; trembling for the present — and then following bribery, like Felix. At the first coming on to profession seething hot — but after awhile lukewarm — then ice-cold; slashing with Peter at the first — and shortly after flying and denying. His infirmities and falls are but rare — but his holiness is constant. His goodness is not like the 'morning cloud and early dew' ([Hosea 6:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Hos 6.4)). His religion is not operative in company — and silent in secret. He is not like water, that conforms itself to the shape of everything into which it is poured; or like a picture, which looks every way. His religion does not leave him at the church doors — he retains his purity wherever he lives.

"He has a principle, like a fountain within him, that supplies him in the time of drought; not like a splash of water, licked up with an hour's heat of the sun. The music allures him not — the furnace affrights him not from God."

(3) Confess Christ by leaving scenes of a doubtful character. If it is your great desire to walk closely with God, your feet will scarcely be found treading that perilous border-land which has been found so destructive to many souls.

If there were a path on a high cliff where constantly the ground was giving way and many had lost their lives — it would not be wise to adventure there in the hope that you might pass over it in safety.

Just so, if there are places from which by common consent the name of Christ and religion is banished, if you would confess Christ — you must either stay away, or go with the express object of bearing witness there for Him in the face of all defamation and ridicule.

This was once done by a young officer. He had found the Savior, and before he left such scenes forever, he determined to go and bear a parting testimony to those with whom he had often mingled. It was a sore trial to him, but in Christ's name he went as he had purposed, and there spoke boldly for the Master whose service he had entered.

(4) Confess Christ by refusing to make any close and intimate friendship with one who is a stranger to God. I am not speaking of the necessary relations we must often have with those of our kin, or of the courtesy and kindness which Christians should manifest to all. But we must take heed not to choose as intimate companions those who will dishonor the Name we love, or place a hindrance in our path to Heaven.

More especially must young Christians refuse to take one in the closest of all bonds, who does not love the Savior. "Only in the Lord" is the limit which God Himself has placed on such engagements.

(5) Confess Christ by taking an open Bible for your **standard**. Hedley Vicars thus took his place as a brave soldier of the Cross. His old companions soon discovered the ground of his consolation and the rule of his life. The Word of God was on his table and in his heart, and to this he ever turned for guidance and for strength. Follow his example. Lay aside any book whose teaching is opposed to it, unless you prayerfully read it for some special object, that you may the better be able to meet the difficulties of others. Honor the Word of God. It will stand forever. Heaven and earth shall pass away — but this Word shall never pass away.

(6) Hold fast by truths that for a season may be unpopular. The current of popular opinion just now runs very strong in directions that carry men far away from plain Gospel teaching. Some are carried away by a view that denies the supernatural and forbids God to hear the prayers of His children. Others are drawn in by services of a very extreme character, and by teaching that savors more of the Romish than the English Church. But we must hold fast by the old truths and determine still to walk in the old paths . . .  
the supreme importance of heart religion,  
the free justification of a sinner by faith,  
the authority of Holy Scripture as the final appeal,  
the efficacy of believing prayer,  
the peril of idolatry wherever it is found —  
such truths as these we must never let go.

(7) We must frequent regularly Christian ordinances. We ought not only to go to Church or the Lord's Supper, that we may obtain help and strength, but we ought to go also that we may honor the Lord who has appointed them. We there confess His name. In the sight of a world that denies Christ, we profess our faith in Him, and that our whole trust is in His finished work. We openly proclaim that we believe in His dying love and in His glorious resurrection, and that we look for Him to come hereafter as Judge of the living and the dead.

(8) We may sometimes confess Christ by **silence**. A question is put to you with an oath, or with some expression or word that is distinctly profane. What should you do? Perhaps the very best thing is to answer not a word. Say nothing. Press your lips together and be as silent as a statue. This may awaken a thought sometimes, and may do more good than many words.

(9) Confess Christ by kind, persuasive words, to draw those about you to Christ. There are very many around us on all sides who have a longing for something better than they possess, and if the word be only spoken in a tender, gentle spirit — they will gladly listen.

Strive to feel deeply for those who are yet without Christ, and then out of a compassionate heart, tell of His love.

In the railway train, in the friendly walk, when some business matter has been settled, when you have a quiet moment with a servant — tell of Jesus and His kindness to yourself, and how ready He is to save all who turn to Him.

In the year 1864, a Christian in South India made a resolution that he would never let a day pass without speaking to at least two people about their eternal interests. In the year 1871 he was able to write to a friend that he believed that resolution had been faithfully kept, and that for above seven years, no day had passed without his having been able in some way thus to confess Christ. Is not here an example for all Christians?

(10) Confess Christ sometimes by a bold and fearless step. It was a bold step when Christ took the scourge and drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple. And though we are not, as He did, to act as judges — yet there are special times when we ought to act as boldly and fearlessly.

A Missionary in India heard one morning a fearful oath from the tent of an officer. Caution said, "You have nothing to do with it — it will bring you into trouble to say anything." But faith and courage said, "Go and reprove that sin!" After a severe mental struggle he went to the tent and spoke to the officer. He did it wisely — yet faithfully, and before he left he received the thanks of the officer to whom he had spoken. Within a few weeks he heard of the officer's death, and he had some ground for hoping that the message he had given had not been lost.

Another fact. I have read of four young men who were living wicked, profligate lives. One of them heard God's message, and then went and said to his companions, "I will tell you how it is. I think if we go on living as we are living now, we shall come to a very awful end." His companions laughed — but they thought of it, and two of these men ended by becoming ministers of Christ. Be ready, when occasion calls for it, to take up your cross in this way.

Speak out! If you are anxious and distressed about your soul, and can find no peace — go and ask counsel of a godly minister. If you feel you have been doing wrong in any matter — go and openly confess it. If you see any glaring evil — take your stand against it, and who knows but you may be able to check it!

(11) Confess Christ by the pen and by the press. Write letters to those whom you may be able to influence. Carefully examine the publications, tracts, and books, small and great, which you may think most likely to do good — and then scatter, as good seed, those you value most — and perhaps, in numberless homes, you may be speaking in this way words that may do infinite good.

It is impossible to over-estimate the vast influence of the press, and in every way that it is available let us employ it in Christ's service. A lady gave me, a short time ago, a £5 note to spend in this way; and such an amount, or far less, may bring a message for Christ into thousands of homes.

And let me add, how blessed will be the effect, if in these, or any other ways, you truly confess Christ.

I would imagine a young reader of these pages, and you begin your Christian course with a humble determination to speak for Christ. You search out means, day after day, in a quiet prayerful way, to do good:  
you drop a word here and a word there,  
you lend a book to a friend,  
you give a tract to a stranger,  
you utter a kindly warning against a sin you witness.

You now and then have to take a more decided step, and perhaps risk the favor of some whom you love — and withal, men see that it is a reality with you, because your daily walk and temper and conversation is in accordance with your words and efforts.

What will be the sure result? I speak not of the glorious crown which the Lord will give you at His appearing — but think of the numbers to whom you may prove a blessing. If God should spare your life for a few years, the blessing probably may reach thousands, or tens of thousands.

A sinner brought back to God,  
a falling one upheld,  
a backslider restored,  
a mourner comforted,  
a Christian edified —  
thus, one by one, will a goodly host be found at last to whom in Christ's name you have ministered the word of life.

And that you may be able thus to confess Christ, remember that it is only in His strength that you can do so. Let your eye be fixed on Him. Look to Him for the ever-present grace and help of the Holy Spirit the Comforter. Thus shall your heart be strengthened and your lips be touched — and you shall be enabled without fear to witness for Christ.

The Feast of Blessing, and  
the Grace of the Comforter

It is of great importance for Christians ever to bear in mind that in every part of the Christian life, the Holy Spirit is the great agent and worker in the soul. It is the office of the Spirit . . .  
to convince of sin,  
to awake sleeping, careless ones,  
to enlighten the eyes of the understanding,  
to see the glory of Christ,  
to renew, to teach, to sanctify and to perfect believers in the likeness of the Son of God. And this is true with respect to all ordinances. Divine worship in the sanctuary, baptism, the Lord's Supper — all are profitable in proportion to the grace of the Holy Spirit, granted in answer to fervent and believing prayer.

The ordinances of Christ are golden pitchers, but without the living water they bring no refreshment to the soul. Let us think of this with reference to that ordinance which Christ appointed on the eve of His death for the comfort and strengthening of His people in all ages.

We must remember that all due preparation for partaking of the Lord's Supper is the fruit of the operation of the Divine Spirit. There may be a formal preparation for a few days previously, by repetition of certain prayers — but unless the Holy Spirit touches the heart, there can be no real profit.

Three things are especially needful — repentance, faith, and love. But whence comes this threefold cord of Christian grace?

Whence, but from the Holy Spirit, comes the spirit of true PENITENCE, the broken heart, the humbling sense of our unworthiness and our deficiencies, the godly sorrow that mourns for having crucified the Lord. Yes, it is His work to break up the fallow ground of our hard and strong hearts, to bring us in lowliness and contrition to His footstool, there to confess our manifold iniquities.

Whence, too, but from the same Spirit comes the FAITH, the trust, that looks up for mercy and salvation to our crucified and risen Savior?

Whence also comes that heaven-born LOVE that seeks not her own, that envies not, that bears all things, believes all things, endures all things?

Surely all these are wrought by this one and self-same Spirit, whose fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

Dear reader, carry this thought with you as a practical suggestion, before next you draw near to the Lord's table. Plead with God in Christ's name, for the Comforter very especially to prepare your heart. Look for the Spirit to awaken within you self-renunciation, lowly trust, and true love.

But let us pass on to the work of the Holy Spirit, making the Lord's Supper effectual for the purpose of its institution. Perhaps if we look at it in three lights, each advancing a step beyond the former, we may see the blessings which Christ purposed, and in each of them the need we have for the grace of the Spirit.

We are to regard this Sacrament as appointed to awaken REMEMBRANCE of Jesus and His atoning sacrifice. It was given that we should always remember the exceeding great love of our Master and only Savior Jesus Christ thus dying for us, and the innumerable benefits which by His precious blood-shedding He has obtained for us.

The remembrance of past events may be of two kinds. It may be such as to awaken no emotion, no joy, no sorrow, nor even to cause any lively interest. Such is the storing up in the memory certain facts or dates in our school-days, which may be useful as landmarks in the study of history or science.

But remembrance may be of a very different character. It may stir the soul to its depths. It may awaken the feeling of anger or remorse, of revenge or of grief. Such was the case when an Eastern Monarch bade a servant stand behind his chair and say, "Sire, remember the Athenians!" desiring thus to kindle afresh his determination to avenge the wrong they had done him. Such is the feeling of many a Frenchman in looking back to the conflict between his country and Germany. Such was the remembrance of Peter as he thought of his sin in denying his Lord.

On the other hand, the remembrance may arouse the intensest feeling of joy, or gratitude, or hope, or love. You may remember some act of self-sacrifice on the part of a friend, which saved your life or averted some great calamity. You may think of a parent now lying at rest in a quiet grave; and perchance the recollection of a mother's hand placed on your head, or of her prayers or kindness, may have been a stay in many an hour of sorrow or temptation.

Now of this latter kind, awakening the very deepest feeling, is the remembrance which Christ would have us nourish of Himself and His dying love. It is not a mere recollection — something cold as starlight or moonlight, something passing through the chambers of the memory and leaving no impression behind — but a remembrance . . .  
that has an effectual operation,  
that stirs up deep and lasting emotion,  
that kindles sorrow for sin, repentance, lively gratitude and hope and confidence,  
that leads to active effort in Christ's service.

Now whence can arise such lively remembrance as this? How can such be kindled afresh within us as we draw near to the Table of our Lord? How can we avoid the inroads of that insidious formalism, which, like the dead flies which spoil the precious ointment — is apt to creep in and spoil our holiest services?

Surely it must be the presence of the Holy Spirit. He who appointed this feast to be the great act of remembrance — also promised the Comforter as the Remembrancer of His Church. ([John 14:26](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/John 14.26).) "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

It is thus the Spirit of truth which testifies of Jesus to the soul, bringing back to the soul, in living, effectual remembrance, all the mercy and love of the Redeemer; all that He has said and all that He has done for us, and especially the marvelous loving-kindness of the cross, and all the benefits which thus He has purchased for us. This lively remembrance of Christ is very beautifully expressed in a hymn written by the first Hindu convert in Burmah, and translated into English:

O you, my soul, forget no more  
The Friend who all your sorrows bore.  
Let every idol be forgot,  
But Him, my soul, forget you not!

Renounce your works and ways with grief,  
And fly to this Divine relief,  
Nor Him forget who left His throne  
And for your life gave up His own.

Eternal truth and mercy shine  
In Him, and He Himself is thine:  
And can you then, with sin beset,  
Such charms, such matchless charms forget?

Oh no! Until life itself depart,  
His name shall cheer and warm my heart;  
And lisping this, from earth I'll rise,  
And join the chorus of the skies!

But we take another step. The Lord's Supper is not only a remembrance of Christ and His precious death — but it is SUPPING with Christ. Remembrance is of one absent — but we sit down to sup with one who is present, near at hand, and making himself known to us by word and deed.

We recall the scene at Emmaus. The two disciples meet with the Lord, though at first unknown to them. He converses with them. At their request He goes in and sits down with them at their evening meal. And so their hearts burn within them as they hearken to His loving words.

It is thus with Christ and His people now. Though in His glorified body He is exalted to the right hand of the glory of God — yet spiritually, He is very near to His own. "The world sees Me no more, but you see Me." "If any man keeps my sayings ... I will manifest myself to him."

In Jewish families, I have read that at certain ordinances a chair is placed for the Prophet Elijah. They believe, that though invisible, he is present with them.

This is really true of Christ. A young friend was speaking of her joy in Christ, and said that she could rest happily at night "because she felt Jesus was close by." I was struck with the expression, because it is so true. He is "close by" every one of His redeemed people. This is very especially true at such an ordinance as we refer to. It is indeed a Holy Communion — a Holy Communion between Christ and His people, and also between Christians one with the other.

But how can this fellowship and communion with Christ be realized? It is not to be obtained by any mere general considerations that the Lord is everywhere present — nor is it by palming upon our minds strange theories of some miraculous presence through the consecrating words of the priest.

Nay, it is in the fellowship of the Spirit that we can realize fellowship with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit making that a reality to the soul, which would otherwise be a truth held only by mere intellectual conviction. It is when the Comforter dwells in us, that we can rejoice in the fufilment of the promise, that the Father and Son come to us and make their abode with us.

And then, as we draw near and kneel down together at that solemn hour, if we have sought the special aid of the Spirit, we may look for it that He will enable us to see and feel a Savior in our hearts, revealing His everlasting love and filling the heart with sweet and holy joy.

But we go one step further. Not only is there a remembrance of Christ, but supping with Christ. Not only a supping with Christ, but a FEEDING on Christ.

In an ordinary feast we sit down with a friend and partake of the refreshment provided. But in this feast, not only do we sit down with Christ — but He gives Himself to be our spiritual food and sustenance in that Holy Sacrament. The inward part or thing signified in the Lord's Supper is the body and blood of Christ — which are truly and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper.

But we inquire how is this? What is this partaking of the body and blood of Christ? In the Romish Church we are taught that it is by the elements being changed by the word of the priest. In a letter I once had from a priest of that Church, he wrote: "I receive Christ on my tongue, in my mouth, and thus into my breast."

The teaching of our Church is the very opposite to this. The change of elements cannot be proved by holy writ — it overthrows the nature of a sacrament and has given occasion to many superstitions.

Yet the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive that Holy Sacrament, for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood.

But what is meant by spiritually eating Christ's flesh? Does it mean that in some spiritual, supernatural way, the bread conveys with it the flesh of Christ to my soul? Or does it mean that all true feeding on Christ is in the region of the inner spirit?

Again, I ask this question of our Church. I go to the words with which the bread is given to each communicant. "May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on Him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving."

Look carefully at this language. "The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you." The body of Christ, which preserves the soul, is the body which more than eighteen centuries ago was given for us, to suffer on the cross. Then it is said, "Take and eat this in remembrance of that crucified body" — this bread is to put you in mind of the body which was nailed to the cross for you. "And feed on Him" — not feed on this bread, but "feed on Him" who died. "In your heart" — not by your mouth. "By faith" — not by any bodily reception — "by faith with thanksgiving."

Whereas many now endeavor to confound the body which was crucified, with the bread which is eaten; and the faith which really receives Christ, with the partaking of the elements — it is scarcely possible to find any language which more distinctly shows the difference between them, than these words in our service.

But where is there the least shadow of foundation in Holy Scripture for teaching that the bread and wine is in any way changed, except in its use and purpose? It is said that our Lord's words, "This is my body," "This is my blood," settle the question, and that we must simply take them as they stand, and then leave it.

But words are only the signs of the inward meaning of the person who utters them; and must we not endeavor to lay hold on this, rather than rest in the words themselves? Is it not a fact that our Lord's teaching, from first to last, was ever by figure and parable, an earthly type or shadow, thus leading on His disciples to inquiry and thought? Did not those who took the simple, surface meaning of such parabolic expressions, always err? If you take any other portion of the New Testament, and treat such like sayings in the same way, do you not reduce them to a palpable absurdity? Why then take Christ's word in this instance and interpret it in a wholly different way? Look how men erred by taking Christ's words literally. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up;" "You must be born again;" "Our friend Lazarus sleeps;" "Beware of the leaven of Herod;" "I have meat to eat that you know not of;" "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst again ;" "He who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one;" "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Everyone of these expressions was taken in its literal meaning, and it proved to be a mistaken view of our Lord's intention in uttering it.

Look again at numbers more of similar expressions, which must be taken figuratively, or with considerable variations from their surface meaning:  
"Let the dead bury their dead;"  
"I will make you fishers of men;"  
"If your eye offends you pluck it out;"  
"If any man come after Me, and hates not father," etc.;  
"The good seed are the children of the kingdom;"  
"The tares are the children of the wicked one,"  
"The King shall set the sheep on the right hand and the goats on the left."

Such expressions abound everywhere in the Gospel, and can only be understood by looking underneath for the thought which explains them. Study the whole of the New Testament. See how the elements of figure and emblem and parable abound in every page. And then, I believe, you will have no doubt whatever as to the meaning of our Lord's words. They will shine out as clear as sunlight.

The Savior, on the night before His sufferings, takes into His hand the bread, and breaks it, and gives it to each one, saying, "Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." As if He would say, "See here, in type and figure, my sacred body. Now, you see it whole, active, living — but as I break this bread before your eyes, so shall you shortly see this body of mine, bruised, wounded, torn, broken. The nails shall tears these hands and feet; the cruel scourge shall lacerate this form; the spear shall pierce this side. And it is all for you. Others may give you other gifts, but I give you myself, my body, to bleed and die for your salvation. And whenever you eat this bread, think of my dying love, and nourish your souls by the remembrance of all that I have suffered for you."

So too was it when our Lord gave the cup: "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins." As if He would say, "You know how in olden times the blood was perpetually shed. Moses took the blood of beasts and sprinkled both the book and the people. Aaron went into the holy place every year with the blood of others. But all this could never save you, for the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. But now I make a new covenant with you. I make a covenant of gifts and promises. I offer you complete and free forgiveness. And this cup, this wine, tells you of that precious blood which seals that covenant, and which tomorrow shall be shed for the remission of sins — and shall henceforth be a stream of salvation for the cleansing of all believing souls."

Such, I believe, was the lesson Christ intended to teach. He desired them to see, as before their eyes, that great work which would bring salvation to His Church. And then He would have them again and again remember it for their everlasting comfort.

We see, then, that it is by no change in the elements that we feed on Christ. It is only by the heart partaking in faith of Christ and all the benefits of His death. The soul can only feed on truth, and it is the truth as it is in Jesus that really strengthens and nourishes.

Ignorance is the soul's famine.

Error is the soul's poison.

Truth is the soul's true food and support.

Hence we see again how it is the work of the Spirit which brings the true comfort and profit of this sacrament. Our Lord has said: "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." And again, "As the Father has sent Me, and I live by the Father, even so he who eats Me, he shall live by Me."

This spiritual feeding on Christ crucified, through the knowledge of His truth, brings unspeakable benefit. There is a . . .  
refreshment to the weary and heavy laden;  
strengthening of the weak;  
satisfaction of the longing soul which nothing else can give.

But it is all the work of the Holy Spirit. We may partake of the bread physically — but it is the Spirit that enables us to feed on Christ by faith. We may drink of the wine — but it is the Spirit alone that satisfies the thirsty spirit with a real rest of conscience in the blood of the cross.

It is the Spirit who gives a lasting consolation in those views of Christ's death which uphold and strengthen the Christian pilgrim both in life and in death. It is thus we see the fathomless well of love in His heart; for "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." It is thus we see the high dignity to which those rise who are washed in that blood; for He has loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and our Father!

It is thus we are upheld in daily toil and suffering in His service; for we are "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man," as we learn yet more and more "of the height and depth and breadth and length of the love of Christ" in His atoning death.

It is thus we can face without fear the last enemy; for the Spirit bears witness to the soul that Christ is near, and His presence is everlasting life.

Dear Christian, I would ask you to carry away TWO LESSONS from our consideration of this subject.

1. Never disregard our Lord's command, and refuse His loving invitation to draw near to His table. Remember that in doing so, you dishonor the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

You dishonor Christ — for you disobey His command, and turn away from an ordinance which He has appointed for your spiritual welfare. If it was not needful for you, He would not have appointed it — but He who knows all your temptations and infirmities, has given it as an hour of sweet and holy retirement, and has promised there to meet with you and bless you with His presence and love. Surely it is the part of obedience, as well as of true affection, to value so precious a means of grace.

But in refusing to come, you dishonor the Father also; for he who honors not the Son, "honors not the Father who has sent Him."

And so likewise you grieve and dishonor the Spirit of God; for He delights to testify of Jesus, and He waits to sanctify this feast of remembrance by His own grace and power. He is ready there . . .  
to call to your remembrance the Savior's love,  
to quicken your apprehension of His nearness to you,  
to nourish your soul with believing views of His work.

Let it therefore be reckoned your high privilege, as well as your bounden duty, thus to manifest your love to your Divine Master. Never turn away from His table when you can avoid it; neither come in a cold and formal spirit. Draw near with an earnest longing . . .  
for clearer light,  
for more fervent love, and  
for more entire devotedness to Christ and His work.

2. Then, one other lesson. Be sure there can be no feeding on Christ except in the heart; none in the heart but by faith; and no exercise of living, soul-reviving, soul-strengthening faith, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Hence let us draw near in the power of the Spirit.

Let us humbly ask and earnestly expect the Spirit to be with us whenever we thus meet and desire to remember Christ.

Let us turn our thoughts from the elements of which we partake, to those great realities to which they point us.

Let us look back to Christ as crucified on the cross for us.

Let us look upward to Him as now exalted to the right hand of God, and believe that He is indeed present in the midst of us to bless.

Let us look forward to His glorious appearing, when all true Christians shall meet at His marriage feast!

And let us look, meanwhile, for His Spirit to bring Him to us yet nearer and closer day by day, and thus to enable us to rejoice in Him with joy unspeakable and full of glory!

On Companions and Books

No truth is more important for the young Christian to remember, than that we become like those with whom we associate. We gain more and more resemblance to those with whom we are intimate. We insensibly catch their spirit and their tone of mind. It is written, "He who walks with wise men shall be wise — but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." [Proverbs 13:20](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Prov 13.20). "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character!" 1 Corinthians 15:33

Rehoboam takes counsel with the young rogues, and accepting their advice, he loses a large part of his kingdom. Jehoshaphat makes an alliance with King Ahab — disaster and defeat follow, and God sends him the solemn reproof: "Should you help the ungodly, and love those who hate the Lord?"

On the other hand, Ruth joins herself to Naomi and the people of God, and gains a rich blessing. Nathanael joins company with Philip, and finds a Savior.

The lesson is plain. Be careful in the choice of friends! Do not enter into the path of the wicked. As you have opportunity, make companions of such as love and fear God. It was the spirit of the man after God's own heart.

"I hate the work of them that turn aside . . . I will not know a wicked person. . . . My eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me. He who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me." ([Psalm 101:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 101.3), [4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm 101.4), [6](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm 101.6).) "Depart from me, you evil-doers! I will keep the commandments of my God I am a companion of all those who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts." ([Psalm 119:115](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps 119.115), [63](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm 119.63).)

But side by side with this lesson we may learn another. We may well apply this truth to the BOOKS we should read. Where do we find the wisest thoughts of the wisest men? Where do we find the cream of that intellectual or spiritual power which a man may possess? Is it not in their writings? Take off your shelf the work of some godly man who lived a century ago, and do you not at once make him your companion, though he may long have been slumbering in the grave? Take up a thoughtful magazine, and read an article written by some servant of Christ who may be living hundreds of miles distant, and whose face you never expect to see in the flesh — and is he not in some sense numbered among the friends you value?

You may not often be able to find as your daily friend and counselor — one as true and wise and helpful as you would desire; but can you not by reading good books attain in some measure your object? Can you not find always, if you search for it, a book that will teach you and strengthen your hands?

And there is another advantage in these companions. We can have their society when we will. There are friends who come and talk with us — when we would rather be alone, or when we feel we ought to be about our work. And at other times we desire their presence, but they are far away. But we can always choose our time for conversing with our friend on the shelf. The time in which we have his company need not either be too long or too short. Let us consider then what sort of companions it is well to choose, and then apply this to the books we read.

First of all, we may be sure of this — that it is wise to choose as companions, such only as are of pure mind, sound principle, and whose conversation will not harm those who listen to it .

Some companions are very clever, very fascinating, sparkling with wit and life, and it even may be with kindliness of nature — and yet for all this, their influence is against all right feeling and Christian holiness. It is hard to resist their advances, or to refuse an invitation from them — and yet all the while a voice within tells us it is dangerous to be with them — their influence is all in the wrong direction; it is away from purity, from the love of God, from the path of faithful obedience to the Divine will. Their bands may be silken, but they are the bands of Delilah, for they bind the soul to its ruin! Their voice may be sweet, but it is the voice of the Syren that would draw you to the fatal island, where escape is well-near impossible.

Dear reader, is this a danger to which you are exposed? Have you a friend who makes light of spiritual things, and whose words leave many a taint of evil on your soul? What ought you to do?

Ought you most to regard Christ — or your friend? If you desire to be loyal to the Great Captain of your salvation — then take a bold stand. Don't let things insensibly take their course, until one by one you give up your own decided convictions. Act courteously, act kindly and considerately, but act firmly.

Speak out boldly when anything is spoken to the dishonor of Christ's name. Write a letter to your friend, and say how much you have been pained, and that you dare not be friends with one who speaks against the Name you love. Earnestly plead with your friend to turn at once to the Lord, and then you will rejoice to help each other on the way to Zion.

Never mind the pain it may give you to write the letter, or to speak the faithful word; with Christ by your side, you are stronger than any ungodly companion who may be much older or more clever than yourself. Perhaps your courage and faithfulness may win a soul for Christ. Perhaps it may break the friendship, and make your friend no longer care for your society. In either case it will do you good and glorify God, and you will have a fresh testimony in your own heart as to the reality of your faith in Christ.

That which is true of companions, is equally so of books. Much that is written is very amusing, very attractive — but it is very dangerous. It may please the imagination — but it pollutes and enervates the mind. It tends to destroy not only vital religion, but even common morality. It glosses over the most deadly vices with fair names, and palliates social evils that utterly ruin the peace of families, and debase and corrupt nations.

I have often thought of the dream of John Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press. He was just about to put forward his invention of the printing press, and it seemed to him as if an angel came and spoke to him:

"John Gutenberg, you have made your name immortal — but at what a cost! Think well what you are doing! The ungodly are many more than the godly. Your work will but multiply their blasphemies and lies. You have uncovered the bottomless pit — and a swarm of seducing spirits shall henceforth come out and turn earth into Hell. Oh think of millions of souls corrupted by your achievement. See the poison of fiends distilled into the souls of boys and girls, making them old in the experience of sin! See that mother weeping over her depraved son, and that grey-haired father hiding his face from his daughter's shame. Destroy your press, for it shall be the pander of blasphemy and lust! Destroy it, and forget it! Forbear, by multiplying the resources of the wicked, to make yourself through all ages the partaker of their crimes!"

Gutenberg was about to destroy his invention, but he reflected that the gifts of God, though perilous, are never bad, and that he might be helping the intellect and wisdom which God had given to man to gain fresh help and opportunity for good. So he proceeded with his work, and the first book that went forth from his press was a portion of the Holy Scriptures.

But, alas, the dream has come too true! Tens of thousands of publications, small and great, are issuing from the press which spread the contagion of evil on every side. Many a school boy has lost irretrievably the tone and purity of his mind by such reading. Many a girl has secretly read such a book, and it has left its stain on her for life — her dress may be fair and white, but the spot on the inner robe of purity abides.

Amidst the vast amount of printed matter sent forth daily, it is to be feared that the evil sadly exceeds the good. None can tell how the minds of multitudes are corrupted by the publications that they peruse. Therefore, my friend, be careful what you read!

It is true that "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." But it is no less true that as a man reads — so very much will he think. Mind, memory, conscience, imagination, will, affection — all will be influenced by that which you read.

The questionable novel, with its picturing of the worst passions of the soul, as is too often the case — ought not to be devoured as if it would leave no bad impression behind. I know quite well, that we all need recreation, but it is not genuine recreation to spend hour after hour pouring over that which is trashy, nonsensical, and worse — and will only unfit you for anything higher and holier.

A great responsibility rests upon parents with respect to this matter. You would be very careful never to let poison be so exposed in your house that by any chance your children would be likely to touch it. But is there not worse poison than that which endangers life? And ought you not to take heed that no such books are in your home as may prove likely to injure the souls of your children.

And if, dear reader, you should have formed the habit of reading such light and injurious books or publications — is it not wise at once to cast them aside? It may be difficult for you at first to substitute other reading, but in the end you will be abundantly recompensed for the effort, in the real profit and solid enjoyment afforded by the perusal of works of a higher character.

If such books as I have referred to are in your house, follow the example of the Ephesians. They burned their bad books publicly, though the price of them was fifty thousand pieces of silver. ([Acts 19:19](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts 19.19))

A good companion is one of a thoughtful spirit, and who has a mind well stored with useful information. Such a friend as this is invaluable. If you desire to think out matters of importance that occur around you, or subjects that you feel a difficulty in comprehending, or if you know that you have but stood on the shore of the great ocean of truth — and yet would gladly learn something more, you will find half an hour's talk with such a one will often help you. It may set a stone rolling that may be long before it rest. It may suggest a new view of some truth that may give you matter for thought for weeks or years. It may give you a key to unlock some difficult problem which has often perplexed you.

It is the same with the perusal of books containing real thought, or giving you reliable information. Such books are worth reading, and bring lasting benefit. They help you in any station of life. They fit you for more usefulness in your own home, and in the Church of God. They win for you the friendship of those who find you can help them as they can help you. They keep the mind fresh and alive, and prevent your being engrossed with little petty cares and duties which would otherwise lower the whole tone of your mind.

It is a good thing to cultivate a taste for this kind of reading — the tension of mind, which it requires, is very wholesome discipline.

Many an hour is wasted over books of fiction, or over every item in the daily newspaper, which might be far better spent. If men lived upon some light delicacies, and never took good nourishing food, what health could they expect to enjoy? And if your reading is merely of a aimless character, what mental or intellectual power can you look for?

The best companion is one who is a lover of God and His truth. A Christian friend is worth gold; yes, is a precious diamond. If he has faults, remember you have many also, and bear with them for the grace that is in Him. "A diamond with a flaw, is better than a pebble without one."

How much David was strengthened by the friendship of Jonathan. We read that when in the days of Malachi, those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another, the Lord hearkened and heard it.

The two friends on the road to Emmaus were speaking together of their Master, when He joined Himself to them and made their hearts burn within them. Such Christian friendship is one of the sweetest privileges a follower of Christ can enjoy on earth, and should be cultivated with the utmost care.

And here we discover the sort of reading that is of all the most desirable. We all want help heavenward. Around us we find temptations and snares which turn our feet aside from the narrow path: business, and the example of those we mingle with in society, and our own treacherous hearts — all these have a downward tendency. But God provides many aids to our faith, and among them Christian books have an important place. Often the reading of some such book has been the turning-point for good in the life of a young person. We often hear of the genealogies of good men, but it is interesting to trace the genealogy of a good book.

Sibbe's "Bruised Reed" was the means used of God for the conversion of Richard Baxter.

Richard Baxter wrote "The Saint's Rest," the reading of which led to the conversion of Dr. Doddridge.

Dr. Doddridge wrote "The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," which became a blessing to William Wilberforce.

William Wilberforce wrote "The Practical View of Christianity," which touched the heart of Legh Richmond.

Legh Richmond wrote "The Annals of the Poor," which has been one of the most useful books ever written for the young.

Hence we see how a good book has become, not only an instrument of good to many readers, but a parent of successive works, which in succeeding generations have brought blessing to large numbers of readers. I may mention also an interesting fact which has lately come to my knowledge, and for which I thank Him who can use the simplest agencies and the weakest instruments for His own glory and the good of souls.

Some twelve years ago, a young Hindu of twelve years of age left a village in Tinnevelly, near Palamcottah, and went to seek a living in Ceylon. As his prospects were not very promising, he went about to several places, and at last was cajoled by a party, who carried him off to Penang, in China, and bound him down to servitude for two years. While there, he accidentally saw a little book, "Not Your Own," translated into Tamil by the Rev. E. Sargent, and purchased it, read it, and by the Holy Spirit he was brought to the Lord Jesus and became His faithful child.

He has now gone back to his native village, and the native pastor there has been greatly rejoiced at the prayerful and godly example he is setting before all. And if, sometimes, as in this instance, we see God using a little book to awaken and convert a soul to Himself, still more frequently does He use a similar instrumentality in guiding those that are seeking Him, and in strengthening and confirming weak believers in the faith.

About twenty-seven years ago, a young friend gave me a copy of "Come to Jesus," and in the plain and Scriptural way in which Christ is set forth as the only hope of the sinner, I found exceeding help in dispelling doubt and fear.

In the biographies of earnest Christians, especially of such as have worked hard in the mission field, or in spheres of great difficulty at home, we often have an agency of the first importance in raising up fresh workers in the Lord's harvest field. The lives of David Brainerd, Henry Martyn, and in later years, the lives of noble Duncan Matheson, and the story of the martyr Church of Madagascar — have been eminently useful in quickening the zeal of Christians in the work of the Lord. What a debt of gratitude also does many an invalid owe to books which take the place of the preached Gospel, and unfold the unsearchable riches of Christ in the sick chamber.

But never should any book, however excellent, take the place of the Word itself, or occupy the time that ought to be given to its study. All other books of Christian teaching are only valuable as they bring you back to the fountain-head.

Make the Book of God your chief and most intimate companion. Become well acquainted with every portion of this rich treasury of wisdom and consolation. It will be your safeguard against error on the right hand and on the left. When you enter fully into its spirit, and can see its various doctrines as revealed throughout its pages, you will instinctively shrink from teaching that undermines or denies them. It will be your safeguard against infidelity, in whatever shape it may meet you.

A Bible loved, and well studied, shines, like the sun, by its own light. The comfort and help which it affords is an evidence of its Divine origin which cannot be gainsaid.

And, remember, that when all other reading has lost its attraction, when heart-breaking sorrow, or approaching death, shall cast into the shade all mere human knowledge — this bright candle of the Lord shall illumine the darkness, and give a foretaste of the joy of that home of which the Lord Himself is the everlasting light.

One word more. Be not selfish in the enjoyment of this privilege of reading. Think of others; think of those who are too poor to obtain this help; think of hospitals, jails, and the houses of the needy. Give, or lend books or periodicals that may be likely to do good. Think also of those in the same station of life as yourself. Lend from your own library, from time to time, a book to a sick neighbor, or to one whose mind may be open to serious impressions.

Let Christmas, New Year, Birthday, or Marriage presents, take the shape of a really valuable book. Think especially of the young. Much that is very dangerous is cast in their way — do your best to counteract this by something that will help them. What a large number of young people are indebted to the "Pathway of Safety," for great assistance in their after course; and how many a young woman has found Richmond's "Annals of the Poor," a light to guide her to the Savior.

Sow diligently in this way the good seed, and pray that the Spirit of God may water it with the dew of His blessing. "Cast your bread upon the waters — and you shall find it after many days."

The Great Physician and His Patients

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." [Matthew 9:10-12](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt 9.10-12)

No sooner did Matthew, the Publican, forsake all and follow Christ, than he assembled together old friends and companions, and invited Christ to come and sit down in the midst of them. Nor was Christ unwilling — it was exactly the work in which He delighted. Where, above all places, should a physician be found, but among the sick? And where should He be found who came to heal men's souls, but where such were met who most needed His help?

Of course, the Pharisees misunderstand and object: "Why does your Master sit down with Publicans and sinners?" "Because they most need my help and salvation, and because for such I came into the world," was the spirit of our Lord's reply. "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

I know nothing that has oftener been a thought of help to me, than this office of Christ to be the Physician of His people. It may likewise prove a message of consolation to some who read these pages — it may be a "step across" some stream of fear or unbelief; and may give you a fresh view of the rich fullness of grace and blessing in Christ.

It is impossible to over-estimate the fearful character of that malady of sin and depravity which Christ comes to heal. It prevails everywhere. It is found in all kingdoms — in all races — in all cities, towns, and villages; it has its victims in every home; it has touched every heart; it brings with it unrest and disquietude; it destroys peace in the heart and peace in the home.

Sin is, moreover, highly infectious — its atmosphere is injurious to those around.

Sin is incurable by all human art or power. The ministers of Christ can reprove sin, and show its awful consequences — but they cannot, by their own efforts, turn one sinner from his way. Parents and teachers can warn the young — but too often all warnings are in vain. The sinner may resolve, and resolve again, to forsake old habits — but the habit of evil proves stronger than his resolution.

But that which cannot be effected by man's power, can be done by the Savior's grace. He is the great Healer. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" Yes, since Christ has been revealed, let none doubt that in Him will be found all that meets the sinner's need.

Christ is a Physician, ever near at hand. In very many cases distance prevents help being obtained in time to save life.

In country villages there are often sudden cases of sickness or accident, and no medical help can be obtained nearer than five, or even eight or ten miles; and so several hours elapse, and it is too late.

On the field of battle, too, how many a soldier has lost his life on this account! The wound might be bound up, and the hemorrhage stayed, if only the surgeon were at hand — but in his absence, death ensues.

But Christ is close at hand to hear the feeblest cry of distress, and to support the wounded and perishing one. Yes, wherever you may be — here at home, or far away on the deep ocean — sorely pained by the fiery darts of the Tempter, or suffering from some willful transgression — yet but lift your eye in humble faith, and you will see Christ by your side, in all tender compassion and love, ready to bind up the broken heart, to forgive the grievous fall, or to restore to you the peace and comfort for which you long. "The Lord is near to those who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him faithfully. The Lord is near to those who are of a broken spirit, and saves such as are of a contrite heart."

Christ is willing to undertake every case without fee. When Christ was on earth, we remember how the woman who had spent her all on many physicians, and had suffered many things and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse — at length came to seek His aid — and she obtained it at once. She had to bring nothing to this Physician; but she touched Him, and at once she was healed of her plague.

And still Jesus heals freely! He asks nothing from us as the price of His ready help. Shall I bring a solitary coin? Shall I bring a few good works, a few good prayers or feelings — and then expect Christ will reward me by granting forgiveness and grace? Not so. Come as you are! Nay, if you are too helpless, too paralyzed by sin's power to move a step, as you are too poor to offer anything — still, a look, a longing, a sigh, a breathing after Him — will not be lost.

See the man lying on the road to Jericho. The thieves had robbed him of all he possessed; they had sorely wounded him, leaving him half dead — he lay helpless in his blood. But the good Samaritan passed by — he saw him; he had compassion; he undertook his case. What could the man do, but thankfully receive the kindness that the Samaritan did for him? He had no money, no strength, no power to move. But the good Samaritan did all. He gave the healing remedies, and applied them; he carried him along on his own animal; he watched over him during his recovery; he provided for his future necessities.

Even thus is it with the sinner and Christ. We can do nothing — but our Physician can do everything. He finds us robbed of everything by the great Highwayman, and unable to save ourselves. But He does all freely. He takes us as He finds us, and does all that is needful. He heals, nourishes, and cherishes. He is Physician, Nurse, Provider, Bearer, all in one. He expects nothing from us, but that which He first bestows. He leaves not, neither forsakes, such as commit themselves to His care.

In Christ is the most perfect skill to discern the peculiar features of each case. In visiting a Convalescent Hospital, in the north of England, I was much struck with the frequent complaint, "Oh, sir, the doctor here does not understand my illness!" And so many of the patients returned home without any real benefit, because they were strangers to those who had the charge of them, and who therefore could not fully enter into their case. But Christ knows what is in man. He looks right deep into the heart, and in a moment can tell the full extent of the malady. You may feel there is something peculiar in your sin or temptation — something entirely different from that of others — and this very much discourages you. But Christ knows the peculiarity, and He knows how to meet it.

Or it may be that there is a complication of evil. Sometimes, in a case of disease, a complication of various disorders occurs, and tries exceedingly the skill of the Physician. The medicine or remedy given to meet one disorder — may aggravate and increase another. With yourself there may be evil of various kinds. There may be the remembrance of former guilt; a frequent aversion to prayer; a coldness and indifference of heart, that you cannot cast off; and perhaps you are ready to despair.

But Christ sees the working of all this sin and corruption and hardness of heart, and He can counteract it all by His all-sufficient grace. Before you have spoken a word, when you kneel down and cast yourself upon His mercy — He is prepared to forgive and save. Christ knows beforehand all that you are, and cannot fail to support His tempted or afflicted child.

In Christ there is also a Divine power not only to discern, but completely to effect a cure in every case of spiritual disease. How often do men find that the very ablest physicians in the kingdom have no means of doing anything effectually for them. Perhaps you have gone up to London, and have had great expense, and made great efforts to consult some eminent man. But when you have told him everything, and he has carefully examined all the symptoms of your disease, you see a look that tells its own tale; and you find out that all is in vain, and that it is beyond all human art to save your life.

But this thought manifests by contrast, the power of Christ. When He was upon earth, none were sent away unhealed. The blind and the lame, the deaf and the dumb, the palsied and the lepers, those possessed with devils and those laid low with fever — all alike were healed immediately by the touch of Jesus. "The whole multitude sought to touch Him; for virtue went out of Him, and healed them all."

It was a lesson for all time. Thus completely and surely does Jesus restore all who come to Him. He can . . .  
open the eyes long closed in the night of ignorance,  
strengthen those who have yet had no power to walk in God's ways,  
unstop the ear long deaf to the sweet voice of the Gospel,  
teach the prayerless lips to plead with God,  
remove the paralysis of a careless indifference,  
cleanse souls from the leprosy of debasing lusts,  
cast out the evil spirits of envy, and hatred, and unbelief,  
save men from the fever of covetousness, and every evil temper.

His power, when on earth, reached to the very worst cases of disease. The man full of leprosy, and the woman whom other physicians had tried in vain to benefit — both came, and others just as hopeless, and were alike healed. Yes, and I see Jesus day by day saving such as man might reckon beyond the reach of His saving arm.

I have known a man who once, far and wide, was regarded as one of the vilest — a drunkard, a fighter, and much beside. He comes into a school-room on one occasion, and a message was spoken from the Word of God: "When the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has committed, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive." Such was the word that was spoken — and this man obeyed it. He turned from sin to the merciful Savior: he became a new creature; old things passed away, and all things became new. He lived fifteen years a monument of the power and grace of Christ; and now lies in our Wolverhampton Cemetery: and on his tombstone, by his own request, are inscribed the words which led to his conversion.

Nor does any length of time prevent the possibility of Christ saving the sinner. We read of the woman healed after twelve years of suffering; another woman bowed down by her infirmity for eighteen years; the man at the pool bad been lying there eight-and-thirty years; and the man whose eyes were opened by Christ had been blind from his birth.

Thus no lapse of years can hinder the soul, who seeks a Savior, finding help from Him. True it is, that if you now turn from Him, and refuse His grace — it becomes each year, each day, more unlikely you will ever care to seek Him; for the windows of the soul become darkened more and more by willful unbelief. But if now you have the desire to flee straight to Him, He will never reject you, because for many a day you have turned your back upon Him.

Three short but precious words I noticed on the memorial stone of Hetty Bowman, whose writings have been so useful to many; and I learned that they were the last words that ever fell from her lips. "Mighty to save!" Such is the simple message from her grave, and one that may still every fear and comfort every doubting soul.

Perhaps there are none so disposed to give up all for lost, as those who have been drawn back to the world, after having known much of the Savior's love. Perhaps you are feeling this. You see that Christ is able to save those who have been hitherto most careless, or most ungodly; but the aggravation of your sin, is that you turned away from Christ, and have gone back to the mire of sin. You have done much harm to others by this — you have grievously dishonored Christ. But all this is no obstacle to His saving grace. It is the greatest reason for humility — but no reason whatever for despair. Christ has raised up many who have fallen back into heinous sin, and kept them afterward by His grace. Only trust Him, and walk humbly before Him. He will heal your backslidings; He will love you freely and keep you safely to the end.

Christ shows His tender love as our Physician most of all, in that He heals His patients with His own precious blood!

I have read of a General, in olden time, who tore off his clothes on the field of battle to bind up the wounds of his soldiers. But Christ does more:  
He gives Himself to be our medicine!  
He gives His own life-blood to heal our diseases!

Other remedies indeed He employs, as preparatory to this, or as bringing it home to the conscience, or as perfecting His work in those who are saved.  
He sends the rod to awaken and to humble;  
He sends His Word to teach and enlighten;  
He appoints means of grace to sanctify His own redeemed people.

But chief of all is the blood of the cross applied to the conscience by the Spirit of God, and by faith accepted, as the ground of all hope and confidence.

Oh, sinner, what a Physician is yours! What love is this — that He gives His own blood to cleanse and heal your soul!

But the medicine must be taken — or it cannot save. It will not do to look at it, to place it on the table, to speak of its valuable properties. It must be taken by the patient — or he will not recover.

A wealthy man had a little girl laid low with scarlet fever. She was his only daughter, and he would gladly have parted with all his wealth, rather than have lost her. She might have recovered, but it was absolutely necessary that she should take the medicine. But she would not do it — no efforts could succeed in inducing her to do so. So, poor girl, she died, and left a fearful blank in the home where she had been such a bright light.

Ah, sinner, take the medicine, or you will surely die! Believe in the efficacy of Christ's blood, and trust in this alone for your salvation before God. No power on earth or Heaven can save the soul that rejects or makes light of the blood of Christ! God has declared this to be His chosen means of salvation, and none other will He accept instead. Whether you will hear or not — yet in God's name I do solemnly assure you that there is no other name but that of Jesus, by which you can be saved. And in no other way does He save, but by the blood that ransoms the sinner from destruction.

A closing word to those who have known Christ as their Healer. Be sure you commend this good Physician to others. It is always a pleasant duty for a man who himself has found much benefit from the medical help afforded to him — to tell others who are suffering as once he did, of the one who can perfect a cure.

And though we find it difficult at times — yet is it a blessed thing, in a kind and loving spirit, to tell others of Jesus and His grace. We can tell from our experience how much He has done for us. We can tell, because we have proved it, that His blood has power to cleanse the conscience, and assure us of peace with God. Let us not hide within our hearts His salvation, but be telling of it from day to day; and it shall be our great and endless gain to meet with those in our Father's house, who through us have learned to know Christ as their Physician, their Savior, their All.

When wounded sore, the stricken soul  
Lies bleeding and unbound,  
One only hand, a pierced hand,  
Can salve the sinner's wound!

When penitence has wept in vain  
Over some foul, dark spot,  
One one stream, a stream of blood,  
Can wash away the blot.

Tis Jesus' blood that washes white,  
His hand that brings relief,  
His heart that's touched with all our joys,  
And feels for all our grief.

Faithful unto Death  
  
"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life!" [Revelation 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev 2.10)

I always connect these words with the life and death of a young clergyman. I knew him first at a public school in the north of England. His reverent manner during prayer, his consistent walk, and his whole demeanor told of a principle actuating him, which I fear is not very common. In fact, he had been a follower of Christ from very early years. When about six years old, a lady had instructed him in the knowledge of the Savior, and the good seed had found a little plot of prepared ground. From her lips he learned the truth which led him, even then, to trust and follow Christ.

When I went to the University of Cambridge, he was still the same as I had known him at school years before, but more full of holy joy, more bold in confessing Christ, and more zealous in winning souls. Many a faithful testimony for Christ did he bear, both to the undergraduates and the college servants, and his bright, happy look, commended the truth which he so much loved. When I entered upon my present charge, I was again reminded of John Goodier, though in a very different way. Behind the pulpit is a memorial stone bearing his name upon it, and also the words at the heading of this chapter, from [Rev. 2:10](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rev. 2.10), "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

For only ten weeks only had he been a pastor, and in the course of his short ministrations he had visited a woman laid low with an infectious disease. He caught the disease, and in a few days fell asleep in Jesus. It was remarkable, that on the following Sunday evening he had purposed preaching from the words I have quoted, but his life and early death were a better sermon than any he could have delivered; and now they remain on the walls of our church, bidding us too be faithful to our Lord.

In the Christian life, nothing is more essential than faithfulness. It is that which stands foremost and distinguishes the true Christian from the false. Without it, all other apparent signs of grace are but a sham and a pretense. Faithfulness is that which Christ mainly respects.

It is the same as we find it in our daily life. In any position of responsibility, an employer requires faithfulness above everything. If a young man is thoroughly to be trusted, if you can rely upon his word, upon his strict honesty, upon his careful attendance to duty, upon his punctuality — he is far more valued than one who may have twice the ability, if he lacks this qualification.

It is even so in God's sight. Solomon reminds us that "a faithful man shall abound with blessings." Our Lord tells us that "he who is faithful in little, will be faithful also in much;" and that the faithful and wise steward will be greatly honored when He shall appear. Moses is commended as being faithful in all his house; and Daniel as "being faithful" in his discharge of duty, "because no offence or fault was found in Him;" and Antipas is being spoken of as Christ's "faithful martyr."

It is a noble and a blessed thing, with few talents or with many, in a high position or in a humble one — to be faithful as before God, and to make this our constant aim. And if you would thus be faithful in fulfilling the various duties of the Christian life, first of all, it is needful that you should be faithful in your way of dealing with the glorious Gospel of the grace of God.

A comparison may assist us in gaining a clearer view of the Gospel, and our consequent duty with respect to it. A man of great wealth, having a very extensive business, meets with a young man in humble circumstances. This young man has no claim upon him, and has very considerable liabilities. But, from a motive of pure kindness, the rich man offers him a partnership and a share in his business, undertaking to clear off his former debts, and thus giving him an opportunity of rising to a very good position in life. Does not this give us a true, though very imperfect, view of Christ's love to us in the Gospel?

You have great liabilities. Your own conscience tells of sin, neglect, failure everywhere. Christ compares the debt to ten thousand talents (in our coin between one and two million sterling), and you have nothing with which to pay. But Christ offers to meet all; He has made Himself responsible for the whole sum, and when you trust in Him it is reckoned to Him and not to you. Moreover He offers you a partnership. You may be joint heirs with Him in His riches, His righteousness, His kingdom — all things are yours if you are Christ's. He brings you into close fellowship with Himself; He reckons you one of His own, over whom He will exercise the tenderest care.

But how do you deal with this offer of Christ? You must deal with it in some way. If a partnership such as I have named were offered to you, you must distinctly refuse or accept it. If you accept it, the proper deeds must be drawn up and signed and witnessed, and then there must be a public notice in the Gazette or other newspapers.

And so with Christ's offer. If you would have the benefit, there must be a distinct act of acceptance — you must put your hand to the deed. There must be no delay, no uncertainty, no false dealings with Christ — you must heartily, frankly, thankfully accept His salvation. By faith you must subscribe your name underneath the promise, and say in your heart, "Lord, I trust Your word, and look to You to fulfill Your covenant engagements with me." Nor must you be ashamed to confess it before all men; you must witness that you are Christ's in the world. In all this you must be faithful. These invitations and offers of Christ will benefit none that do not honestly and truly embrace them. But if you have truly accepted the benefit which Christ thus offers, it will involve faithfulness in carrying out the duties and engagements implied in such a fellowship and union with Christ.

The young man taken into partnership on such terms as I have named, would surely be pledged to a life-long struggle to repay the kindness received. The gratitude he felt would prompt him to labor incessantly to advance the interests of the firm with which he was now connected — he would avoid all that would bring dishonor on the one who had acted so nobly towards him, and be unwearied in his efforts to serve him.

The Christian ought to show the same spirit. Carefully must you watch against the very least thing that will cast a slur on the name of Him whom you love, or the Gospel which you profess. Avoid the least contagion of evil — the very touch of anything that defiles. Turn away from all doubtful paths. Take a firm stand when deceit or fraud seem forced upon you by others whom it is your desire to please. Let there be genuine, straightforward honesty and truth in all business transactions. Let there be sincere transparency in all your dealings. Let there be no tampering with trade marks, nor calling things by wrong names, nor giving a false impression as to quality or quantity. Let your eye be single, and your whole body shall be full of light. Suffer all loss, even unto death, rather than the loss of a good conscience. By no means attempt to serve two masters, for nothing more surely will destroy all your peace and lead to final ruin. Let an illustration fix this in our hearts.

When Napoleon, at the head of a vast army was trying to conquer Russia, it was found necessary to bring together the various parts of his army. One of these detachments had lost its way, and was in danger of being cut off by the Russian troops. Late one night a Jew presented himself before the General of the lost detachment, and offered for a certain sum to lead them to the headquarters of Napoleon. "Will you swear to be true to us?" said the General. "I will," answered the Jew. Very well, if you lead us safely you shall have the money you ask; but if you betray us to the enemy, you shall be buried alive, and the whole army shall march across your grave.

Early in the morning the soldiers started under the guidance of the Jew, and for a while all went well. Presently they reached a morass, where the horses could scarcely move the guns, and where the Jew tried to escape. "Lay hold of that man," the General shouted. "Send a detachment to look out from yonder hill," and away galloped some of the Cavalry.

Back they soon came, for the Russian army was close by. Halting for a few minutes, the Jew was brought before the General, and in an agony of fear pleaded for his life. But it was in vain. Six men dug a hole in front of the tent, the Jew was cast into it, and his dying cries stifled by the clods of earth cast upon him, and the whole army marched across his grave.

Such was the end of a double-minded man — a man who tried to serve two masters, and whose unfaithfulness met with the reward it deserved.

And in the kingdom of Christ, there is the same terrible judgment awaiting such as try to play false with Him. You must be true to Him, and let nothing tempt you to seek other reward at the expense of losing His approval and His smile. Often place yourself in His presence, and ask Him if what you do is pleasing in His sight. Let not the thought of possessing some coveted treasure lead you to forget that His eye is upon you. Suppose you were to gain that which you long for, and you lose His favor, and at last are an outcast from His joy. What will it be to be trodden underfoot of His angels, and like the Jewish spy, to be regarded with abhorrence by all the soldiers of our King? Which do you prefer, to share Christ's throne with His saints — or be the footstool beneath His feet?

To be faithful to Christ, it is also needful to use diligently for Him the talents committed to you. Whatever you have is but trust-money, for which the Lord will require an account. Our gold and the silver, the years of our life, the influence we possess with others, our temporal comforts, our natural gifts, our spiritual advantages — all these are to be laid out at interest in the Lord's service.

You must be faithful also in carrying the cross, and in meeting reproach for Christ's sake. You must consider how Christ patiently endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and in His strength you must do likewise. It is almost worse than death sometimes to be exposed day after day to taunt and unkind remarks, and to be looked coldly upon and regarded with dislike, because your life may not be like that of others, and because you may try to follow the Savior. But the cross will last but a little while, and then the gain will be eternal.

Faithful unto death! Only so long will trial and temptation assail us. A few more days and years perhaps we may have still to battle on. A few more days of sorrow, mingled as He will have it, with seasons of quietness and joy. A few more doubts and fears to withstand, and a few more efforts to make in Christ's service. A few more words of testimony to bear for Him, and our warfare will be accomplished and the victory won.

It has been well said, that "we should live one day at a time, and that day for God." We need not burden ourselves with a thousand troubles and difficulties that we may never meet with. Let me only consider for this day, what the Master calls me to do. Let me only for this day watch and pray lest I fall into temptation. Let me only this day resist the uprisings of evil tempers and carnal lusts and passions. Let me only this day endeavor to do what Jesus asks of me — what He would do and think and speak if He were in my position. So I am to live by the day — and leave the morrow in His hand. Every day will be a step nearer Home, and leave a blessing behind. And very soon the pilgrimage will be over, and the cross laid down, and a full rest for the weary soul.

Nor must I forget that He who calls me to be faithful unto death, enables me to be so by His own faithfulness to such as trust in Him. He was Himself faithful unto death for our sake. With all His sufferings fully in view, He hastened up to Jerusalem to suffer. He refused not the bitter cup — He drank it to the very dregs! He would not hearken to the cry to come down from the cross — for it would have been to leave us in our sins to perish. Peter promised to lay down his life for Christ — and yet failed at the very approach of danger. But Christ did lay down His life for Peter and for His flock, to save them from wrath and judgment.

And if He was thus faithful unto death for me, shall not I strive to obey His call to be faithful unto Him? Yes, and more than this: He who calls me to be faithful unto death, promises to be faithful to me now in my struggles and conflicts. It is He who lives and was dead and is alive for evermore, and gives grace sufficient for me, and upholds me when ready to fall. He is ever by my side, in forbearing compassion when I have sinned, to cover me afresh with His spotless robe. He is near when the Tempter is at hand, and is able to support those who are tempted. He is close at hand when trouble comes, and the heart fails, and no human power can avail to comfort me. Therefore I may be faithful; I may be strong in His grace, though weak in myself. He, the ever-faithful One can make me faithful and keep me steadfast to the end. And more than this: He who bids me persevere, holds out to me the crown of life! "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life!" is His word of promise.

Then death is not death, for when it comes I have life, yes, the truest and the highest life — the life begun here, perfected in glory. And I have "a crown of life."

There are many crowns which men covet. There is . . .  
the crown of pleasure,  
the crown of wealth,  
the crown of high rank and distinction,  
the crown of dominion.

But each of these is but a fading garland, and the head which wears it, soon lies down in the silent grave.

Only a few years ago there was one who from a humble position had risen to the highest pinnacle of fame in Europe. Kings and Princes eagerly sought an alliance with him, and he had but to move a finger and a vast army was ready to do his bidding. Nations were moved when he purposed war, and Europe seemed almost at his feet. But how soon it all passed by! A few months, and his power all melted away, his army was scattered and in captivity, and he himself an exile. And not three years after, came the last summons — and he who was once so great and high in the world, is now weaker than the weakest of his former subjects. "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass!" [Isaiah 40:6-7](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 40.6-7)

But he who wears the crown of life lives forever; and that life, the life of immortality, the life of ceaseless joy, the life of heavenly love, the life of glory never fades away. He is with Christ, and with Christ forever. He shall hear the joyful welcome, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter you into the joy of your Lord!"

A twofold image is used to set forth the glory that awaits God's people. And though in the following chapter a further reference is made to this subject — yet it may be well here to touch upon it. "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever!" [Daniel 12:3](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Dan 12.3)

We have here, one comparison taken from the day and another from the night. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens; or, as the promise given by our Lord, "as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." The clouds which now obscure the light will then all be scattered, the scene of the transfiguration will be repeated, when not Moses and Elijah — but all the saints will shine in the light of Christ with a radiance beyond that of noonday. And they will be a great power for good. The beneficence of earth's great luminary, shedding its fruitful beams over all the world, is a type of the blessing of God's saints through the whole universe.

And they shall shine "like the stars for ever and ever!" Fixed in the vault of Heaven, as they appear to us, calmly do those distant lamps, set in Heaven's canopy, look down upon us in the midst of our strife and care and sorrow — a fit emblem of the high position, the abiding continuance, and the everlasting rest of God's children in the world to come.

Resurrection Glory!

Between the life of faithful service on earth, and the glory of Immanuel's land, there flows a river which must be crossed. And we have good reason to ponder what are "the steps across," and what lies in the fair country beyond. One precious promise, illustrated by an historical incident in the history of the children of Israel, seems best suited to answer to the former of these inquiries. The promise is that given in [Isaiah 63:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa 63.2), "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you."

The narrative which illustrates this promise is that of the crossing of the Jordan, as narrated in [Joshua 3:4](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Josh 3.4). The presence of Christ with us, as the Captain of our salvation, must be our one ground of hope, and the resting-place of our souls when the time has come that we must part from all below. He has said it, and will make it good, that in this river, however dark it may appear, He will be by our side.

When Israel passed over into Canaan, the ark went before, and those who carried it stood still in the midst of the stream until all the host had reached the other side. And thus we learn that He, of whose presence the ark was a symbol, will be with us every moment of our last struggle; and while He is by, the waves shall know His power who stilled the rough billows of Gennesaret, and said to them, "Peace, be still!"

Perhaps these pages may be read by some trembling, fearful Christian, who looks ahead with great shrinking and dread, to the day when the summons shall come. But you will probably find Christ beforehand with you, and strengthening your faith; so that a bright and blessed hope of His kingdom will sustain you. It seems to me, the great matter is every day to be living in His presence, resting on His promise, and setting Him before us; and then He who has been so near to us in life, will be doubly near to us in death, and —

When the waves roll full in view,  
He will fix their "hitherto."

But we must look beyond the river. Our hope must go forth to survey the land of promise. We must cheer our souls by the firm and steadfast promises of eternal life. We must grasp the blessed assurance that Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. And here we must distinguish between the joy that awaits believers at death — and the fuller joy that awaits them at His coming.

Not very much is said of the immediate bliss of believers after death. A few bright rays of light pierce through the obscurity of the present condition of those who sleep in Jesus, and, thank God, it is enough to assure us of their blessedness. We have Christ's word to the dying thief: "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise!" We have the prayer of Stephen: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit;" and the declaration that Christ was standing at the right hand of God to support His faithful servant. We have the word of Paul, that for him to be "absent from the body" was to be "present with the Lord;" and that "to die was gain," and "to depart and be with Christ was far better."

We have, moreover, the parable which tells us that Lazarus, in death, "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." And the statement in the Apocalypse: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth — yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works follow them."

And this is about all. We see, at least, that the bliss is immediate. It is no mere sleep of insensibility. It is rest from toil. It is companionship with the saints. It is greater nearness to Christ than we can enjoy on earth.

There seems a special object in the comparatively slight reference in Holy Scripture to the happiness of the blessed dead while in the disembodied state. It seems intended to remind us that this state is but temporary. It is to fix our eye on the glory to be revealed at the coming of the Lord. It is to lead Christians to look onward to that blessed hope of His glorious appearing. And the fullness of statement with respect to this, contrasts very strongly with the brief and few statements with reference to the condition of believers before this period.

In our Lord's discourses, while He passes over almost in silence the period immediately following death, He gives exhortation and promise and parable in almost every one of His discourses, with reference to the day of His appearing. In all the apostolic epistles, the Holy Spirit speaks much of the events which will then transpire, but scarcely anything with respect to death.

There is one chapter unspeakably inspiriting to the Christian in the loss of friends, or in the prospect of his own dissolution. I refer to 1 Corinthians 15, which is so connected in the minds of most of us with the most solemn seasons in life, when we have carried to the grave those nearest and dearest to us.

There is something so cheering in the evident authority with which the Apostle writes. He was not expressing his own opinion; he was not giving the result of a long course of acute reasoning; he was not endeavoring to prove by any arguments that the soul was immortal, or that man would live again. But he speaks as the oracles of God: he brings a message from the faithful covenant-keeping God for the consolation of His people. As only one could do who had been taught from above, he lifts the veil from that which is to come, and tells in no faltering or uncertain accents of that which shall happen when the Lord returns.

He tells how the spoiler shall be spoiled, and the King of terrors vanquished. He tells how death and the grave shall lose their prey, and closes a magnificent and glowing description of the resurrection of the saints, by an appeal to Christians, on the strength of this sure and glorious hope, to be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as their labor should not be in vain in the Lord."

A few elements of resurrection joy are very prominent in the mind of the Apostle.

There will be identity. The resurrection body is compared to the ear of grain, springing from the seed cast into the ground; and we are told, that "to every seed" shall be given "his own body." The very word "resurrection" supposes this — were it otherwise, it would be "creation," not resurrection.

Whatever change there may be, however marvelous the transformation from these bodies which shall soon mingle with their parent dust — yet in everything which constitutes our separate personality, we shall be the same men and women that are now known by the names we bear.

There is great joy in this thought. The faces we miss from our homes we shall see again; the dear friends who have together bent the knee with us in prayer, and have followed the same Savior, we shall by and by recognize among the throng of glorified ones.

After the frightful persecution of the Protestants in France, those who survived and were released from the galleys were brought down to Geneva, and there met by friends and relatives. Great and sorrowful was the change wrought in many by five or ten or more years of suffering — and yet, when recognized by those from whom they had been parted years before, it would not be easy to describe the joy that ensued.

But who can describe what will be the joy of meeting our friends hereafter — when the change will be so blessed, and when we recognize those whom we have loved in this lower world!

Let us remember that a second element of resurrection joy, will be complete freedom from all distressing infirmity. This mortal frame is too often a cause of weariness and suffering: "in this tabernacle we groan, being burdened;" and part of this burden is our liability to numberless infirmities and diseases which we cannot escape from. We are overcome by toil, depressed by care, borne down by many evils and miseries which come upon us from time to time. Constitutional ailments, nervousness, accidents, beside a thousand other things — make men often prefer death to life, and long for the hour when all this will be over.

But in the day when Christ calls forth His faithful ones from the grave, all this will be finished: "This corruptible shall put on incorruption." No pain, no sickness, no sorrow, no fear — shall depress the spirit. The children of the resurrection will be as the angels in Heaven. The entire absence of all that now makes the body too often a clog and a hindrance to the spirit, will be another element of our joy on that day.

And then a third element of resurrection joy. The mighty power of the resurrection body: "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." So weak is the body when laid in the tomb, that the greatest Monarch is then weaker than the weakest of his subjects, and the greatest warrior unable to resist the worm that feeds upon him.

But in the risen body there will be power. We may expect that every faculty we now possess will be indefinitely increased — every physical and mental power will be vastly augmented — every talent we now desire to employ will be multiplied many-fold. We often lament now, how little we can say or do in the Master's service, but let us believe that with powers so greatly enlarged there will be blessed fields for service which now we cannot the least imagine!

Then let us consider the glory and beauty of the resurrection body. Sometimes we see now a heavenly beauty in the Christian's countenance. We have seen one whose every look and expression tells of faith and love and unselfish benevolence. We have seen a holy glow of deep and chastened piety in one who for years has been bearing some heavy cross. We have seen, too, the beauteous innocence displayed in the face of a little child, and have thought it the most lovely sight which earth affords.

But in the risen saints, there will shine forth a beauty of holiness and love and joy and rapture beyond all this: "Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty!" And the beauty of Him who is fairer than the children of men will be reflected upon His own: "When I awake in His likeness, I shall be satisfied with it." "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is!" [1 John 3:2](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1 John 3.2)

Then there is the thought of immortality: "This mortal shall put on immortality." But how can we conceive of this immortality? What one thing is there ever we have seen — but is dying, fading, passing away? How can we think aright of this ever-abiding continuance, never-ceasing life of the glorified? Shall we venture on a thought which may show us, at least, our inability to grasp this tremendous idea of a life which can never have an end? Can we conceive a life as long as the aggregate of all the lives of the men and women that have trodden our globe? Begin with the old patriarchs before the flood; add life to life, each nearly reaching the term of a thousand years. Add to these the lives of all who have ever lived since. Consider but the aggregate years of the people of a single generation — and then, if we could thus add together the years of men in all generations of the world's history, and consider this vast period in reference to eternity, the great clock of eternal existence would scarce have struck its first note!

And this everlasting existence will be assuredly one of ever-increasing joy to those who rise in the image of the Lord!

And this immortality will be spent in companionship with the glorified Redeemer and His glorified and perfected Church. Here is the crowning bliss. To see Christ's glory, to taste the joy of His presence, to be near Him and with Him, and with all who have loved Him forever — then the cup will be full, and we shall have pleasures for evermore at His right hand!

"The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." When this glory has been attained, we shall need no more "steps across." Fears, conflicts, difficulties, temptations, sorrows, beset us now, and are our portion while we linger here.

Sometimes we tread the valley of humiliation.

Sometimes we have to climb the hill where every footstep is painful to the flesh.

Sometimes we have to gird on our armor to meet Apollyon who comes out to withstand us.

Sometimes we are terrified by the lions which are in the way.

Sometimes a Red Sea of trouble lies before us, and the recollections of sins in the past are like foes in the rear, so that we want now every help we can obtain to enable us to overcome.

But this is only for a short season. "Yet a little while, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry." "Weeping may endure for a night — but joy comes in the morning."

Meanwhile, dear reader, may you have peace in Christ — though tribulation in the world may be your present portion. Whatever counsel you may find in this little book that you may need, and that is in accordance with the written Word — endeavor to carry out in daily practice. Make the Book of God your constant companion. Cling with childlike faith to the hand of your faithful Guide — keep very near to Him, and walk only in such paths as He would approve. Cherish the presence of His Spirit in your heart, and work diligently in His vineyard, and hope evermore. The enemy will not be able to triumph over you. The walls of Jericho shall be leveled before you, and you shall go in to possess your inheritance, even "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that never fades away."

I have a Home above,  
From sin and sorrow free,  
A mansion which Eternal Love

Designed and formed for me!

My Father's gracious hand  
Has built this sweet abode,  
From everlasting it was planned  
My dwelling place with God.

My Savior's precious blood  
Has made my title sure;  
He passed through death's dark raging flood  
To make my rest secure.

The Comforter is come,  
The earnest has been given,  
He leads me-onward to the Home  
Reserved for me in Heaven.

Loved ones are gone before,  
Whose pilgrim days are done;  
I soon shall greet them on that shore  
Where partings are unknown!