Young Men Exhorted to Come to Christ

by Thomas Brooks

I shall now hasten to the main use that I intend to stand upon, and that is an use of exhortation to all young persons.

Ah, sirs! As you tender the glory of God, the good of your bodies, the joy of your Christian friends, and the salvation of your own souls, be exhorted and persuaded to be really good betimes. It was the praise and honour of Abijah, that 'there was found in him some good thing towards the Lord' in the primrose of his childhood.

Oh! That it might be your honour and happiness to be really good betimes, that it might be to you a praise and a name, that in the morning of your youth you have begun to seek the Lord, and to know and love the Lord, and to get an interest and propriety in the Lord. Now that this exhortation may stick and take, I beseech you seriously to weigh and ponder these following motives or considerations:

Motive (1). First consider, It is an honour to be good betimes. A young saint is like the morning star; he is like a pearl in a gold ring. It is mentioned as a singular honour to the believing Jews, that they first trusted in Christ; 'that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ,' Eph. i. 12. This was their praise, their crown, that they were first converted and turned to Christ and Christianity. So Paul, mentioning Andronicus and Junia, doth not omit this circumstance of praise and honour, that they were in Christ 'before him,' Rom. xvi. 7. 'Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.'

And so it was the honour of the house of Stephanas, that they were the first-fruits of Achaia, I Cor. xvi. 15. It was their glory that they were the first that received and welcomed the gospel in Achaia. It is a greater honour for a young man to outwrestle sin, Satan, temptation the world, and lust, than ever Alexander the Great could attain unto. It was

Judah his praise and honour, that they were first in fetching home David their king, 2 Sam. xix. 15.

Ah, sirs! It is no small honour to you, who are in the spring and morning of your days, that the Lord hath left upon record several instances of his love and delight in young men. He chose David, a younger brother, and passes by his elder brothers, 1 Sam. xvi. 11-13; he frowns upon Esau, and passes by his door, and sets his love and delight upon Jacob the younger brother, Rom. ix. 12, 13; he kindly and lovingly accepts of Abel's person and sacrifice, and rejects both Cain's person and sacrifice, though he was the elder brother, Gen. iv. 3-6. Among all the disciples, John was the youngest and the most and best beloved, John xiii. 23. There was but one 'young man' that came to Christ, and he came not aright, Mark x. 19-21; and all the good that was in him was but some moral good, and yet Christ loved him with a love of pity and compassion. The Greek word (agapan) signifies, to speak friendly and deal gently with one; and so did Christ with him, all which should exceedingly encourage young men to be good betimes, to be gracious in the morning of their youth. No way to true honour like this, but,

Motive (2). Secondly, consider, Christ loved poor sinners and gave himself for them, when he was in the prime of his age (being supposed to be about thirty and three), and will you put him of with the worst of your time?

Ah! Young men, young men, Christ gave himself up to death, he made himself an offering for your sins, for your sakes, when he was in the prime and flower of his age: and why then should you put off Christ to an old age? Did he die for sin in the prime of his age? And will not you die to sin in the prime of your age? Did he offer himself for you in the spring and morning of his years? and will not you offer up yourselves to him in the spring and morning of your years? Oh give not Christ cause to say, I died for you betimes, but you have not lived to me betimes; I was early in my suffering for you, but you have not been early in your returning to me; I made haste to complete your redemption, but you have made no haste to make sure your vocation and election, 2 Pet. i. 1O; I stayed not, I lingered not, but soon suffered what I was to suffer, and quickly did what was to be done for your eternal welfare; but you have stayed and lingered, like Lot in Sodom, Gen. xix. 16, and have not done what you might have done in order to your everlasting good. In the primrose of my days, I sweat for

you, I wept for you, I bled for you, I hung on the cross for you, I bore the wrath of my Father for you; but you have not in the primrose of your days sweat under the sense of divine displeasure, nor wept over your sins, nor mourned over me, whom you have so often grieved and pierced, Zech. xii. 10. I could not be quiet nor satisfied till I had put you into a capacity, into a possibility of salvation, and yet you are well enough quieted and satisfied, though you do not know whether ever you shall be saved.

Ah, sirs! How sad would it be with you, if Jesus Christ should secretly thus expostulate with your consciences in this your day.

Oh! How terrible would it be with you, if Christ should thus visibly plead against you in his great day. Ah! young men, young men and women, who but souls much left of God, blinded by Satan, and hardened in sin, 2 Cor. 3, 4, can hear Jesus Christ speaking thus to them: I suffered for sinners betimes, I laid down a ransom for souls betimes, I pacified my Father's wrath betimes, I satisfied my Father's justice betimes, I merited grace and mercy for sinners betimes, I brought in an everlasting righteousness upon the world betimes, &c.; I say, who can hear Jesus Christ speaking thus, and his heart not fall in love and league with Christ, and his soul not unite to Christ and resign to Christ, and cleave to Christ, and for ever be one with Christ, except it be such that are for ever left by Christ? Well, remember this, the more vile Christ made himself for us, the more dear he ought to be unto us.

Ah! young men, remember this, when Christ was young, he was tempted and tried; when he was in the morning of his days, his wounds were deep, his burden weighty, his cup bitter, his sweat painful, his agony and torment above conception, beyond expression; when he was young, that blessed head of his was crowned with thorns; and those eyes of his, that were purer than the sun, were put out by the darkness of death; and those ears of his which now hear nothing but hallelujahs of saints and angels, were filled with the blasphemies of the multitude; and that blessed beautiful face of his, which was fairer than the sons of men, was spit on by beastly filthy wretches; and that gracious mouth and tongue, that spake as never man spake, was slandered and accused of blasphemy; and those hands of his, which healed the sick, which gave out pardons, which swayed a sceptre in heaven and another on earth, were nailed to the cross; and those feet, that were beautiful upon the mountains, that brought the glad tidings of peace and salvation into the world, and that

were dike unto fine brass, were also nailed to the cross: all these great and sad things did Jesus Christ suffer for you in the prime and flower of his days. and oh! what an unspeakable provocation should this be to all young ones, to give up themselves betimes to Christ, to serve, love, honour, and obey him betimes, even in the spring and morning of their youth.

Motive (3). The third motive or consideration to provoke you to begin to be good betimes, is this, viz., That it is the best and choicest way in the world, to be rich in gracious experiences betimes, which are the best riches in all the world. As he that sets up for himself betimes is in the most hopeful way to be rich betimes, so he that is good in good earnest betimes, he is in the ready way, the highway of being rich in grace and rich in goodness. They usually prove men of great observation and great experience. God loves to shew these his 'beauty and his glory in his sanctuary.' He delights to cause 'his glory and his goodness to pass before' such. These shall find all his 'paths drop marrow and fatness.' For these 'the Lord of hosts will make a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.' These shall have all manner of 'pleasant fruits' laid up 'at their gates for their well-beloved,' None have so many choice pledges of Christ's love, nor so many sweet kisses of Christ's mouth, nor so many embraces in Christ's arms, as those souls that are good betimes. Oh the grace, the goodness, the sweetness, the fatness that Christ is still a-dropping into their hearts! Christ will make their hearts his largest treasury, he will lay up most of his heavenly treasure in their souls. There he will store up mercies new and old; there he will treasure up all plenty, rarity, and variety; there he will lay up all that heart can wish or need require. Oh the many drops of myrrh that falls from Christ's fingers upon their hearts! Oh the many secrets that Christ reveals in their ears! Oh the many loveletters that Christ sends to these! Oh the many visits that he gives to these! Oh the turns, the walks, that he hath in paradise with these! There are none in the world for experience and intelligence to these. Ah! young men, young men, as you would be rich in the best riches, begin to be good betimes; as there is no riches to spiritual riches so there is no way to be rich in these riches, but by beginning to be good, in good earnest, betimes.

As for worldly riches, philosophers have condemned them, and preferred a contemplative life above them, and shall not Christians much more? The prophet calls them 'thick clay,' which will sooner break the back than lighten the heart; they cannot better the soul, they cannot enrich the soul, Hab. ii. 6. Ah! how many threadbare souls are to be found under silken cloaks and gowns! How often are worldly riches like hangmen, they hide men's faces with a covering, that they may not see their own end, and then they hang them. And if they do not hang you, they will shortly leave you, they 'make themselves wings and fly away,' Prov. xxiii. 5. When one was a-commending the riches and wealth of merchants, I do not love that wealth, said a heathen, that hangs upon ropes; if they break, the ship miscarrieth, and all is lost. He is rich enough, saith Jerome, that lacketh not bread, and high enough in dignity that is not forced to serve.

This world's wealth, that men so much desire May well be likened to a burning fire, Whereof a little can do little harm But profit much our bodies well to warm; But take too much, and surely thou shalt burn; So 'too much wealth to too much woe does turn.'

Motive (4). The fourth motive to provoke young ones to be really good betimes is, to consider that The present time, the present day, is the only season that you are sure of.

Time past cannot be recalled, and time to come cannot be ascertained: 'To-day, if you hear his voice, harden not your hearts,' Heb. iii. 15; 'Behold, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation,' 2 Cor. vi. 2. Some there be that trifle away their time, and fool away their souls and their salvation.! To prevent this, the apostle beats upon the to nun, the present opportunity, because if that be once past, there is no recovering of it. Therefore, as the mariner takes the first fair wind to sail, and as the merchant takes his first opportunity of buying and selling, and as the husbandman takes the first opportunity of sowing and reaping, so should young men take the present season, the present day, which is their day, to be good towards the Lord, to seek him and serve him, and not to post off the present season, for they know not what another day, another hour, another moment, may bring forth. That door of grace that is open to-day may be shut to-morrow; that golden sceptre of mercy that is held forth in the gospel this day may be taken in the next day: hat love that this hour is upon the bare knee entreating and beseeching young

men to break off their sins by repentance, 'to return to the Lord, to lay hold on his strength, and be at peace with him,' may the next hour be turned into wrath, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5.

Ah! Young men, young men, do not put off the present season, do not neglect the present day. There is no time yours but the present time, no day yours but the present day; and therefore do not please yourselves and feed yourselves with hopes of time to come, and that you will repent, but not yet, and lay hold on mercy, but not yet, and give up yourselves to the Lord next week, next month; or next year, for that God that hath promised you mercy and favour upon the day of your return, he hath not promised to prolong your lives till that day comes.

Motive (6). Sixthly, consider, That the sooner you are good on earth, the greater will be your reward in heaven.

The sooner you are gracious, the more at last you will be glorious. You read in the Scripture of a reward, of a great reward, and of a full reward. Now those that are good betimes, that know, seek, serve, and love the Lord in the spring and morning of their youth, they are in the fairest way of gaining the greatest and the fullest reward.'

No man can commend good works magnificently enough, saith Luther, for one work of a Christian is more precious than heaven and earth; and therefore all the world cannot sufficiently reward one good work. And in another place, saith the same author, 'If I might have my desire, I would rather choose the meanest work of a country Christian or poor maid, than all the victories and triumphs of Alexander the Great, and of Julius Caesar.'

And, again, whatsoever the saints do, though never so small and mean, it is great and glorious; because they do all in faith and by the word, saith the same author. To prevent mistakes, you must remember, that the works that Jesus Christ will reward at last are supernatural works: they are, 1, works of God; 2, wrought from God; 3, for God; 4, in God; 5, according to God. They are works that flow from supernatural principles, and they are directed to supernatural ends, and performed in a supernatural way. Now the sooner a man begins to be good, the more he will abound in these good works; and the more doubtless any man abounds in such good works on earth, the greater reward he shall have in heaven.

Yet it must not be forgotten that the best actions, the best works of hypocrites, and all men out of Christ, are but splendida peccata, fair and shining sins, beautiful abominations.

Motive (7). The seventh motive or consideration to provoke and incite you to be good betimes, is to consider, That the Lord is very much affected, and taken with your seeking of him, and following after him, in the spring and morning of your youth.

As many young women and sickly children cannot stay till the fruit be ripe, but must have it while it is green; even so, saith God, my heart, my desires, are so vehemently set upon the first-fruits, the first things that I cannot stay, I cannot satisfy myself without them; and what would God teach us by all this, but to serve him with the first-fruits of our age, the primrose of our childhood, the morning of your youth. God hath given you of the best, do not put him off with the worst, with the worst of your time, the worst of your days, the worst of your strength, lest he swear in his wrath that 'you shall never enter into his rest,' Heb. iii. 18.

Motive (8). The eighth motive or consideration to provoke you to be good betimes, to seek and serve the Lord in the morning of your youth, is to consider, that this may be a special means to prevent many black temptations, and an encouragement to withstand all temptations that you may meet with from a tempting devil and a tempting world.

An early turning to the Lord will prevent many temptations to despair, many temptations to neglect the means openly, to despise the means secretly; many temptations about the being of God, the goodness, faithfulness, truth and justice of God; temptations to despair, temptations to lay violent hands on a man's self. Temptations to question all that God hath said, and that Christ hath suffered, arises many times from men's delaying and putting off of God to the last; all which, with many others, are prevented by a man's seeking and serving of the Lord in the spring and morning of his youth.

It is reported of the harts of Scythia, that they teach their young ones to leap from bank to bank, from rock to rock, from one turf to another, by leaping before them, by which means, when they are hunted, no beast of prey can ever take them; so when persons exercise themselves in godliness when they are young, when they leap from one measure of holiness to another, when they are in the morning of their

days, Satan, that mighty hunter after souls, may pursue them with his temptations, but he shall not overtake them, he shall not prevail over them. As you see in Moses, Joseph, Daniel, and the three children, these knew the Lord, and gave up themselves to the Lord in the prime and primrose of their youth, and these were all temptation-proof, Heb. xi., Gen. xxxix., Dan. iii. Satan and the world pursued them, but could not overtake them. When the devil and the world had done their worst, the young men's bows abode in strength, and their hands to resist were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, Gen. xlix. 23, 24. Ego non sum ego, said that young convert when tempted, I am not the man that I was.

Motive (9). The ninth motive or consideration to stir up young men to be good betimes, to seek and serve the Lord in the spring and morning of their youth, is, To consider the worth and excellency of souls.

A soul is a spiritual, immortal substance, it is capable of the knowledge of God, it is capable of union with God, of communion with God and of a blessed and happy fruition of God, Mat. xix. 28; Acts vii. 59 60; Phil. i. 23.

Christ left his Father's bosom for the good of souls; he assumed man's nature for the salvation of man's soul. Christ prayed for souls, he sweat for souls, he wept for souls, he bled for souls, he hung on the cross for souls, he bode the wine-press of his Father's wrath for souls he died for souls, he rose again from death for souls, he ascended for souls, he intercedes for souls, and all the glorious preparations that he hath been amaking in heaven these sixteen hundred years is for souls, Heb. ii. 13-16; Isa. lxiii. 3; John xiv. 1-3.

Ah! Young men, young men, do not play the courtier with your precious souls. The courtier doth all things late; he rises late, dines late, sups late, goes to bed late, repents late.

Ah! Sirs, the good of your souls is before all, and above all other things in the world; to be first regarded and provided for, and that partly because it is the best and more noble part of man, and partly because therein mostly and properly is the image of God stamped, and partly because it is the first converted, and partly because it shall be the first and most glorified.

Ah! Young men, young men, if they be worse than infidels, that make no provision for their families, 1 Tim. v. 8; what monsters are they that make not provision for their own souls! This will be bitterness in the end.

Ah! Young men, young men, do not pawn your souls, do not sell your souls, do not exchange away your souls, do not trifle and fool away your precious souls; they are jewels, more worth than a thousand worlds, yea, than heaven and earth. If they are safe, all is safe; but if they are lost, all is lost: God lost, and Christ lost, and the society of glorious angels and blessed saints lost, and heaven lost, and that for ever.

Ah! that all young persons were so affected with the worth and excellency of their souls, and so alarmed with the hazard and danger of losing their souls, as that they may in the spring and morning of their days inquire after the Lord, and seek him, and serve him with all their might, that so their precious and immortal souls may be safe and happy for ever. But if all this will not do, then in the last place,

Motive (10). Consider, young men, That God will at last bring you to a reckoning. He will at last bring you to judgment. 'Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of shine heart, and in the sight of shine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee unto judgment,' Eccles. xi. 9. In these words you have two things: (1.) An ironical concession; he bids him rejoice, &c.; he yields him what he would have, by an irony, by way of mockage and bitter scoff. Now thou art young and strong, lively and lusty, and thy bones are full of marrow; thou art resolved to be proud and scornful to indulge the flesh, and to follow thy delights and pleasures. Well! take thy course if thou darest, or if thou hast a mind to it, if thy heart be so set upon it. 'Rejoice in thy youth,' &c. (2.) The second is a commination, or a sad and severe premonition: 'But know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment. 'Will bring thee;' these words import two things: first, the unwillingness of youth to come to judgment; secondly, the unavoidableness that youth must come to judgment; but how soon you shall be brought to judgment, is only known to God. (...) Augustine confesses in one of his books, that as long as his conscience was gnawed with the guilt of some youthful lust he was once ensnared with, the very hearing of a day of judgment, was even a hell to him.

Ah! young men, young men, that the serious thoughts of this great day, may put you upon breaking off the sins of your youth; and the dedicating of yourselves to the knowledge, love, and service of the Lord, in the spring and flower of your days. Ah! Young men, consider the errors of your lives, the wickedness of your hearts, the sinfulness of your ways, and that strict account that ere long you must be brought to before the judge of all the world.

Now if, for all that hath been said, you are resolved to spend the flower of your days, and the prime of your strength, in the service of sin and the world, then know that no tongue can express, no heart can conceive that trouble of mind, that terror of soul, that horror of conscience, that fear and amazement, that weeping and wailing, that crying and roaring, that sighing and groaning, that cursing and banning, that stamping and tearing, that wringing of hands and gnashing of teeth, that shall certainly attend you, when God shall bring you into judgment for all your looseness and lightness, for all your wickedness and wantonness, for all your profaneness and baseness, for all your neglect of God, your grieving the Comforter, your trampling under foot the blood of a Saviour, for your despising of the means, for your prizing earth above heaven, and the pleasures of this world above the pleasures that be at God's right hand——

Oh! How will you wish in that day when your sins shall be charged on you, when justice shall be armed against you, when conscience shall be gnawing within you, when the world shall be a flaming fire about you, when the gates of heaven shall be shut against you, and the flame of hell ready to take hold of you, when angels and saints shall sit in judgment upon you, and for ever turn their faces from you, when evil spirits shall be terrifying of you, and Jesus Christ for ever disowning of you; how will you, I say, wish in that day that you had never been born, or that you might now be unborn, or that your mothers' wombs had proved your tombs! Oh, how will you then wish to be turned into a bird, a beast, a stock, a stone, a toad, a tree! Oh that our immortal souls were mortal! Oh that we were nothing! Oh that we were anything but what we are!

But now to those young men and women who begin to seek, serve, and love the Lord in the primrose of their days, the day of judgment will be to them melodia in aure, jubilum in corde, like music in the ear, and a jubilee in the heart. This day will be to them 'a day of refreshing,' a 'day of

redemption,' a day of vindication, a day of coronation, a day of consolation, a day of salvation; it will be to them a marriage-day, a harvest-day, a pay-day. Now the Lord will pay them for all the prayers they have made, for all the sermons they have heard, for all the tears they have shed. In this great day Christ will remember all the individual offices of love and friendship shewed to any of his. Now he will mention many things for their honour and comfort that they never minded, now the least and lowest acts of love and pity towards his shall be interpreted as a special kindness shewed to himself Now the crown shall be set upon their heads, and the royal robes put upon their backs; now all the world shall see that they have not served the Lord for nought! Now Christ will pass over all their weaknesses, and make honourable mention of all the services they have performed, of all the mercies they have improved, and of all the great things that for his name and glory they have suffered.