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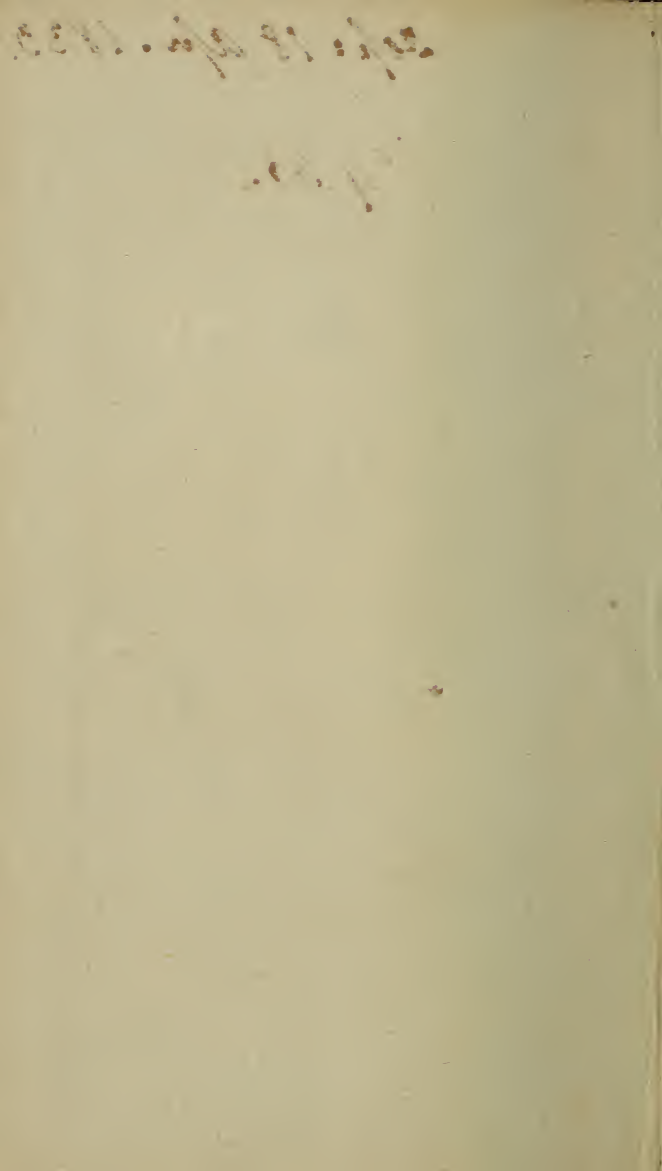
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THE  
**ACTIVE CHRISTIAN:**

A  
SERIES OF LECTURES.

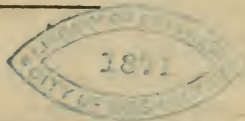
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BY  
**JOHN HOWARD HINTON, A. M.**

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FIRST AMERICAN EDITION:  
With an Introduction by the Rev. Ezra Stiles Ely, D. D.

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**PHILADELPHIA:**  
**FRENCH & PERKINS,**  
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## INTRODUCTION.

Man has been formed for activity ; and if he is renewed in his mind he will be *an active Christian*. The whole of his religious activity is commonly called *holy living* ; and he who does not exert the faculties of his mind in conformity with the moral law, cannot be the subject of spiritual life.

“ Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? ” is an inquiry which arises from the heart of every converted sinner ; to which the answer has been given in numerous ways, that we should do good unto all men as we have opportunity, and especially to the household of faith. No one should regard himself as a Christian, or as a sincere follower of the Lord Jesus, who is not actively engaged in doing his will. If a man loves Christ he will keep his commandments ; and if any man loves him not he is accursed.

It is clearly shown, in the following work, that the foregoing statements are true ; and that the great business of every Christian, while dwelling upon earth, should be, to glorify God, by promoting the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints. The author inculcates the important doctrines, that in every case the new birth results from the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit of God ; who moves the persons employ-

ing the appointed means of converting sinners, no less than the minds of sinners converted : that the new birth is a great and necessary moral change, in which the soul commences a never ending course of holy activity : and that those who labour, agreeably to the divine will, for the conversion of sinners, may confidently expect a large share of success. “*Some* exertions will fail, and *any* exertion may fail ; but *all* will not fail.” “ We shall have many failures, but more successes ; we shall behold too many spots of barrenness, but we shall see a general fertility ; much seed will perish, and many green ears be blighted, but those who sow shall reap ; and he who hath gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. On the whole, therefore, the success attending labours for God will not only be satisfactory, but abundant. It is too little to say that it will be enough to recompense the expenditure ; it will be sufficient to inspire a grateful and overflowing joy, like the joy of harvest.”

The writer of this introduction would not become answerable for every expression which Mr. Hinton has used ; nor does he profess agreement with him in every shade of thought ; yet he cannot refrain from recommending “ The Active Christian ” to all who would well consider the talents for usefulness which have been given

them, improve those talents, and employ them effectually in saving their fellow man. The style of the author is simple; his thoughts are clear, and every page of his LECTURES may please and profit the candid reader.

Some will doubtless accuse the author of attributing too much to human means, and will represent him as "a new light divine" in the Baptist Church in old England; but he ought to be regarded as more Calvinistic and scriptural in his sentiments than most of the persons who will accuse him. When Paul apologizes for having spoken of "saving some," and of having "begotten" men "through the truth;" and when Paul and Peter are convicted of heresy for not explicitly referring to the agency of the Spirit in every instance in which they speak of one person's converting and saving another, then we shall be disposed to censure our author as an Arminian. That he does not teach the efficiency of God in doing those actions for men which the Saviour says proceed out of their own hearts, and beyond which we need not look for a cause, we joyfully proclaim. Of a physical regeneration, and of moral agency by machinery, he is not an advocate.

EZRA STILES ELY.

*Philadelphia, April 4th, 1833.*



# CONTENTS.

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## LECTURE I.

### SURVEYING THE FIELD OF LABOUR.

Lord what wilt thou have me to do?—Acts ix. 6. *page* 1

## LECTURE II.

### ESTIMATING HIS RESOURCES.

Bearing precious seed.—Psalm cxxvi. 6. - - 21

## LECTURE III.

### CULTIVATING FITNESS FOR LABOUR.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.—Psalm li. 13. - - 41

## LECTURE IV.

### PREPARING FOR ACTION.

Him that girdeth on his harness.—1 Kings xx. 11. - 61

## LECTURE V.

### HABITUAL ACTION.

Lights in the world.—Philip. ii. 15. - - - 80

## LECTURE VI.

### SPECIFIC ACTION.

I made haste, and delayed not.—Psalm cxix. 60. - 100

## LECTURE VII.

### TREATMENT OF VARIOUS CASES.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.—Psalm xix. 7, 8. - - - - 120

**LECTURE VIII.****DIRECT EXERCISES AFTER LABOUR.**

- O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.—Psalm cxviii. 25. - - - - - 139

**LECTURE IX.****INDIRECT EXERCISES AFTER LABOUR.**

- They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.—Canticles i. 6. - 158

**LECTURE X.****SUCCESS EXPECTED.**

- For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.—2 Cor. x. 4. - - - - - 177

**LECTURE XI.****SUCCESS WANTING.**

- Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?—Isaiah liii. 1. - 197

**LECTURE XII.****SUCCESS GRANTED.**

- Now thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.—2 Corinth. ii. 14. - 217

# THE ACTIVE CHRISTIAN.

## LECTURE I.

### SURVEYING THE FIELD OF LABOUR.

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ACTS, ix. 6.

*Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*

HAVING already delivered to you, dear brethren, a series of discourses\* adapted to induce and to urge you to the use of individual efforts for the conversion of sinners, I now proceed to some topics of instruction and of counsel connected with such endeavours. I am to take it for granted, therefore, that you acknowledge their obligation, that you feel their importance, and that you mean to make them. May I safely take this for granted? Does every one of you who has a knowledge of salvation for himself really purpose, and already begin, to say to his neighbour, Know thou the Lord? Have the arguments which have been presented to you been seriously weighed, and practically applied? Or have they been resisted, evaded, or forgotten? Upon some of you I trust they have not been without a beneficial and abiding influence: would to God that influence had been universal, and more deep, both upon others' hearts and upon my own!

\* See a recent volume by the same author, entitled, "Individual Effort for the Conversion of Sinners, enforced in a Series of Lectures adapted to promote a Revival of Religion."

If, however, you are doing something, and intending to do all that may be your duty in this respect, accept kindly at my hands a few counsels adapted to guide and facilitate your efforts. They are submitted to you by one who knows something of the difficulty both of commencing and sustaining them; and may not improbably meet your experience in a work which you likewise may have found not unembarrassed.

I present to you on this occasion the ACTIVE CHRISTIAN, for such you are resolved to be, *surveying the field of labour*. Having heard the voice of his Lord calling him to exertion, he adopts the inquiry, Lord, *what wilt thou have me to do?* Such should be your immediate attitude and primary exercise. Summoned to labour, you should attentively and carefully survey the field which is to be cultivated by your toil. Permit me to suggest to you, in the first place, *some general reasons why such a survey should be made*; and in the second, *the particular points to which it should be directed*.

I. In speaking of *the general reasons why a deliberate survey of our field of labour should be made*, I might insist on its obvious propriety and necessity. Without considering what we have to do, it is not likely we shall do what we ought; and it is certain we shall do nothing wisely or well. A heedless activity is an evil scarcely inferior to absolute sloth; since it affords little prospect of a beneficial result, and, together with a waste of strength, incurs no small hazard of actual mischief. These general observations apply to nothing more forcibly than to endeavours for the conversion of sinners. In no respect may we more easily, on the one hand, go out of our place, and make attempts



where we ought not; or fail, on the other, to fill it up with completeness, and to be active always when we ought: in no case, therefore, is it more necessary to look well before us and around us.

Not to insist further, however, upon a topic which is too obvious to require extended notice, I may proceed to point out some of the *specific advantages* which an attentive survey of our sphere of action will afford.

1. *It will give a definite and practical character to our general sense of obligation.* We hope that we have already a general sense of this obligation; but while it remains general, it will be in a great measure vague and uninfluential. We know that we ought to try to convert sinners; but, unless we inquire also *what sinners* it is our duty to persuade, there is little probability of our ever beginning the work. A merely general conviction of this duty may render us uneasy, and perhaps almost unhappy, by generating a consciousness of unfulfilled obligation; but it can scarcely lead to action: it is much more likely gradually to subside and finally to disappear, if it is not even intentionally banished as an unwelcome and disagreeable guest. It is of great importance, therefore, that our general conviction of duty should be connected with a specific view of the persons to whom it relates; and that we should be able to say, It is my duty to labour for the conversion, not merely of some persons, but of *those particular persons* whom I now contemplate. Our duty then will assume a more definite and tangible form; it will be easier to begin, and more consciously criminal to delay.

This advantage will be attained by the attentive sur-

vey which I am recommending to you ; and it can be secured by no other means. Deliberately examine what apparently irreligious persons are properly within the reach of your influence, and then apply to them the general sense of obligation which already exists within you. Say to yourself, These are the sinners whom it must be my endeavour to turn unto God ; and here I must begin my efforts to instruct, to convince, and to persuade. The various pretexts which may have hindered your activity will thus be deprived of one of their principal shelters, and you will be able at length both to detect and to exterminate them ; while you will no longer be appalled by the apparent but unreal vastness, or perplexed by the seeming inaccessibility, of an undefined and intangible undertaking. You will not be looking on an unmeasured wilderness, with the thought that some unknown portion of it is to be cultivated by your labour ; but there will be before you a plot staked out and appropriated, inviting and enforcing the immediate commencement of your toil.

2. The survey recommended to you *will yield important information, and rectify many mistakes.* Strange as it may seem, it is true, that, as men in general know little of their own hearts, so they know little likewise of their opportunities of usefulness. While they are altogether insensible to the obligation of useful exertion, it is not wonderful that opportunities should be disregarded ; but even when this insensibility is removed, they are by no means speedily or extensively seen. The eye of the mind, like that of the body, is apt to dwell upon things that are remote, rather than things that are near ; and the immediate openings of useful exertion are thus in a great mea-

sure overlooked, even by those who wish to improve them. Hence the feeling so common among well-disposed persons, that there is little or nothing for them to do. If they were such or such an one, then they should have some valuable opportunities of action; or if they were in some office, they should have scope for exertion; but in a private and obscure station like theirs, such things cannot be expected. Another sentiment, equally erroneous and mischievous, is connected with this; a sentiment, namely, of satisfaction and complacency that persons who have done nothing have nevertheless done all they can: with our small opportunities, it is asked, what can we do more?

A survey of our condition will speedily supply a remedy for these common and hurtful errors. Let any person but seriously commence the inquiry how many ungodly persons are within the reach of means of religious benefit which he may use, beginning with his family and his neighbourhood, and extending his eye through the wider circle of acquaintance and casual intercourse; and he will find them very unexpectedly numerous. Several, perhaps, may be found within his own house; many within a few yards of it; and multitudes more crowding every path which he treads. Such a scrutiny will call up innumerable objects of this class, as out of non-existence; it will place the inquirer as in a new world; and for ever banish the delusion that opportunities of usefulness for him are either wanting or few.

Connected with the notion that we have few *opportunities*, is the kindred fallacy that we possess few *means* of usefulness. When urged to exertion, per-

sons not unfrequently say, But I am not fit for what you would have me do; I have not a capacity for such efforts; I must leave them to others. I shall notice this subject more particularly afterwards; but I may just observe here, that an attentive survey of our condition will go far towards the formation of a more accurate estimate. While we have no realizing view of the existing ignorance and irreligion which surround us, we may imagine that we have no means of attempting their cure; but when these are before us in some tangible shape, no man who has found the adaptation of the gospel to his own necessities can fail to perceive its adaptation to those of others. Whether he may be disposed to act is another question; but assuredly he will be constrained to acknowledge, These people want instructions, warnings, reproofs, and encouragements, with which I am acquainted, and which I might administer.

3. An attentive survey of our sphere of action *will supply us with many valuable impulses to labour.* In the course of such an exercise we shall see ignorance and sin in their substantial forms of criminality and wretchedness; the levity which trifles with eternity, and dances on the brink of everlasting ruin; the obduracy which dares the divine anger, and defies the most solemn reproof; the galled conscience and the dissatisfied heart with which worldly objects are pursued; and the gloomy, though resisted, anticipations of death and a future world. These are things which, if we know the value of our own souls, we shall not contemplate unmoved. While we are musing the fire will burn; a fire of compassion for perishing immortals, and of zeal for our dishonoured Maker, which

will consume the lingering love of quietness and ease which to the last impede our exertions, and will impel us to some practical, if not to commensurate activity. It was intended that our hearts should be thus affected. As the sight of distress is among the most prompt and powerful of the stimulants designed to awaken the benevolence by which it is to be relieved, so it will be with compassion for souls; and, if there is any thing valuable in the influence of this feeling, it behooves us to arouse and cherish it, by an intent and realizing observation of the guilt and wretchedness of those for whose good we are to labour.

II. To these general observations on the importance of taking a survey of your field of labour, let me now add some remarks on *the points to which your attention should be chiefly directed.*

1. Your first object should be to observe *its extent*; or to ascertain who and what persons are so situated with respect to you, as to be within the sphere of your proper influence for their spiritual good.

This is manifestly a question upon the decision of which much depends, and in the consideration of which much wisdom is required. The space we mark out for ourselves may be either too large or too small. I am very far from wishing it to be too large. I have no inclination to say, be sure you take an ample scope. On the contrary, I should prefer that the boundaries of your allotment should be traced in a spirit of moderation, and that the determination of every point should be effected by the truest wisdom. No man is likely to do much good out of his place; and a small field well cultivated is better than a large one half neglected. At the same time, I suppose no person would inten-

tionally assign himself a sphere too small, or entertain a wish to exclude from his regard any of the objects to which it is justly due. A determined dishonesty and cherished sloth would be manifested in such a case as this, which I know not how to ascribe to any christian indeed.

(1.) What then is *the principle* upon which we are to proceed? How shall we mark out the persons for whose conversion we are bound to labour?

In answer to this question, I shall not begin with the undoubted claim of persons nearly related to us, and so go on to more remote and questionable obligations, but say at once that *our duty is equal to our opportunity*, and that we are bound to labour for the conversion of every sinner for whose conversion we have an opportunity of labouring.

I know that this general principle will assign a large sphere to every christian. It may be asked with surprise and incredulity, 'Am I really *bound* to instruct, and persuade, and try to save *every* person for whom, if I were disposed, I *might* make such efforts of kindness? I might make such endeavours, certainly, in many cases; but is it to be said I *must*? May I not also leave them alone, or make them where I choose?'

Far be it from me to put even the best of principles to an unreasonable stretch, or to introduce any principle which is not of unquestionable rectitude. I beg it may be considered, however, whether the rule I have laid down, that obligation is commensurate with opportunity, does not run through the whole of God's requirements and of our duty. In whatever respect our Maker requires any thing of us, he requires all that we have. He has produced nothing for waste;

and every thing which he bestows upon us, including certainly opportunities of usefulness, he commits to our trust as stewards of his manifold kindness. The wasting of any portion of our master's goods, though less wicked than the profligate squandering of them all, is nevertheless criminal, and in exact proportion to the quantity fruitlessly consumed.

Or if we regard the exercise of bevolence towards men, the same rule will be found to obtain. What distressed persons are we bound to relieve? All, certainly, whom we have the opportunity of relieving. If there were a number of persons perishing with hunger, and you possessed both food for their supply, and a facility of conveying it to them, how many of them would you deem it your duty to feed? Would you acknowledge an obligation to present bread to half or three-fourths of them, and then say respecting the remainder, I may feed them or not as I please? Would you feel justified in passing any one by, and, when his necessities were pleaded before you (the opportunity still being in your possession) in saying, 'I am not bound to relieve him?' If not bound to relieve this sufferer, under what obligation have you been to relieve any, or upon what ground has the selection been made? Illustrations of this kind might be adduced to any extent; but it must be evident, I conceive, that the obligation of benevolent exertion, if it be admitted to have any existence at all, arises out of the opportunity, and of course must be commensurate with it. The rule cannot but apply with equal certainty, and with much greater force, to efforts of spiritual kindness. If he is a hard-hearted person, who, with an opportunity of saving any man's life, makes no

exertion, yet more hard-hearted is he, who, with an opportunity of snatching a sinner as a brand from the burning, does not employ it for his rescue.

If, however, any one objects to the rule that our obligation to make efforts for the conversion of sinners, is as extensive as our opportunity of doing so, I only ask for some other principle applicable to the case. For myself, I confess that I know of no other. If we are not bound thus to act whenever we have an opportunity of acting, our own discretion must be called in to select the seasons when we shall be inert. To what extent is this discretion to be carried? If I may choose not to act upon one occasion, so I may likewise upon another, and upon another, until upon every occasion I have exercised that allowable and convenient discretion, and have thus obtained a sanction for not acting at all.

Let it be remembered, therefore, that unless any thing remains to be justly objected to it, the co-extensiveness of opportunity and obligation is the rule by which our field of labour is to be determined. ~ Where we have not opportunity, of course we are under no obligation to act: where we have, we have no justification for sloth. Neither youth nor age, nor wealth nor poverty, nor learning, nor ignorance, nor vice nor amiableness, nor nearness nor distance, nor any other circumstance, can release us from the obligation of improving whatever opportunities we possess for promoting the spiritual welfare of our kind. In taking a survey of our sphere of action according to this principle, our business is to enquire, Towards what persons have I an opportunity of employing means of religious benefit? All these are comprehended in our field of labour.



(2.) The field of labour may be contemplated to some extent in *its details*. Not that it may be possible to describe minutely the sphere actually open to any individual, or that it would be desirable to do so; but the general scope of our duty is readily divisible into smaller departments, of which it may not be unimportant to take a passing notice.

There is, first, *the domestic circle*; which presents the most obvious and most important facilities for the conversion of those who are as yet strangers to God. A pious person cannot be in any station in such a circle without having opportunities, more or less abundant, of promoting their spiritual benefit. Though parents have naturally the amplest influence, that possessed by the younger members of the family is still large, nor is that which pertains to servants by any means inconsiderable.

Next may be mentioned *the neighbourhood*; including those who reside either in immediate contact with us, or within that sphere of kindly intercourse which in many cases is, and in all cases might be, maintained with those around us. It may seem rude, or hazardous, or uncharitable, to interfere with them on matters of religion; nor will I advocate for a moment any measures which may be really improper or unwise: but I cannot help suggesting the probability that something may be done without any impropriety, and the obligation that any thing which can be done short of impropriety ought to be done. A kindly intercourse upon general subjects, perhaps an interchange of offices of kindness, commonly exists in a neighbourhood, and clearly presents an opportunity of conveying religious benefit which ought not to

be overlooked. Our reluctance to such efforts may too justly be traced to our slender appreciation of eternal things. If any of our neighbours were in temporal distress, we should inquire after their welfare, and make offers of assistance; and why is it that similar interest is not shewn in reference to spiritual and eternal sorrows, but because we do not feel in this respect a proportionate anxiety? For myself, I must avow my conviction that the mere fact of neighbourhood constitutes both an opportunity and an obligation to efforts for conversion. I ought no more to live next door to a man who is going to hell, and not try to save his soul, than I ought to see his house on fire, and not endeavour to rescue his life.

A third department in the field of pious labour is that of *friendship*, with the wider circle of *general acquaintance*. The opportunity of bringing religious truth under consideration in these circumstances is obvious; and in the case of intimate friendship, the effort may be seconded by influences of the most favourable and most powerful kind.

Another portion of our sphere of action is opened to us by *religious connexion*. While this associates us with some persons of piety, it brings us into contact with some also of a contrary kind. Very few families, and no congregational bodies, are found altogether devoted to the Lord. To those who are thus brought within our influence, we should endeavour to be useful; and the more so, because it is particularly as professors of religion that we are known by them. In every effort of pious labour, therefore, according to our ability, we should take a part, if without obtrusiveness on the one hand, without backwardness on

the other. The Sunday-school, the Christian Instruction Society, the Sick Man's Friend, the Village Preaching Association, and whatever else may be in action for the good of souls, should be promptly aided by every one according to his opportunity, for opportunity creates an obligation.

*The stranger* must likewise be included within our sphere of devout endeavour, so far as he is brought within that of our influence. With almost numberless persons to whom this name may be applied, we have an occasional or casual converse, either through calls of business, through intercourse with the world, through applications for charity, or the accidents of relaxation or travelling. Far as I am from urging an indiscreet or invariable introduction of religion, it cannot be denied that casual conversation, if carefully watched, would afford at least *some*, if not *many*, opportunities of useful endeavour. Why may not an effort be made to save the soul of the poor creature who, half-naked or starving, importunes, and perhaps receives, your bounty for his body? Why may we not keep in mind the profit of persons with whom we fall in upon a walk, or are associated in a stage coach? Why may we not try to substitute for frequent and sometimes long conversations about the weather, or politics, or the passing concerns of the day, something of serious and beneficial bearing? It is unquestionable that many such things might be done, without any breach of christian wisdom; and if so, then they *ought* to be done.

Finally, *the distance* ought not to be excluded from our regard. We have much intercourse with those who are far removed from us; and the opportunities

thus afforded are of no trifling value. Perhaps we have relations hitherto far from God, who, as relations, are easily accessible to our serious counsel; perhaps we maintain a correspondence of friendship with similar persons, any letter to whom may be directed to their spiritual good; and with respect to letters of an ordinary kind, with whatever obvious exceptions, unquestionably many of them might easily and most properly be imbued with profitable sentiment. Now, what can be done ought to be done. The opportunity and the obligation are one.

Perhaps, on individual application of these remarks, you will not find your own field of labour partaking of all these departments, or of all of them equally; but the hints I have thrown out may guide your inquiry, and assist you to ascertain what its just limits really are.

2. After the *extent* of your field of labour, your inquiry should be directed to *its condition*. You will thus learn what occasion it presents for your exertions, and of what kind those exertions should be.

Here it will be your main object to ascertain as nearly as you can, which of the persons within the sphere of your influence, are in a state of irreligion; an inquiry of some delicacy, indeed, but of obvious necessity, and of no injuriousness or impropriety. If you are met by the question, how can you judge the heart, your reply may be, that you do not judge the heart any further than its quality is manifest in the life. Our Lord has taught us that human character may be known, like a tree, by its fruits; so far therefore as these can be observed, a just foundation is laid for an estimate even of the heart itself; where they cannot

be observed, you form no estimate at all. If again you are asked, how you can presume to call others to your bar, you may answer, that you do not call any man to your bar. Your opinion is formed, not for the purposes of judgment, but of mercy; not to pronounce condemnation, but to lead to pardon. It is formed, not to be proclaimed to others, but to be expressed in earnest kindness to themselves. Neither is it for the most part any such matter of difficulty to form an estimate of character, as these questions seem to imply. In a deplorable number of instances the conduct of men puts doubt immediately to flight, and renders it manifest beyond all question that they are without God, and therefore without hope in the world.

In the estimate we thus form of character, though we should not be harsh, we should above all things be faithful. In this respect there is a wide difference between the manner in which we should *speak* of persons, and that in which we may *think* of them, especially when taking measures for their good. In the former case there is the utmost importance in expressing what is commonly called a charitable judgment, hoping and believing all things; but in the latter, as an opinion erroneously unfavourable can do no injury, so it is far safer than erring on the opposite side. It is much better to be aiming at the conversion of a man who already loves the truth, than to be neglecting one under a mistaken notion of his piety.

In order to an accurate estimate of character, we should beware of laying too great or exclusive a stress upon appearances. We should not regard immorality as the only evidence of irreligion, nor steadiness and the forms of piety as certain tests of godliness.

We should not be satisfied respecting the spiritual state of persons, merely because they are of unblameable conduct, or regular attendants at a place of worship. Much more than this is necessary to constitute real religion; and it is too certain, that under such fair and pleasing appearances, there may exist a cherished enmity to God, and love of the world. Our inquiries should be directed to the detection of these latter evils, a task, if we know our own hearts, of no insuperable difficulty. The word of unerring truth furnishes us with numerous and decisive tests of varied and easy application for the discovery of latent iniquity; while the new creation of divine grace is of a nature too blessed and influential to remain impenetrably concealed.

When the condition of your field of labour is thus scrutinized, you will find it to present a mixed and varied aspect. Some, no doubt, will appear of decided and perhaps of eminent piety, but probably the few; while the far greater number must be ranked among the enemies of God and their own souls. The features of irreligion, also, will probably vary much. Some, perhaps, you will perceive to be grossly vicious and profligate; some in avowed infidelity; some in deep ignorance; some in daring impiety; some consciously hopeless, and some with a false hope; some the victims of delusion, of pride, of formality, of fancied virtue: and mingled with these, it may be, some conscience-stricken, trembling, and unhappy; some anxious and inquiring; some broken-hearted and needing consolation. All these matters it is highly important that you should distinctly and vividly set before yourselves; not rapidly and superficially, as at a

glance which leaves no abiding impression, but distinctly and vividly, that you may feel deeply and permanently what you have to do. Much of the impulse and direction of your exertions is to be derived from such a review.

3. To the survey of the general condition of your field of labour should be added a contemplation of *its peculiarities*. For though there is a general similarity in the circumstances of mankind, yet every man's condition has some peculiar features, by which it may be distinguished from that of every other man. It is so with our spheres of usefulness; and much of the completeness and wisdom with which we shall occupy them, depends upon the correctness with which we estimate their distinctive features and the carefulness with which we regard them.

Some peculiarities arise from our own condition, and others from that of those by whom we are surrounded. Perhaps we may be so situated as to form a part of no domestic circle; or if we do, we may occupy the station of a parent, a child, or a servant. In matters of neighbourhood, or general intercourse, and in relation to all other methods of usefulness, our efforts may be modified according as we may be of either sex, in youth or in age, in the higher or in the lower walks of life, at our own command or under the authority of others. A regard to these things is highly necessary, in order to know what we may do and what we may not do, and to direct as well as to open our path.

Those among whom we are to employ ourselves, in like manner, may give to our station a characteristic aspect. We may be conversant chiefly among the

lower classes, or we may have an extensive access to the higher. We may be in a family where we stand singly amidst ungodly relations; or we may be one of several pious members of a family trained up for God. We may be in a neighbourhood peculiarly abounding in profanity and vice; or we may dwell where order and decorum are eminently observed. We may encounter resentment and opposition, or we may find a ready and welcome access. Infinitely multiplied as these diversities may be, they are all of them instructive, and they ought to be influential. They require from us a special preparation of mind, and corresponding modes of exertion; and much of our usefulness will depend upon the adaptation in both respects which we can succeed in acquiring to the specific circumstances of the case.

Having thus set before you, dear brethren, the importance of making an attentive survey of your field of labour, and the points to which it should be directed, I now earnestly commend you to the task. Perhaps you have never made such an attempt; or if you have, you have never carried it to a proper completeness. As now presented to you, perhaps, it appears a great and difficult undertaking; but be assured you will not find it so. I know, indeed, that it will require more than a superficial and momentary attention, and that it cannot be effected amidst the hurry and din of busy life. It will take you to your chamber; but you ought not to be unwilling to go there. If you will be an active christian, you must be there often and long. Go then, dear brethren, and spend but one hour in the survey of your field of labour, and all difficulties will vanish before you. Commence your endeavour



with an humble and fervent approach to God. Say, "Lord, thou hast bidden me exert myself for the conversion of sinners; I am come to inquire of thee what thou wilt have me to do." Implore the light and guidance of his Spirit; and then enter diligently on your employment. If your thoughts wander, recall them; if your heart slumbers, awaken it; and persevere, till you have looked attentively at your sphere of action, in its extent, its condition, and its peculiarities. And when you have done so, be sure that you remember *what it is* that is before you. It is not a picture to be admired, or a landscape to be gazed upon; but a space of ground to be cultivated. It is not a garden of pleasure, but *a field of labour*; and a field of labour *for you*. Those in your family, in your neighbourhood, in your acquaintance, in your religious connexion, in your casual intercourse, in your distant correspondence, who are yet in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity, are the persons whom you are called upon to instruct, to warn, and to persuade. I have been addressing you as persons stirred up and resolved in this respect to do your duty; it will now be put to the test whether you are so or not. If your duty should appear more extensive and more onerous than it has ever done, if your feelings should still be but defectively prepared to accord with such large demands upon your activity, do not at once shrink from the prospect and abandon the effort. The same considerations which have awakened you in part, and made you willing to undertake a measure of exertion, are adapted and adequate to overcome your remaining lingerings. Bring your heart nearer to the Saviour, and into fuller contemplation of eternal things. Ask yourself pointedly, whe-

ther the exertion from which you shrink is more than the ruin of souls demands, or more than the love of Christ deserves; and whether, since he has no motives of greater power to adduce than those which he has presented to you, he must at length look beyond you, for more faithful servants and more devoted friends, ere the labour shall be done.

## LECTURE II.

### ESTIMATING HIS RESOURCES.

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PSALM CXXVI. 6.

*Bearing precious seed.*

HAVE you, dear brethren, so far pursued your intention of exemplifying the character set before you, that you have taken a serious and deliberate survey of your appropriate field of labour? Have you carefully inquired what persons are within the legitimate sphere of your exertion for their spiritual good? If you have done so, you have doubtless found their number very considerable, and perhaps much larger than you had previously imagined. Instead of being, as you may have fancied, almost shut out from opportunities of usefulness, you have probably found them rise and expand beneath your opening eye, till the voice of him who has summoned you to labour has seemed to say to you, Behold I have set before you an open door.

You have not, I hope, cherished a spirit of refusal or of reluctance to enter upon the labour assigned to you. But in order to proceed either with wisdom or with success, it is important that you should understand the nature and extent of the means you possess for its prosecution. To have surveyed the field you are to cultivate, and to have ascertained the measure of its barrenness, is one thing; it is another, and to the full as necessary, that you should thoroughly acquaint yourselves with the instruments at your command for the

promotion of its fruitfulness. Without such an inquiry, you may remain in a great measure ignorant of your capacities for usefulness, while to a much greater extent you may overlook or underrate them; and thus, like a man who, though he knows he has work to do, either thinks he has no tools, or does not recollect where they are placed, or is imperfectly acquainted with their use, you will be likely to attempt nothing, or to engage yourself in action either with an enfeebling despondency, or with a perplexing sense of insufficiency, or with actual embarrassment and mistake. When you seriously look on the waste submitted to your care, it may perhaps seem to you as though you had no sufficient means for converting it into the garden of the Lord; yet you may be assured that, if you are with any propriety called to apply yourself to its culture, the means are at hand. The call to labour would otherwise be absurd; and never could have issued, as we know it has issued, from the wise, the just, and the gracious God. That you may be imperfectly acquainted with them, both as to their true nature and the extent to which you possess them, is highly probable; and hence arises an additional reason for the inquiry I am recommending to you. Take the pains to see whether you are not, in the language of the text, "bearing precious seed," adapted to vegetate in the soil, however unpromising, and, under the divine blessing, secure of bringing forth the fruits of piety; and, not to confine ourselves to this expression, but to take the whole range of illustration to which it leads, whether you have not the means of breaking up the fallow ground, and of ploughing in hope, that if

your seed should be sown in tears, you shall nevertheless reap in joy.

On another occasion I have stated to you that the methods by which conversion of sinners may be pursued are either direct or indirect. The latter consists in the force of example, while the former comprehends all immediate appeals to the understanding and the heart. I will not here repeat what I have already urged on these topics in two former discourses.\* I propose rather to suggest an inquiry in detail, what resources may be possessed by each of us respectively for pursuing these methods of activity with benefit and success. The subjects which will thus present themselves to our regard are, *character, knowledge, talent, property, influence, and time.*

1. We observe, in the first place, that *character*, I mean of course *pious character*, forms one portion of our resources for the conversion of sinners. I call it so, because the exhibition of it in an exemplary manner is adapted to this end. A deep sense of duty, and a solemn impression of eternity; humility and meekness; love to God, and joy in his salvation; likeness to Christ, and dedication to his glory; all this, exhibited in our conduct, is fitted to instruct, to persuade, and to convert men. It carries to the heart a reproof of iniquity, and a conviction of the excellence of religion, powerfully adapted to the production of good. It is, therefore, an instrument of conversion. It should be the aim of all who possess piety, not merely to cultivate it for their own sake, but to manifest it for the benefit of others; according to those words of our Lord, "Let your light shine before men; and so shine,

\* Individual Efforts, Lectures 9 & 10.

that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

In estimating your resources for the conversion of sinners, then, you should enquire whether, and to what extent, you possess a substantial piety. It is, of course, to be assumed, that to some extent you do so; inasmuch as your desire to become an active christian implies that you are previously a christian indeed. Now even if your attainments in religion should be small, as perhaps they are, you should remember that the possession of the least portion of it yourself confers upon you a capacity for inducing it in others. Whatever you have of real religion, be it ever so little, so much you have of means for the conversion of sinners.

This observation obviously acquires greater force, in proportion to the strength and eminence of piety. If, by a deep work of grace, by a long experience, by a near walk with God, by abundant privileges, by numerous trials, or by any other means, our character have been matured, and our graces rendered strong, our example is, in these respects, so much the more fitted to instruct and attract the ungodly; and whatever we may have attained of christian lowliness, or spirituality, or joy, or submissiveness, these treasures fit us to enrich others, while they actually enrich ourselves. They augment our resources for the conversion of sinners. Let us, therefore, faithfully ask ourselves, not for the purposes of pride or self-gratulation, but for the sake of justly estimating our means of usefulness, what the state of our character is; and whatever we may find reason to acknowledge, with adoring gratitude, that God has wrought in us, let us

charge ourselves to remember that it is all to be employed for him.

It is the more needful to impress ourselves deeply with this obligation, because it is with peculiar facility kept out of sight. To be christians, and to cultivate sedulously the graces of the Spirit, we may readily acknowledge to be our duty; but there it might naturally seem that our duty, in this respect, has its termination; more especially with regard to those more experimental and more mellow exercises of joy or of patience, the great end of which we may conceive to be the comfort of our own souls. Such an idea, though not unnatural, is decidedly wrong. These things fit us, likewise, for a beneficial exemplification of religion in the eyes of the ungodly, and should sacredly be regarded as enlarging our means for their conversion.

2. Secondly, *knowledge* constitutes another portion of our resources for the conversion of sinners; knowledge, that is to say, of divine truth and the way of salvation. This is the direct means of conversion in every case, and is the very element with which it is above all things important to imbue the minds of those who remain yet unconverted. Whatever is known, therefore, on this subject, is directly fitted, by its communication, to accomplish the object in view.

It behoves us to ask ourselves, therefore, whether we have any knowledge of divine things: if we have, it confers upon us a proportionate capacity for the turning of sinners unto God. Now, when persons are pressed to communicate religious knowledge, it is common to hear them say, 'I am no scholar,' or 'I have

no learning;' and this seems to be intended as an excuse for their neglect. Whether such a representation be more or less true, it obviously cannot answer the purpose for which it is adduced. The question is not whether you have any *learning*, but whether you have any *knowledge*; any knowledge of God, or of your duty to him; of your own transgressions against your Maker, and your inward corruption in his sight; of your soul's value and danger, and the method of escape from the wrath to come. If you have not a knowledge of these things, how are you a christian? And if you have, why can you not impart it? What foreign language does it require that you should learn? What science is it needful you should attain? The truth is, that you possess that which alone is necessary, and is above all things calculated, to fit you for the very effort from which you shrink, namely, an experimental acquaintance with Christ. Of what service would the classics or philosophy be to you in this respect, if you had not this? And since you have, in what manner does the want of them obstruct your saying, Behold the way to God? Knowing what is adapted to your own salvation, you know also what is adapted to the salvation of others; and if you be the most ignorant of christians, you have knowledge enough for the conversion of the world.

It is obvious to observe here, that our resources for the conversion of sinners are augmented in exact proportion as our knowledge is increased. Some christians have acquired an enlarged experience; some possess a more extended acquaintance with the word of God; some have familiarized themselves with the



controversies which relate to the doctrines or the evidences of christianity. Now in whatever direction, and to whatever extent, our knowledge may be enlarged, the whole of it is to be ranked among our means of doing spiritual good. It should not be confined to our own breasts, whatever may be the satisfaction or the benefit we may derive from it; but, like a light in darkness, it should be made subservient to the advantage of others as well as to our own. We can scarcely fail to be thrown among persons to whom the knowledge we possess may be suitable and important; and, in all methods, it should be our aim to be communicating it. In a contrary course we shall resemble the husbandman who would hoard the seed which he ought to have scattered over the ground; or the traveller who should have concealed the light by which his companions in a perilous way might have been saved from destruction.

3. Thirdly, we have placed *talent* among our resources for the conversion of sinners; not, however, intending by this term exclusively the more splendid endowments sometimes bestowed upon mankind, by a beneficent creator.

It is obvious that a capacity of communicating what we know to others, is a capacity likewise of rendering it subservient to their good; and in proportion to the facility and the persuasiveness with which this can be done, our means of promoting the welfare of others are increased. Whoever has the power of presenting to his fellow-sinners the things which belong to their peace, in an instructive, convincing, and persuasive form, is in possession of an important instrument for their conversion.

Every one of you should inquire therefore, with what portion of the gift of utterance has God endowed you. Whether it be little or much, according to its exact quantity it endows you with resources for the salvation of men.

You will, perhaps, be ready to acknowledge, as a general truth, that those who have a talent for speaking should employ it for God; but you will be equally ready, it may be, to withdraw yourselves from this highly privileged class. 'If I had talent, I would endeavour to use it; but I really have no talent, and my attempting to communicate religious instruction is quite out of the question.' It is an amiable piece of modesty to say that we have no talent, though I believe it is said by much the most freely, when the duty of doing good is connected with it. Even if it were absolutely true, I do not know any thing else besides the doing of good which is so exclusively left to the more talented portion of the community. Nobody is willing that persons of superior talents should be the only rich, or the only honourable, or the only successful people in the world; on the contrary, every one strives for his portion in these respects; and this renders it very suspicious when the plea of no talent is adduced in bar of activity for God.

Without being tenacious on this point, however, and without wishing to persuade any person that he has more talent than he may acknowledge, I am ready to take the lowest ground, and to suppose myself addressing a pious man who has nothing more than the ordinary gift of speech. This itself constitutes a talent for the conversion of sinners. Any person who can make himself understood on matters of

common life, and can give intelligible utterance to ordinary emotions, is capable of expressing himself beneficially on subjects of eternal concern. The communication of religious knowledge, though it may be rendered more easy by the possession of eloquent gifts, is by no means dependent upon them. Uttered in the most homely phrases, or by the most stammering tongue, the truth of God is still itself, and is both adapted and adequate to accomplish its design. Every christian who is not dumb, has a talent for conversion. I am not concerned to say that it is a large talent. On the contrary, it may be very small; but to say that it is small is nothing to the purpose, when the burden of our exhortation is that, however small, it ought to be employed. To say that we have no talent, is to utter a manifest untruth; either overlooking in fact, or neglecting on purpose, an undeniable measure of capacity for useful exertion.

It may be added, that a peculiar adaptation to usefulness attaches to the very persons who might with most plausibility maintain that they have no talent for conveying religious instruction. We always understand those most readily, whose language and habits of thinking bear a resemblance to our own. When this is not the case in a considerable degree, the attempt to communicate knowledge is inevitably in some measure impeded, and very often partially frustrated. For this reason a considerable portion of ministerial labour is lost, especially upon the less informed part of our congregations; for the same reason the conversation of more talented persons is, and must be, of inferior efficiency with the same class, because it is, and with every effort to remedy the evil, will still be, in

a measure, unadapted to their comprehension. The humbler portion of society are far the most easily and effectually instructed by persons of their own order, whose manner of expression they at once understand, whose line of thought accords nearly with their own, and whose illustrations are drawn from sources with which they are familiar. So far, therefore, from our untalented friends having no fitness to labour for the conversion of sinners, their fitness is pre-eminent above that of all other persons, for usefulness to those in the same walks of life with themselves. If they should (as is sometimes the case,) request a minister, or some other supposed more qualified person, to call upon a neighbour, the probability, and almost the certainty is, that their own conversation will prove the more acceptable and beneficial of the two. The mistake I am combating, thus appears to be one of a peculiarly mischievous character, inasmuch as it not only keeps out of the field some labourers, but those best adapted for a very large portion of the work to be done. I charge it upon you therefore, dear friends, even the least informed and the least capable among you, to remember that you are not without a talent for instruction, and one which you have probably never duly appreciated. It may not be large enough to exalt you in comparison with your fellow men; but it is decidedly sufficient to fit you for usefulness.

To advert to a different class of persons. It would be amusing, if it were not too painful, to observe, among those who plead that they have no talent for religious conversation, many whose talent for conversation of almost any other kind admits of no question. 'We cannot talk upon religion.' Astonishing! when

you can talk so rapidly and so well upon almost any thing else. You are afflicted with no hesitation in the chit-chat of familiar acquaintance, in general conversation with strangers, in settling matters of business, in discussing politics, or in discoursing of the sciences; but you cannot talk upon religion! There is something in that subject that makes your voice falter, and absolutely chokes your utterance! Ought not any person of common understanding to be ashamed of such a mere subterfuge from the sense of obligation, and the call to duty?

There are some, however, who must be conscious, and who would acknowledge, that their Maker has endowed them with larger powers of apprehending and exhibiting truth, or with more eminent aptitude for analyzing the character and reaching the heart of man. Scattered among the body of sincere christians, there may certainly be found the power of luminous instruction, of convincing argument, of humbling reproof, of persuasive importunity; some persons surely must know that they possess a measure, perhaps an eminent measure of these gifts; and what an immense accumulation of instrumentality for conversion is thus produced! These are the powers which move the world. They throw light upon the blind eyes, and arouse the dormant passions of mankind. They give force to errors, and work up the hearts of men to furious mischief. Equally adapted are they to give force to truth, and to subdue the proud and turbulent spirit to submission to the Saviour. Every man who has in his hands any share of this instrumentality, is proportionately rich in resources for the conversion of his perishing fellow-mortals.

4. We have spoken of *property*, in the fourth place, as a part of our resources for the conversion of sinners. It is not that we attach any value, however, to such misnamed religion as may be purchased with money. The tribes of hypocrites who seem devout for the sake of the benefits which may recompense their fraud, or who show their sanctimonious faces at a place of worship in order to link themselves with the charities and benefactions attached to it, cannot be looked upon without melancholy and loathing; nor can such an employment of money, whether covert or open, be contemplated without deep regret. The intention of the donor may be kind, but the effect of his gift is always mischievous. Neither do I now mean to advert to the power of wealth to advance christianity by supporting the various societies which are in operation, more or less effectively, for this end. Such subscriptions, whatever be their value, most unhappily separate the apparent support of the cause of Christ from the exercise of *individual exertion*, and have had a most injurious effect upon the christian world at large, by presenting a plausible and acceptable apology for its neglect. The use of property to which I now refer, as holding a place among individual efforts for the conversion of sinners, lies in the diffusion of religious knowledge, by giving or lending copies of the sacred scriptures, together with tracts and more considerable publications. The value and importance of such a mode of exertion are obvious. It is well known that many more persons can now read than at any former period; that multitudes in the lower classes are very defectively supplied with materials for satisfying this appetite of the mind; that the food they seek is too

often of the pernicious rather than the salutary kind ; and that works of frivolity, obscenity, and irreligion, are freely circulated, and almost thrust into their hands. It is ascertained, moreover, that the loan of tracts has, to a great extent, excited or discovered a thirst for more beneficial reading, and necessitated the establishment of lending libraries. Those who employ themselves in actual endeavours of instruction, speedily find, also, how important it is to induce persons with whom they converse to read upon the same subjects ; and so, by bringing an additional power to bear upon ignorance and vice, to aid and prolong the efforts of their lips. The wide dispersion of tracts and small religious books has, in fact, been productive of immense advantages ; and it is a method of usefulness which every one, who has it in his power, should pursue. What is in our power in this respect ? A supply of tracts for distribution may be maintained at a very small expense, so that scarcely any person need be denied this privilege ; and there must certainly be many by whom this method of useful activity might be carried *personally* to a very considerable extent. I say *personally*, because nothing else comes up to my meaning ; and I deem it important that this kind of effort should not supersede, but, as far as possible, be associated with those of direct conversation.

5. The next portion of our resources for the conversion of sinners consists in *influence*. Every measure of influence, though the smallest imaginable, has a manifest adaptation to the conversion of sinners. It may in any case be employed to gain attention to instruction, to induce a habit of consideration, to engage a perusal of the word of God, or of other pro-

fitable books, or to procure an abandonment of evil company, and an attendance on divine worship. In many instances it may be carried much further, as may appear from a passing glance at the different circumstances in which it may be exercised.

The influence of mere neighbourhood is not small, especially where an interchange of kind offices is kept up. That of a familiar acquaintance is yet greater. Many things are done at the request, or at the recommendation, or even at the suggestion of a companion. Still stronger than this is the influence of intimate friendship. Besides the opportunity which is thus afforded for direct and unrestrained fidelity, there arise from such a state some topics of very tender and powerful appeal. To the parental relation pertains influence of yet increasing power, especially if associated with a wisely cultivated affection. Parental instruction, reproof, and entreaty, have a force which nothing can exceed, which perhaps nothing can equal. The complete possession which may be taken of the understanding, the authority with which the manifestations of evil may be rebuked and restrained, and the tenderness which may be thrown into appeals to the heart, are invaluable facilities for the work of conversion. Many a child who has been obstinate under every other consideration, has been melted to tears by the question, Shall we be separated for ever? The influence of the head of a family or an establishment extends also, with no inconsiderable force, over all its members. His instructions and counsels are of greater weight than those of other persons; while it is often in his power, without infringing on personal freedom, to restrain as well as to reprove the



commission of iniquity. When persons hold a station of greater publicity, a corresponding extension of their influence is conferred. Their example then becomes more conspicuous, their recommendations more approaching to the authoritative. Here, however, it is needful to be especially cautious. The influence of public station and office has too often been exerted on a principle of interest, or of constraint, rather tending to obstruct than to promote a just exercise of the understanding, or an appeal to the conscience and the heart; an *undue* influence which cannot be too much regretted, but against which it is perhaps very difficult to be sufficiently on our guard.

In the endless diversity of circumstances, it behoves each of us to enquire what influence pertains to us; and to reckon it all among our resources for the conversion of sinners. This is a means of operation of which no person can be entirely destitute. It necessarily arises out of the relations and circumstances of life, according to which indeed it may vary, but in no case can it be entirely wanting. A person who should imagine that he could exert no influence on religious subjects, need only be reminded of that which he knows he could exert upon general ones. There are certainly some persons who would oblige you at your request, at least in a way which put them to no trouble; and there are probably more who, at your importunity, would be willing to benefit themselves. You would not despair of inducing a sick neighbour to accept medical advice, especially if offered gratuitously, or the distressed to allow you to minister to their relief. What could be your meaning, therefore, if you should say you have no influence? It could mean only, what

I hope you do not mean, that you are not disposed to employ your influence for men's eternal welfare. I cannot be content, however, with maintaining the fact that you have *some* influence. I must urge you to examine the various aspects of your station in society, and to bring before yourselves *all* the influence which may arise from them. No part of it should be overlooked, when you are searching after means for the conversion of men.

6. Finally, an important part of our resources consists in *time*. Though many efforts to convert sinners may be made without any peculiar appropriation of time, yet there are others to which time is necessary, and an attention to which can be enlarged in proportion as leisure is enjoyed. Time, therefore, whatever portion of it may be available in our case for such occupations, is clearly to be considered as augmenting our means of useful activity.

What then are our circumstances in this respect? Though there are obviously some persons of great leisure, many of you perhaps are ready to say, 'I would exert myself if I had time, but I really have no time.' It is scarcely conceivable that any case can exist in which this can be strictly true. Even the busiest persons find time for almost every thing which they deem interesting or important. That we can find other things to do, and that we are actually busily employed, may probably be the fact; but it will be difficult for any man to show that he could devote no time to the salvation of his neighbour, if he thought proper to do so. For purposes far less important than this, labourers will work over-hours, tradesmen will contrive means of leaving their shops under the care

of others, and persons who are employed all the day will sit up a part of the night ; so that, even with the really busy, the plea of want of time is only a cover for the want of heart. But with how many people is life in great part a busy idleness ! Always doing something, indeed ; but what ? Things which are not worth the doing perhaps, and which, at all events, it is not at all necessary to do. Supposing many occupations to be innocent, and even laudable, in comparison with endeavours to save sinners they are clearly light and unimportant. Let any observer of the world, and of the christians who are scattered in it, reckon up the hours which are spent in frivolous conversation, in works of taste, in calls of ceremony, in long and unprofitable visits, in scenes of relaxation and amusement, and then let him say what an immense portion of the resources available for the conversion of men is absolutely squandered and lost.

I press it, therefore, upon those of you who might, with the greatest apparent justice, affirm that you have no time to strive with men for their salvation, to re-examine this plea with an honest mind. Are you sure that you are even so busy as you suppose yourselves to be ? Are there no considerable fragments of time actually unemployed, which are at present overlooked, but which might be brought to light by a diligent search ? Are none of your occupations so light and immaterial that you might easily withdraw a portion of the time which is now devoted to them ? Have you not some leisure in an evening ? Might you not spend less time in light reading ? Might not the hours allowed to company be abridged ? Could you not sometimes rescue half an hour from business,

or sometimes from sleep? If in point of fact any thing were proposed to you which you felt to be interesting or important, would you not find time for it? Would you imagine that you had no time to save a man that was drowning, or to extinguish a fire in your neighbour's habitation? I cannot conceal my conviction that an estimate of time for any object is but an estimate of the importance of the object itself; and that no man who realises the value of souls will find himself without time to save them. Remember, therefore, dear friends, that whatever time might, under a due sense of your obligation, be applied to this purpose, forms a part of your resources for it, the very resources after which we are inquiring.

Some of you are persons of manifest and acknowledged leisure. With much time at your own command, you are rich in resources for conversion. To what a considerable extent may you be employed in instructing the ignorant, in reclaiming the vicious, in guiding the disconsolate to the Saviour! Every hour which the duties of your station do not demand, augments your capacity for the salvation of the lost.

Having thus exhibited to you, dear brethren, the directions in which our resources for the conversion of sinners are to be found, allow me to remind you that I have done so upon the supposition of your being *desirous to find them*. I have taken it for granted that you feel the importance of cultivating the field which is before you, and that you wished to know what means of doing so were in your possession. I should be sorry if this discourse should make upon you such an impression as to show that I have been in error. Have you felt rather unhappy than otherwise,

to learn that your resources for the conversion of sinners are so ample? Did you really cherish the imagination that you had few or no means of action, as comfortably shielding you from the exhortation to labour? Are you now indulging a querulous and half-captious spirit, ready to insist upon it that the view given of your resources cannot be a fair one? You *ought* to have received the hints which have been submitted to you in a very different spirit. It should have delighted you to discern that you have so many means of doing good. It should have made your heart leap for joy to know, that, with such a wilderness before you, you are bearing so much of the precious seed which is adapted to render it fruitful in righteousness.

If you have received the suggestions I have presented to you in any measure of such a spirit, you will not now dismiss them from your remembrance, but will rather carry them to your chambers, and make them matter of deliberate and serious examination. You will ask, What are my individual resources for the conversion of sinners? Permit me to give you one caution as to the manner in which you allow yourselves to answer this question. It may seem to be a departure from humility to estimate your own resources highly, more especially, perhaps, as to character, knowledge, talent, or influence. You may deem it only modesty to make, not only the lowest estimate you can, but one even lower than you can, with any sense of justice, adopt. You should remember, however, that it is one thing to speak of our resources before men, and another to estimate them before God; it is one thing to survey them for purposes of complacency and self-gratulation, and another to calculate

their capacities for useful exertion. It is in the former case only, I believe, that we are apt to overrate them; in the latter our chief danger is on the opposite side. We run little hazard of over-estimating our responsibility; while, on the contrary, the plausible and amiable pretext of humility may easily serve unjustly to reduce it. I do not wish you to think your means of usefulness larger than they are; but if you are not careful, you will infallibly think them smaller than they are. Be resolved to estimate them justly, that, as stewards, you may be found faithful.

Finally, when you have completed this inquiry, connect it with that which you have already made into your field of labour. Having first seen what you have to do, you now discern the instruments by which it is to be done. Remember, that these instruments are given you for work, and not for amusement, and for work in the precise field which you have recently surveyed. Be up and doing, therefore. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

### LECTURE III.

#### CULTIVATING FITNESS FOR LABOUR.

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PSALM li. 13.

*Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

THE missionary accounts inform us of a Hottentot convert, who, for a time, absented himself from the exercises of christian instruction and fellowship. Being asked, upon his return, why he had done so, he said, in substance, that, having seen some of his brethren called to somewhat difficult efforts of usefulness, he had been afraid lest he should be thought fit for similar exertions. It may be apprehended that a measure of the same spirit, though not expressed with equal simplicity, exists among some professors who are not Hottentots. If we suspected that we did possess talents for extensive usefulness, how eager would some of us be to keep it a secret, almost from ourselves, lest the voice of our brethren, or that of our own consciences, should summon us to unwelcome labour! On the other hand, what a comfortable thought it may be to others among us, that we really have no considerable talent for beneficial exertion, and, therefore, cannot be expected to do much, if any thing, in that direction. How delightfully it lessens the weight with which the sense of duty and of conscientious obligation might otherwise bear upon us; and, by furnishing, if not a justification,

yet a pretext for inaction, enables us to settle down into a state of undisturbed and imperturbable repose!

Now I do not wonder that any person who first surveys the field of labour which is before him, and sees how large it is, and how barren, and who then estimates with any measure of justice his resources for its cultivation, and sees how ample they are, and well adapted to the end, should be oppressed with a sense of his unfitness for the task. You yourselves, dear brethren, have probably already said, 'Who is sufficient for these things? If I had the most powerful talents, the most eminent piety, the most profound wisdom, they might all be employed in this field of labour. Nay, they are all wanted here; and the share of them which I possess is so small as to convince me that I am disqualified for producing any considerable effect. With *my* little gifts, and graces, and skill, what can I do for such an object as the conversion of these sinners to God?'

I am neither surprised nor sorry that such a sense of your deficiencies has fallen upon you; I should have been both sorry and surprised if it had not been so. Neither do I wish to dispel the feelings which have arisen upon this subject, founded, as in a great measure they unquestionably are, in truth, and capable as they are of receiving a most salutary direction. All that I ask of you is to deal with them as *active* christians, and not as *slothful* ones. May I not hope that you will do this? Have you not been contending, and in some measure effectually, with the slothfulness of your own hearts? And is it not as christians of an active spirit that you come hither to learn the practical methods of activity?



If it be so, I can without difficulty trace out the course you will pursue. In the first place, *you will not suffer yourselves to suppose for a moment, that, however great your deficiencies may be, you are totally disqualified for action.* Some fitness for promoting others' good you have, if you are a christian indeed; and this, however small, it is your duty and privilege immediately to employ.

In the next place, *you will not allow yourselves to judge of your own deficiencies hastily, or superficially: or, above all, with a willingness to exaggerate them.* Far, on the one hand, from indulging a spirit of pride or complacency in your qualifications for usefulness, you will feel, on the other, the obligation of estimating them with honesty and justice; lest merely imaginary defects should lead to real and criminal negligence. There are few things which, when we are called upon to do them for the first time, we do not imagine that we cannot do. This objection is always answered by saying, '*Try*; you do not know what you can do till you try.' A person disposed to work never hesitates to follow this advice; and if you are in the spirit of an active christian, you will never suffer yourselves to believe that you cannot labour for God, *until you have tried* and found that you cannot.

In the third place, *you will regard your ascertained deficiencies with deep and unfeigned sorrow.* Instead of considering it as a *comfort* that your fitness for usefulness is small, you will deem it an affliction, and will place it among the heaviest of your griefs. You will dwell upon the importance and excellency of the object which you have so little adaptation to attain. It is the saving of souls from death: an object of incal-

culable interest, inasmuch as it involves the highest pleasures or the deepest pains of an eternal world. It has awakened the tender compassion of the whole Deity, and engaged the concurrent action of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It has drawn persuasion from the lips of the Saviour, tears from his eyes, and blood from his heart. It has awakened the sympathy of angels, and would have induced their willing exertions too, but that they are forbidden to employ them. It has engaged the deepest counsels of eternity past, and is to constitute the chief glory of eternity to come. And when you meditate on these topics, with grief you will say, 'Is it such an object that I am so little qualified to pursue; an object in comparison with which every thing else that can be done on earth dwindles into nothing?'

You will contemplate the peculiar relation which, as a christian, you bear to the promotion of this end. You will recollect that your character is prepared for its attainment; since, in order to shine in the world, you are first made light in the Lord, and since you are fully impregnated with the heavenly qualities which you are expected to diffuse. You will call to mind the obligation under which redeeming love has laid you, and the summons to labour which is so urgently and touchingly repeated by the voice of your dying and risen Lord; you will bear in memory the expectation which he has formed, both of your readiness to labour, and of the results of your endeavours; you will not forget that if you, as one of his disciples, are not qualified to serve him, no other persons can be expected to do so; and musing upon these things, you will be ready to exclaim,

‘Woe is me, that my deficiencies are so great for the service of my Lord! The worldly, the gay, the profligate, the formal, will not, cannot labour for him; and I, whom he has ransomed by his blood, and transformed by his Spirit, whom he has fitted to be useful, and expects to be laborious, I am in a grievous measure disqualified for exertion! What then am I fit for? Salt is good, if it have a savour; but if not, it is good for nothing, but is cast out, trodden under foot of men. Is this my character? And am I really almost entirely wanting in that which constitutes the whole worth of a christian in the world?’

You will bethink yourself, too, of the rich and exquisite delights by which endeavours for the conversion of sinners are recompensed. You know that the communication of benefits is always a luxury; and that this is the highest of all luxuries, because it is the greatest of all benefits. To save a soul from death is infinitely more than to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to liberate the captive, to rescue the dying. It is to snatch a brand out of the everlasting burnings, to lead the lost to the possession of immortal glory. Unutterable luxury on earth! What will it be in heaven? ‘But for acquiring these pleasures,’ you will say, ‘I have very little fitness. My want of talent and courage, of consistency and skill, excludes me from these joys. I can attain only the inferior delights of piety, and can never know the ecstasy of leading sinners unto Jesus.’

In the midst of such reflections, it will be impossible for you to look upon your deficiency with complacency. *Think with comfort that they disqualify you for pious labour!* What man finds any comfort in

knowing that his ignorance or want of education unfits him for rising in the world, or for improving the opportunities which are open to him of becoming rich and prosperous! And what christian, but one who loves his sloth and self-indulgence more than all that impels him to labour, can find *comfort* in his *unfitness for exertion*? No, dear brethren, view it aright, and it will be your grief, a subject of perpetual and touching lamentation.

And this is not all. *You will*, in the fourth place, *entertain an earnest desire that your impediments to action may be removed*. You will not sit down contented in so afflictive a situation. With important and interesting objects in view, men have shown an intense eagerness to possess themselves of the qualifications necessary to their accomplishment; and if you are truly awake to the value of the object before you, you will make restless inquiry whether the difficulties which surround you may not be overcome, and the deficiencies which obstruct you be supplied. Something like this will be your language: 'Is there no way of augmenting my fitness for this blessed employ? Must I remain so afflictively disqualified to be active, useful, and happy? May I not become more exemplary? Can I not pursue the acquisition of wisdom? May I not cultivate even defective talent? Will there be no recompense for diligent and vigorous endeavours like these?'

You will carry these inquiries to the throne of grace, and lay them before the Lord, with urgent importunity that he would open your lips and sanctify your heart; combining your earnest supplication with the sacred purpose, 'Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.'

Now even if all such questions must be answered in the negative, if it were quite certain that our qualifications for useful activity never could be increased, this would form no good reason why our deficiencies should cease to be our affliction. Does a poor man cease to deplore his poverty because he has no hope of its mitigation? Do those who suffer pain bewail it less because it is incapable of relief? Does the captive less deeply lament his bondage because his chains are riveted on him for ever? No: and if our hearts are right, even if our afflictive unfitness for activity were hopeless, we should never cease to bewail it.

But it is not hopeless. If there is much to awaken an impulse to seek after growing qualifications, there is also much to encourage it: and it will be my present business to show you, that, by any person who will resolutely attempt it, much may be done in *cultivating fitness to labour for God*.

I. I may refer briefly to *the general grounds upon which such a representation may be established*.

It is to be presumed, then, that skilfulness in turning sinners to God, like the same quality in the pursuit of any other object, may be acquired by appropriate methods. All the arts and manufactures, the trades and professions, that are carried on in the world, are acquired by proper attention and instruction. No man possesses them at his birth, or becomes competent in them by magic. Every man *learns* the art or trade which he follows; and any ordinary profession may be acquired by a moderate use of our faculties. Now, admitting and duly estimating all the differences between the process of a sinner's conversion and every other object of human endeavour, yet in as far as

human endeavour or instrumentality is applicable to it, I am bold to ask why the method, or the art (I hope to use this term without being misunderstood) of turning sinners to God may not be acquired, as well as any other? What is there about it so peculiar as to baffle our efforts, and to defy a vigorous exertion for its attainment? It is simply the art of instruction and persuasion respecting divine things. But the art of instructing and persuading men is notoriously attainable by human industry, as thousands of instances prove; and if any person who endeavours to do so may improve himself in the art of instructing and persuading men to evil, why not to good? Or if in relation to temporal things, why not to spiritual? Our endeavours to convert sinners consist in nothing but the use of our natural faculties for this end; but the use of our natural faculties, in any case in which they can be used at all, is clearly capable of cultivation and improvement.

To this it may be added (and, though the remark is obvious, it is important,) that, while the art of turning sinners to God may be acquired by appropriate efforts, it never can be acquired without them. Obvious as this sentiment is, it seems to have been strangely overlooked. Professors appear, extensively, to have regarded qualifications for usefulness as existing of themselves, or as springing up and ripening without cultivation. One person has them, another has them not; and this is supposed to be all that can be said on the subject. Yet this is far from being the fact. No person, whatever may be his natural talents, becomes eminently fitted for usefulness, without a sedulous cultivation of his powers. As every art must have a learning, so this is no exception to the rule.

In this view, even our very ignorance and unskilfulness afford us a ground of encouragement. For I suppose I may safely put the question to you, and to professors generally, what pains have you ever taken to acquire fitness for converting sinners? Recollect yourselves a moment. Some of you probably are struck by perceiving, perhaps for the first time, that you have never used any endeavours for this purpose; while few, if any of you, can say that they have been vigorous and habitual. Yet it seems marvellous to you that you are not eminently fitted to be useful! It would be marvellous rather if you were. Which of the ordinary occupations of life would you have been competent to perform, if you had taken no more pains to acquire it than you have to learn how to save souls? And is it this alone, of all things, that you expected to know without learning? And this object, the greatest and best of all, that you imagined you could be highly qualified to promote, without the cultivation of your powers?

But, as I have said, connected as it is with inattention, our very unskilfulness may encourage us. It is not as though we had been using every endeavour to become wise, and after all were thus incompetent to our task. We have scarcely yet begun learning the alphabet of this science. All that may be attained by consideration, by discipline of heart, by nearness to God, and by prayer, all this remains to be attained by us. It is easy of attainment; it is ready to our hand; and it needs only a moderately diligent and vigorous use of our faculties to make the immediate acquisition of it. Much less trouble than we have taken to master the operations of the trade we follow, or those of ordinary domestic

life, will put us into possession of inestimable treasures of wisdom, and go far towards removing the disqualifications we deplore.

II. We shall find this encouraging expectation confirmed, *if we look more particularly at those things in which eminent qualification for usefulness consists.*

1. And here we may notice, in the first place, what may be called *natural fitness*; meaning by this term an aptitude for communicating instruction, a persuasive address, a talent for conversation. Such a talent obviously affords great facilities for religious usefulness, and is almost essential to any considerable qualification for it. It is a talent, moreover, which we find it very easy to persuade ourselves that we do not possess, and which, at the same time, we are apt to consider so exclusively in the light of a natural gift, as to be quite beyond the hope of attainment. Now I am very far from calling into question the diversity of original talent, or from imagining that persons can give themselves what talents they please: I maintain, however, with entire conviction, that the mind of every sane person contains an elementary capacity for all useful and important pursuits; so that while persons of peculiar constitutional talent may make more rapid and eminent attainments, any and every person, by a diligent and well directed cultivation of his faculties, may make such as are respectable and sufficient for ordinary purposes. Nothing can be more obvious than the fact, that, while few persons have great natural talents for poetry, music, or painting, a large number of those who have no considerable talent for these accomplishments at all, make in them, nevertheless,



very respectable acquirements. The principle I have laid down might be still more strikingly illustrated by a reference to the useful arts, which are acquired, in a degree sufficient for all valuable purposes, by persons of all degrees and all diversities of natural adaptation. We are warranted, therefore, in representing it as a general feature of providential administration, that, however original talent may vary, and splendid gifts may appear to raise one man unmeasurably above another, a sufficiency of whatever is truly valuable is within the reach of every man.

Let this beneficial, and, as it appears to me, unquestionable principle of the divine dispensation, be applied to such natural talents as may be needful to religious activity. Let it be taken for granted that you have not any large measure of a gift for instructive and persuasive converse, and even, if you please, that you are remarkably deficient in this respect: without saying that you can alter your natural constitution, or create for yourself original talent, we say without fear that, by a moderately industrious cultivation of your faculties, you may acquire a very valuable facility of religious conversation. Of every one of the common arts of life you were once as ignorant as you now can be of the method of persuading sinners to be reconciled to God; you have acquired them by your endeavours to learn, without having any extraordinary talent for any of them; and in the same way in which you have acquired these, you may acquire the art of turning sinners to God. What are these methods?

The first of them is obviously *considerate effort*. To a person who performs any manual operation but indifferently, we naturally say, 'Try to do it as well as

you can; be attentive; mind what you are about.' In ordinary cases it is very well known that such trials both develope capacity, and strengthen it. If you wish, therefore, to augment your capacity for religious conversation, I say to you, 'Try to do it as well as you can. Do it, not heedlessly, but considerately, and with preparation. Call to mind the object you have in view; prepare yourself with topics suited to your purpose; bestow attention and care upon the execution of your design; aim at improvement; and this very exercise of your powers will invigorate them.

The advantage thus acquired is increased by *repeated effort*. As no art is perfectly acquired at once, so multiplied efforts are never made without a proportionate increase of skill. What we do often, we infallibly do easily, and if we try, we shall do it well. Our early endeavours in religious conversation and address may have been attended with many defects, and may have oppressed us even with a heavier sense of our unfitness than we had ever before suffered; but this should by no means discourage us. No person ever made a pin well the first time; but practice leads the learner forward, even to perfection. If you make a proper use of your failures in one attempt, they will increase your wisdom for the next; and it is impossible that a series of such efforts should be made without a very valuable measure of success. You yourselves do not believe that you could pursue such a course for ten years, or for one year, and have no more talent for religious conversation at the close of this period than you have at present.

It must be added that a talent for religious conversation may be promoted, in many cases, by a little *dis-*

*cipline of the heart.* Our attempts in this direction are sometimes embarrassed by our feelings. We could converse on any other subject; but, when we think of conversing upon religion, we are taken with such a trepidation, we are so nervous, that our very voice is choked, and we cannot speak. Now, without denying that all or some of this may be constitutional, and admitting readily that, whether constitutional or not, it is trying, I must still say that such feelings as these are capable of regulation, and that, for any important object, we know what it is to control them. What man or woman suffers them to stand permanently in the way of their promotion and advancement in life? And how long would they obstruct our religious activity, if we realized the infinite value and importance of the end to be attained? Or if every one who is liable to a little nervousness and trepidation in bringing forward serious conversation is entitled to abandon the attempt, where is the person who might not find a screen for his taciturnity?

If I have brought home to you, dear brethren, any conviction that, for all useful purposes, a talent of religious conversation may be successfully cultivated, even by those who may possess the least of it as a natural gift, let me press it upon you to commence the process. Do not any longer imagine that even a real want of natural talent denies you the attainment of an ample fitness for exertion. If you have not an aptitude at pious converse, acquire it; just in the same way as you would apply yourselves to the mastery of any domestic process or professional operation, with which you might find yourselves unacquainted. Let me press it upon you also to commence this cultivation of your

talents *without delay*. Procrastination increases its difficulty, both because the cultivation of natural talent becomes less easy as life advances, and because an habitual neglect demands ultimately a more strenuous effort for its destruction. In this respect persons young in piety and young in life possess immense advantages over others. Only begin the cultivation of your talents for usefulness, dear young friends, in this period of your course, and many difficulties, which now impede the activity of your seniors, will never occur to you at all. To them, in fact, they are in great part the mere production of indulged and confirmed habits. They feel themselves unfitted now for religious converse and address, chiefly because they have never been used to it; and when they would exert themselves, they are embarrassed by little more than the rigidity resulting from the inaction of so many preceding years. Had those who are now aged, studied and practised from their youth the art of persuading men to repentance, they would now have been masters in a science in which many of them are babes; and instead of having a number of old professors who, for the most part, shrink from efforts of usefulness, and really do not know how to address fifty people for their souls' good, or to converse with ungodly individuals for the same end, we should possess in them at this moment an invaluable body of instructors. Such, I hope, the next generation of old professors will be; but it is for you who are now young to see that it shall be so, by a diligent cultivation of those natural powers, which every man possesses in a sufficient degree, and which, if cultivated, will render the experience and wisdom of

your later years a treasure for the benefit of the world.

2. A second portion of the qualifications for usefulness may be expressed by the term *moral fitness*. It consists mainly of three branches: the first is an established and eminent spirituality of mind; the second is an exemplary consistency of conduct; and the third is an adequate command of temper. A sense of deficiency in these things, is, perhaps, not an unfrequent hindrance to religious activity, especially in the family or other circles, in which our character is more continually subject to observation. When some opportunity of useful converse arises, and we are sufficiently alive to it to perceive that it ought to be improved, we feel, perhaps, that we are at the time in so dull and stupid a frame, our thoughts so absorbed in earthly things, our feelings so far from spiritual, that we are unfit for the effort; we cannot say any thing about religion in such a state of mind: or it may be that we have not long before shown some unchristian temper, either of passion, or pride, or levity, or want of uprightness; so that the very thought of inculcating religion upon another too severely reproves ourselves, while we know that our inconsistencies would furnish an unanswerable pretext for the evasion of our exhortations: or perhaps we fear to speak, because we have found ourselves in similar attempts liable to lose our temper, and to manifest a degree of petulance and irritation tending to destroy the effect of the most touching truths. These things constitute, it is true, a grievous unfitness for usefulness; but the want of this kind of fitness is surely not insuperable. Spirituality, consistency, and self-control, are clearly parts of christian

character, and capable of successful cultivation by christian industry. Let it only be our concern to retire more resolutely from the world, and to draw nearer to God; to look more intently at the things which are not seen, and to dwell more solemnly on the powers of the world to come; let us only be more in the presence of our ascended Lord, and more importunate for the influences of his blessed Spirit; let us only make a more thorough examination of our own hearts, and subject them more deliberately to the subduing and sanctifying influences of the love of Christ; let us only associate the more vigorous exercises of the closet with a more watchful and prayerful spirit in the world; and these qualifications will be continually on the increase. There is no eminence in these, which, if we choose, we may not attain.

3. A third portion of fitness for spiritual usefulness may be called *practical fitness*, or skill; an aptness in conducting religious conversation *well*, so as to engage attention, to touch the feelings, to reach the conscience, to meet objections, to remove cavils, and in all respects to be adapted to the character addressed, and productive of the best effect. Now this requires, not merely a well cultivated talent for conversation, but an eminent degree of wisdom in the management of conversation in particular cases. Of such wisdom we may all of us well say that we possess but little. In how many cases does our experience painfully convince us of the fact! How often do we find ourselves at a loss to understand a character, to select suitable topics, to find the best method of attacking a manifest evil, or to withdraw persons from a maze of errors and a labyrinth of vain objections! Sometimes it may seem use-

less for us to continue or to renew the attempt; and in truth it is of the utmost importance that our wisdom should be increased. But this also *may* be increased; cultivation will not be lost upon it.

Much in this respect may be learned from an attentive *study of the scriptures*. We should not forget that God has to do with the same characters which perplex and embarrass us, and in the same methods of instruction and persuasion which he commands us to employ. In the bible we shall see how he treats them. Their portrait is there, with the statements, exhortations, and motives which divine wisdom has thought adapted to convict, to arouse, and to subdue them. Make it your endeavour to trace the description and the treatment of different characters in the word of God; and when you thus learn to understand them, treat them accordingly. Remember that the method in which they are treated in the scripture is the wisest and the best; and the only one in which you can expect success, because it is the only one in which you can expect the divine blessing. If I might obtain particular attention to this remark, I would earnestly press it; since I am convinced that the treatment of ungodly persons, even by those who sincerely strive for their conversion, is to a great extent unscriptural, and that for this reason the heart and conscience answer to it so feebly.

An additional help to the skilful treatment of others, will be found in the *study of your own heart*. For your own heart contains in embryo, if not in actual development, every thing which exists in the bosom of another. To understand the mysteries of the breast into which you are desirous of introducing the light

of divine truth, or of pouring its sanctifying streams, it is only needful that you should comprehend yourself. Get a large acquaintance with your own heart, in its deep-seated corruption and enmity to God, in its evasiveness and treachery, in its flatteries and inconstancy; trace the manner in which instruction and conviction came home to your own conscience, and the motives which operated to your release from the bonds of iniquity; call to mind the unanswerable truths which silenced all your objections, and made you stand speechless, though condemned, before God; any you will become profoundly wise to win souls to Christ.

You will do well, also, to accustom yourself to the *study of mankind*. Though human character is, in its general principles, so uniform that every man may be regarded as an epitome of his race, it is also of such endless diversity in its development, that every individual is worthy of a separate study. Have your eye open to the various phases of character which pass before you; mark the differences of constitutional temperament, the influence of predominant passions, the effect of circumstances and association, the force of early opinion and prevailing prejudice, the unmeaning acquiescence, the captious cavil, the petulant repulse; for every observation of this sort will be an additional lesson of wisdom, teaching you more fully what men are, and with what arms you must contend against their iniquities. In such a cause as this, no Christian need despair of attaining eminent practical skill, and of becoming a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.

Such are the methods, dear brethren, by which fit-



ness for labour may be cultivated : I have now only to ask you *whether you will pursue its cultivation*. In establishing its possibility, I will not believe that I have taken away one of your remaining *comforts*, by robbing you of what you have regarded as a permanent plea for inaction. I hope rather that I have presented to you a remedy for no inconsiderable sorrow. If, desiring to be useful, you have been weighed down by a sense of your unfitness for it, you will now lift up your head with joy, saying to yourself, 'Every thing needful to render me eminently useful may be acquired. Delightful thought ! I am not then doomed to a hopeless unfruitfulness. I need not repine at the sight of more splendid talents, or of a superior education. I need not sit down amidst my own many infirmities in despair.'

I know that the cultivation of useful talent will add to your labour. But does that dismay you ? How many persons, in order to acquire something conducive to an earthly object, have risen early in the morning, and sat up late in the evening, and made efforts as willing as they were strenuous ! What would we ourselves not do to acquire a language, or an art, by which we should gain a thousand, or even a hundred pounds ? Shall our neglect of the cultivation of fitness for usefulness proclaim the fact, that we do not estimate the conversion of perhaps many sinners worth any thing like so much as these comparatively paltry and insignificant gains ?

Allow me to close this address with one word of caution. *Do not wait for an increase of qualification before you begin to act*. As you are, you can do something, and amidst dying souls not a moment

should be wasted. Besides which, if you do nothing to-day, your only opportunity may be lost: to-morrow you yourself may be in eternity. *Neither suffer yourself, upon any particular occasion, to be hindered from action by conscious unfitness.* Though you might exert yourself more pleasantly and more beneficially if it were otherwise, do not therefore omit the good which you may still accomplish, and thus voluntarily aggravate the inevitable mischief of your state. Finally, *whatever advance you make in fitness for labour, be sure that you bring it all into action.* Remember that you are not amassing a treasure for yourself, but for others; that it is not to be hoarded, but to be spent; and that you mean to be as laborious, as you are endeavouring to become wise. See that you fulfil the vow which you have associated with your prayer, 'Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.'

## LECTURE IV.

### PREPARING FOR ACTION.

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I KINGS xx. 11.

*Him that girdeth on his harness.*

DEAR brethren, I have hitherto been engaging you to survey your field of labour, and not only justly to estimate, but diligently to augment your resources for its cultivation. It is now time to descend from these more general to more particular topics. If any thing is really to be done for God or for the souls of men, the work must be taken up, not in the gross, but in detail. We must not content ourselves with contemplating perhaps a large number of objects, and saying, 'I have to attempt all these;' but, as we can do only one thing at a time, we must proceed to take up individually the efforts which are incumbent upon us, and address ourselves to that which is appropriate to the present hour. Without this, it is very possible for a general perception and conviction of duty to exist in combination with perpetual sloth. I hope, dear brethren, that you are no strangers to those vigorous exercises by which a sense of obligation is rendered practical and influential, the impulse and the guide, rather than the torment and the reproach of your daily life. You thus exemplify the christian *preparing for action*, and will kindly accept from me a few counsels adapted to this difficult and important part of your proceedings.

I need not detain you by any lengthened observations on the benefit or the importance of preparation for your attempts to turn sinners unto God. Its advantage is obvious. Whatever it is worth while to do at all, it is worth while to do well; and nothing can be done well without an endeavor to do so. Heedlessness is never connected with eminence in any department of exertion; but, on the contrary, inevitably gives a character of inferior workmanship even to the simplest operations. If endeavours for the conversion of sinners, therefore, stood only on the same level with the ordinary occupations of life, they should, like them, be associated with preparatory thought; but how much more, when we consider the far higher rank which they occupy? No efforts contemplate so important an object; none require so much wisdom; none meet with so many obstructions; in none is success so valuable or so difficult: least of all, therefore, in this direction can we expect to operate wisely or successfully without preparation. It is a line in which inconsiderate efforts run the utmost hazard of being, not only fruitless, but injurious. We may derive from them in the retrospect much cause of lamentation and of shame; but we shall see little matter for satisfaction or of joy. If this be not the issue that we wish, if we are desirous of having a recompense for our labour, or, at all events, of showing ourselves to be workmen who need not to be ashamed, every effort should be made with a previous exercise of thought and discipline of heart, commensurate with the importance of the work, and the value of its result.

To pass on, however, from this general and obvious sentiment, let me direct your attention to *the objects*

*which should be principally aimed at in your preparatory exercises.* For the sake of doing so more distinctly, I will take a specific case, and suppose that, in your morning retirement, you are contemplating some special effort; as, for example, your sectional visits in a christian instruction society, a call upon an ungodly neighbour, conversation with a brother or a sister, or some other among the thousand methods of religious usefulness. Your devout endeavours to prepare yourself for this effort, should be directed to *the formation of the purpose, the selection of the means, the cultivation of the temper, and the supplication of the divine blessing.*

I. The first of these objects is *the formation of the purpose.* This is manifestly of the first importance, inasmuch as the purpose is the direct impulse of action. Knowledge leads to action only by generating a purpose to act; and if such a purpose be wanting, however clear our perception and ample our information, action can never be produced by it. It is true, that the knowledge of reasons why we should exert ourselves, is in itself adapted to awaken a resolution to do so; but it by no means necessarily or uniformly produces this effect. Its just influence always may be, and in many cases is, counteracted by other causes. To take for illustration the example which is now before us. You clearly see, perhaps, and are fully convinced, that it is your duty to make an effort for the conversion of some particular sinner, and you are well acquainted with the various motives adapted to quicken you to the effort; but is your knowledge connected with an actual intention to acquit yourself of the obligation? Are you in the attitude of resolution for immediate action?

Do you not know what it is to find the knowledge of your duty combined with a great disinclination to perform it? Or if not with a positive disinclination, yet with a large degree of apathy and irresolution?

Now this is an evil which requires our immediate and earnest care. In whatever measure adequate resolution is wanting, the main spring is wanting by which exertion is to be originated and sustained. The generation of a decided and glowing purpose should be our first aim. I know that the task will not be an easy one. Even if there were no external difficulties, the carnality of our own hearts would present no inconsiderable obstacle; while it constantly facilitates the invention of others, or their aggravation, in whatever measure they may exist. As you cannot regard such a state with complacency, on the one hand, so neither, on the other, should you contemplate it with despair. You find herein that your heart needs discipline, and you will proceed to discipline it accordingly. You will enter into converse with yourself in some such method as this. 'Here is an opportunity of promoting another's spiritual good; why am I not ready to improve it? It is an effort which I *may* make, which I *can* make, which I *ought* to make. I shall be aiming to impart the highest possible benefit to another; I shall be securing the richest luxury for myself. If I am indeed pious, it is an effort for which my character is adapted, and with which my heart is congenial. The voice of my Saviour calls me to it; it is the way in which he wishes me to glorify his name, and to testify my gratitude for his love. And yet I cannot make up my mind to do it! What can be the meaning of this? Is pity for the souls of men;

is my duty to God ; is love to the Saviour ; is consistency ; is every consideration to lift up its voice in vain ? Do I mean, here in my chamber, in the immediate presence of eternal things, and of him who loved me and gave himself for me, to refuse his call, and to say I will not obey ? What then am I ? What can I be ? Where is my love for the Saviour ; where my devotedness to his glory ; where my pity for the lost ? In the face of this unmoveable apathy, am I still going to believe that any one of these feelings prevail within me ?——But *whence* is it that such considerations do not move me ? Am I turning away from them, as though I were unwilling that they should produce upon me their just influence ? O my soul, beware of such guilty treachery to thyself, and to thy Lord ? Is it that I am embarrassed by bashfulness and timidity ? Yet I surely ought to mortify these feelings at the voice of my Redeemer, and for the accomplishment of so blessed an end. Is it that I imagine I cannot speak, or act in the case with effect ? At all events I can try ; and I never shall acquit myself of my duty if I do not. Is it that I fear the consequences, and am unwilling to hazard the unpleasantness which might result from my endeavours ? Yet what sacrifices ought I not cheerfully to make, for him who bore such griefs for me ? Is it a kind of effort which is new to me ? Then my past neglect should quicken my present activity. Is it that others are slothful ? Their guilt can afford me no justification. What else obstructs me ? Let me try every pretext, and penetrate every disguise ; and if nothing impedes me but what will not bear examination, nothing but what ought to be sacrificed at my Redeemer's footstool, by all that is consistent

or faithful, grateful or devoted, I charge my heart to slay it in his sight. I *must* go and labour. How can I bear to be the murderer of souls, or a traitor to the sovereign of my heart ?

I give you this merely as an example of those exercises of meditation, which of course will be thrown into endless diversity by diversities of character and circumstances. You will not use such a method without an ample recompense. The purpose to act for God, if ever it exists on rational grounds, arises out of such considerations as these, and out of them, when vigorously presented to the heart, it will infallibly arise. Whatever efforts for conversion you contemplate, make it a point thus closely to converse with your own heart, until you have awakened a firm and steady purpose for the deed.

II. Your preparation should be directed, secondly, to *the selection of the means*. It would be egregious folly to attempt to do all things in the same method. Every object has means peculiarly appropriate to its attainment, and much of the wisdom and success of our efforts lies in the selection and arrangement of them. When you have resolved, therefore, to make an effort for the conversion of a particular person, ask yourself by what means you shall seek to accomplish the end. Let the various methods which may be employed be set before you, and consider which of them may be best adapted to the case. The most natural and obvious is conversation ; but as there may be occasions on which this may not be suitable or practicable, consider whether the writing of a letter may be preferred ; or whether the recommendation of a book, or placing one so that it may be taken as by accident,



may be all that the case will properly admit of. Let me only say, that the decision of such points should be referred neither to rashness on the one hand, nor to prudence on the other; but to honest christian wisdom. If on some occasions it may be necessary to rein in our zeal, on many more it may be requisite to apply the spur to our cowardice. It is obvious that such points as these are to be determined with more facility and wisdom by previous consideration, than if left to perplex us at the moment when the opportunity of action arrives. The neglect of such consideration may give to the best intended exertions a lamentable character of heedlessness and indiscretion.

If you have determined on some mode of direct communication, as in a great majority of cases you may, prepare yourself for it by a judicious selection of topics. Fitted as every part of divine truth is for usefulness, circumstances give a peculiar fitness to certain parts of it, in certain cases, and at certain times. In a given instance, one portion of truth may be more especially congenial with the exercises of your own mind, with some local or passing associations, or above all, with the character, temper, habits, or degree of knowledge, of the person you address. I am not now insisting upon so obvious a truth as that our conversation should be adapted to such circumstances, but upon the necessity of using *previous care* for this purpose, whenever it is possible. We shall in this way secure the adaptation we desire much more extensively than in any other. Even if we possess a considerable measure of readiness for useful religious conversation, (which, perhaps, we may scarcely be willing to affirm,) we should not trust ourselves to the suggestions of the

moment, when opportunity for consideration may be attained. It should be our endeavour also to furnish ourselves for conversation upon the topics we have chosen. Conversation without thought is apt to be desultory and incoherent. We naturally, and almost inevitably, find it difficult to pursue any object on the instant, even with tolerable closeness or effect; while, without being adepts in study, a few minutes devotional consideration of the theme would afford invaluable aid.

To illustrate what I mean by an example. The person you intend to address presents a particular aspect of ignorance upon the subject of inward depravity; he thinks that his heart is good, and that he never meant any harm. You wish to lead him to more accurate views of himself, and you mean to make this the subject of your next conversation. The interview arrives; and if you enter upon it without preparation, you find your address far less convincing than you could have desired, and the success of it very small. This is just what you might have expected, and what the preparation I am recommending would enable you to avoid. If previously to such an interview, you will seriously think what the evidences of the heart's corruption are; what are the most striking general manifestations of it; which are most likely to come home to the particular case; and how the spirit of self-complacency may be most effectually destroyed, you will obviously be much better fitted for the conversation, and can hardly fail to conduct it with greater power.

There is the more importance in this subject, because there is reason to believe that, in many recent efforts to do good, the religious conversation has been

limited to a few cursory remarks, or expressions of good will and earnest concern. Now I ask, and I may reasonably ask, whether we can expect to slay the reigning passions of ungodly men by such weapons as these. What is here of the vivid presentation of truth, or its forcible application? What evil is skilfully attacked? What holy disposition is it judiciously attempted to awaken? And what results can be anticipated from such superficial and slender efforts? Verily, just what we see; the evil spirit continuing unbound and rampant in the breast.

If we say that it is high time this mode of proceeding was altered, we shall be told, perhaps, that this is all which christians at large can do; and that the studied conversation of which we have spoken is competent only to ministers, and persons of a superior order. But we deny this altogether. Without undervaluing the advantage of habits of disciplined thought, we may safely affirm that the possession of experimental piety capacitates every man, who will converse considerably upon religious topics, for conversing with substantial method and wisdom. The least informed and most illiterate christian is competent to meditate upon the word of God in its various bearings upon the heart of man, illustrated as they are by its influence on his own; and by the moderate exercise of such meditation he may furnish himself for converse of the most beneficial kind. But this plea is brought forward much too soon. The matter has not yet been put to the test. Private christians have not generally begun to try to converse as well as they can. There is, for the most part, no attempt made to furnish themselves for any thing beyond a few desultory words, so that what they

can do is a thing hitherto quite unknown. When they have done what they can, we shall readily admit the plea we have been considering in lieu of the rest.

III. Preparations for efforts of usefulness should be directed, in the third place, to *the cultivation of the temper*; taking the word *temper* in such a latitude as to comprehend generally the spirit in which they are undertaken.

One point in this department which demands very serious regard, is *the motive* under which we act. It is clear that it is both right and important for our endeavours for the good of souls to be actuated by the grand motive of the gospel, an ardent concern for the glory of God, and of his son Jesus Christ. No further than they are so, are they evidential of a proper character to us, or acceptable in the sight of a heart-searching God. Yet it is by no means to be presumed that this motive is in due operation, even in so sacred a work as the conversion of sinners. If you look carefully within, you may find, perhaps greatly to your own surprise, that there is scarcely any conscious operation of motive at all; especially when the effort, as among visitors of a christian instruction society, or in other cases, has a measure of regularity about it. Or if you are not so engaged merely because it is such an hour or such a day, you may be so because others are, or because it is expected of you, or for some other reason far below the great impulse of a heart dedicated to the Saviour. You should be very much aware of this lowering and mixture of motive; and you will by no method so effectually prevent it as by the preparatory exercises I have recommended to you. Examine seriously what your motives are; whether you

are impelled by unworthy or subordinate ones; and whether the grand motive of love to Christ is in due exercise. See that, by meditation on his love, it is awakened afresh; let your intended effort be made a fruit of the living tree of consecration to God which is implanted within you; and as such let it be presented, before you make it, at his footstool, to whom your whole heart and life are dedicated. Be not satisfied till you can say, 'Lord, I do this for thee, and for thy glory.'

Another point demanding notice is *the temper*, strictly speaking, in which our efforts shall be conducted. In this respect danger arises from that love of censure which belongs to our fallen nature. We are too likely to be pleased with an opportunity of finding fault, or with feeling that we have a right to do so. Hence, if we are not wary, the statements which we are called upon to make to men respecting their sin and misery, may be thrown into a tone of censoriousness and denunciation greatly adapted to defeat their end. While upon no account we should be deterred by mere *imputations* of harshness from an unflinching fidelity, we should carefully endeavour to avoid the reality of it. For this end, a portion of our preparatory thoughts should be applied to the cultivation of a compassionate spirit. We should set before us the person at whose conversion we mean to aim in aspects adapted to excite our pity, and stir up those yearnings of mercy within us, which will make us weep while we accuse, and teach us to utter cutting truths with a melting tenderness.

Besides this, it should be our care to be well secured against *irritation*, an evil not always avoided, nor

always easy to be avoided, in religious conversation. We are apt to become fretted by those whose ignorance does not speedily give way to instruction, more especially if they should, in our judgment, exhibit stupidity or perverseness. Much that may be deemed of this character is liable to occur in efforts of religious instruction, not only through the blindness of the natural man, but through an unwillingness to be drawn from sinful ways; and sometimes the very endeavour to convince may be made an occasion of resentment or insult. Nothing can be more undesirable than that our passions should be inflamed by any occurrences of this sort, or that a word or a tone expressive of petulance should escape from our lips. Our guard in this respect requires to be set before we enter upon our labour. We should steadily contemplate the probability of such trials, and fortify ourselves beforehand, by considerations which will readily occur to us, against their influence. We should never regard ourselves as prepared for the work, until we are consciously ready to encounter perverseness with patience, and to repay insult with love.

We need to be yet further armed with *discretion*. For even when our plan is laid, and every thing, as we may imagine, skilfully prepared, it may be by no means practicable with wisdom to carry it into direct and complete execution. Circumstances may arise, adapted to induce us either to relinquish what we did intend, or to do what we did not, or in a thousand ways to modify the execution of our purpose. We should never so fix our plan, as to be unprepared or unwilling to change it. We should keep an open eye, and maintain an enlarged observa-

tion of circumstances, in order warily to avoid whatever might diminish the good effect of our endeavours, or perhaps turn them to mischief. If we should fail to do so, the best intended efforts may become liable to such charges of obtrusiveness, impertinence, or other evils, as not only to frustrate our purpose for the present, but to forfeit our influence for the future, and to place a stumbling block in the way of others as well as ourselves. This spirit of watchfulness, like all other right feelings, requires to be cultivated beforehand, in order to be ready for use when the occasion arrives. In our preparatory exercises, therefore, it should as truly be our endeavour to arm ourselves with discretion as with courage; and the more so, because, so liable are we to extremes, that in our efforts to awaken courage, discretion is unusually likely to be forgotten.

IV. Your preparation for efforts of usefulness should comprehend, lastly, an earnest *supplication of the divine blessing*. You will acknowledge in a moment that this is a matter of the utmost importance.

You will want it *to help you in your labour*. For when you come to put into execution what you have designed, you will find the same evils in your heart with which you have been contending in your closet; while the spirit of devout consecration, which you were endeavouring to cherish there, will have lost some of its vigour. Upon a moment's consideration, and perhaps without it, you will find yourself entirely helpless and unfit for work, but in the strength of divine grace. It may be sought, indeed, by an inward prayer at the moment; but it is highly important that it should be previously sought, and that fervent supplications should arise from your retirement for mercy

to be communicated to your labour. With how much more comfort will you proceed amidst your conscious and multiplied infirmities, when you know that you have previously engaged the help of your Father who is in heaven! With how much more cheerfulness may you expect that succour, when you know that you have acknowledged your poverty before him, and besought him to pour into your earthen vessel of his heavenly treasure!

You will want the blessing of God *to give you success*. It is not that the adaptation and sufficiency of the means you employ are for a moment to be questioned; but that the success of means *in all cases* depends upon divine blessing. In the natural world, if you plant or water, it is God who gives the increase; and it is the same in the spiritual world. No blind eyes will be opened, no sinners will be turned from the power of Satan unto God, unless the Lord be with you; in any other case, ignorance and sin will bid defiance to all your exertions, and the foul spirits that reign in the world will laugh you to scorn. You have surely seen enough of the blindness and stubbornness of ungodly men, to remove all doubt of this truth. You have seen how little favour the declarations of God's word meet with in the carnal heart; how quickly and perseveringly the eye is turned from spiritual to temporal things; how deeply rooted the dominant passions are; and how tenaciously beloved iniquities are clung to, in defiance of every thing that is either just, or terrible, or attractive: and I might ask you whether it is in *your own* strength that such obstacles as these can be overcome. The strong man in armed possession of his house might say to you, as the demons at Ephesus to the sons of Sceva, 'Jesus I know; but who



are you?' and the little fruit of labours carried on in a spirit of self-confidence would speedily convince you of your weakness. There is one power, and only one, to which the carnal heart will bow; and that power it should be your earnest aim to engage on your side. If, indeed, you are willing to labour in vain, if it will be satisfactory to you to see the field submitted to your cultivation still barren in righteousness, and producing luxuriantly the thorns and briars which fit it for the burning, then go to your occupation alone; contend with the carnal heart in your own strength, and this result will assuredly follow. But if, as doubtless is the case, you long to see a blessed result from your toil; if you wish to see the wilderness in which you labour become as the garden of the Lord; if you yearn over perishing souls, and pant to rescue them from the wrath to come; then I beseech you to cherish the deepest sense of your own insufficiency, and of the inefficacy of every means apart from almighty grace. Lay your contemplated efforts in unfeigned humiliation before the mercy-seat, and with all the ardour of your mind implore the Father of mercies to bestow the success by which his name shall be glorified. Attempt nothing until you have associated it with the earnest prayer, "O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity." If you find yourself deficient in the appreciation of your own weakness, as you often may, look upon that deficiency as an evil which urgently requires to be rectified. Give your own heart no rest, until you feel rightly upon so important a subject; and then give the Lord no rest until he hear and answer your prayer. Tell him that you cannot go without him to a battle, in which without him you are sure

to be defeated; and appeal to him in the words of one of his ancient friends, "If thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence."

There is the greater need that our exercises in this respect should be deep and earnest, because of the principles by which the divine administration is governed. "Them that honour me," saith the Lord, "I will honour." It is in proportion to the degree in which we cultivate right feelings towards him, that he will afford tokens of his favour to us. This is just. The glory of his name is the ultimate end of all his ways; and he will not give it to another. When we fail to observe and to acknowledge the station which he holds as the giver of all good, or to place ourselves in our due position of dependence and supplication, we fail to render him the glory which is due from us unto his name; and we assume an attitude, in which, if he were to grant us tokens of favour, it would be departing from the great principle of his government, and be smiling upon what he disapproves. A spirit of self-annihilation, therefore, is immensely important to our success. It draws God towards us. It puts us in the posture in which his amplest blessing may be expected. While the contrary spirit repels him, and makes it necessary that he should leave us to learn, by bitter experience, the error and the folly of our self-complacency. There is no inconsiderable need of exercising ourselves on this point. In doctrine, nothing is more clearly proved, or more readily admitted; but the state of feeling is sometimes far from corresponding with the doctrine. We never justify self-confidence; but, if we would examine, we should find that we often indulge it: or, which is the same thing, that

we are very far from being duly impressed with the necessity of divine influence, and duly importunate for it. We may recollect, perhaps, many occasions upon which our endeavours for the conversion of sinners have not been connected with exercises of humiliation and prayer at all commensurate with the facts and truths which we acknowledge. Till we learn more eminently to honour God, we cannot expect eminently to be honoured by him.

It is a further advantage of such preparatory exercises of humiliation and prayer, that they augment our actual fitness for labour. I am well aware that they do not increase our *comfort* in it; but how many times have you yourselves found, or have others told you, that, so far as *usefulness* can be traced, it is far from being most abundant when we have been most comfortable! Upon the contrary, and perhaps very much to our surprise, those efforts which we have made under the most afflicting sense of weakness and insufficiency, have subsequently appeared to have been most copiously blessed. The fact is, that a painful sense of weakness imparts an earnestness and cogency to the manner, which greatly augments its adaptation to the end designed, and renders a person in such a state of mind much more likely to succeed than one in the lighter spirit of easy expectation; while it tends likewise to keep the eye continually up to heaven, and to associate every word that is poured into the ear of man with an ardent aspiration to that of the Most High.

It is highly delightful, and should be earnestly coveted, to go forth to endeavours for the conversion of sinners under a *consciousness* that God is with us. In answer to earnest prayer we know not how often such

a felicity may be granted us. We should not, however, be discouraged if we do not attain it. The Lord *may be* with us in our work, though we have not the sweet anticipation of his presence; and if we have earnestly besought him, he *will*. He whom we have sought in secret may reward us openly, when the exercises of the closet have witnessed little but severe and apparently unsuccessful wrestlings.

These preparatory exercises I have exhibited to you, for the sake of distinctness, in connection with some specific exertion contemplated in your retirement; but inasmuch as many efforts of this class cannot be so singled out, inasmuch indeed as we are called to be habitually in action, so we ought to be *habitually* prepared for action. To attain this end it is necessary to make preparation for such endeavours an object of habitual regard, and to allot to it a portion, both of our closet exercises, and of our constant watchfulness. We should aim at the same kind of preparation for habitual exertions as for specific ones; and then only should we be satisfied, when the fitness for them which may be attained by laborious discipline in the closet can be sustained through all the circumstances and employments of the day.

Such are the counsels, dear brethren, which I beg you to accept and to practise, in reference to preparation for the efforts which you make in order to turn sinners unto God. If the work of preparation should thus have acquired in your eyes a magnitude unusual and appalling, I can only beg you to ask whether it is unreasonable and unjust. Is it more than the salvation of a soul deserves? Is it more than such a work, to be carried on by such an instrument, and in the midst of

such difficulties, demands? Is it more than will be amply repaid? If it is more than you have been accustomed to make, this may not unnaturally account for your want both of wisdom, constancy, and success. You have complained much, perhaps, of these things; you have appeared to lament them; you have professed to wish that they could be remedied. Now I just ask you *how much* you wish it. Here are methods in which, if you were to exercise yourself, the evils you bewail might, in great part at least, be removed: will you employ them? Or will you, because it may be some trouble to make preparation, continue to go about these efforts for the good of souls as heedlessly as ever? In what earthly occupation should we obtain either credit or success, in preparation for which we did not take much more pains than we habitually take for this most important of all pursuits? Let us arouse ourselves from our supineness, and gird ourselves to this conflict as though we wished to be victors, and meant no longer to trifle with an effort which ought to engage every power and all the resources we possess.

**LECTURE V.**  
**HABITUAL ACTION.**

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PHILIPPIANS ii. 15.

*Lights in the world.*

IN the illustration of christian activity for the conversion of sinners to which our preceding discourses have been devoted, it has been my province to lead you to your closets, and engage you to exercises of stimulant meditation. I would fain hope—at whatever hazard, I must now take it for granted—that at my earnest entreaty you have been there, not merely contemplating the work to be done, and realizing your means of performing it, but girding yourselves for the effort, and worthily resolving to commence it, in the strength of the Lord your God. I have now, therefore, to trace your steps from your hallowed solitudes into the thick and crowded world, and to imagine myself beholding you in your several spheres of domestic, social, or public life, accomplishing the purpose of your secret hours. You have taken your resolution; you have made your preparation; you are now coming into *action*.

The subject which stands for this evening is *Habitual Action*. Perhaps the very term startles you. It is impossible, you may be ready to say, that opportunity can be found for perpetually endeavouring to turn sinners unto God. Such efforts certainly must be confined to appropriate seasons; and to be always at-

tempting them must be as great an error as entirely to overlook them. You may be disposed to add, that ordinary life is constituted of such an almost ceaseless succession of mixed and secular engagements, that suitable occasions for efforts of religious usefulness cannot be thickly scattered over its surface. I should hope, however, that you would be far from falling a victim to such a delusive imagination as this. Even admitting for the present, what we may hereafter find not to be true to any thing like the extent to which it has been supposed, namely, that opportunities of specific exertion are infrequent, it is beyond question that there exists a wide and important scope, for habitual action. Living and moving in the world as it now is, we are almost incessantly under the observation of irreligious persons. Some of them are for the most part found in our very habitations, among our children, our servants, or our friends; while it is obviously almost impossible to move beyond this limit, without mixing ourselves to an undefinable extent with the same portion of mankind. Now we have shown at large in a former discourse,\* that the exemplary manifestation of christian character has a direct and powerful adaptation to spiritual good: the whole sphere therefore in which our conduct is visible, is also a sphere in which usefulness is attainable. In every part of it, and at every moment, we may be trying to do good, by trying to be that which a christian ought to be. This capability of general and perpetual usefulness is plainly indicated by the metaphor employed in the text. A lamp indeed may be, and no doubt often is,

\* Individual Effort, Lecture IX.

employed for the special benefit of some particular person or persons, who may need its assistance; but, apart from such a circumstance, it is capable of an important general use, by being so fixed in a dark place as to give light to whatever passengers may come within the sphere of its action. In like manner, we are to conceive of christians, who are "lights in the world," as not merely diffusing a beneficial influence occasionally, by special endeavour, but as doing so constantly, by the steady shining of a holy example, which is not and cannot be hid.

If it should be imagined that persons in general are not paying sufficient attention to our deportment to render it influential upon them, a moment's consideration will evince that the contrary is the fact. Not to dwell upon the undoubted adaptation of example to instruct and to convince, or upon the innumerable instances which have demonstrated its power, the fact is incontestable, that irreligious persons are in the habit of keeping a very shrewd watch on the conduct of professors. Our profession of being holier than they provokes it; and however little it may be apparent while we are in company, it very often discovers itself by keen observations after we are gone, especially if any thing has occurred to afford matter for depreciation or for censure. Now if it be true that the conduct of professors is strictly watched by the ungodly, this is the very state of mind fitted to receive the appeal which exemplary piety makes to the conscience. It creates a certainty that the influence of example will be felt, even apart from any opportunity of personal or pointed address. Here then is our scope for habitual exertion for the good of souls; a scope not at all less extensive



than that through which our conduct is open to the observation of men.

Without repeating what I have said on a former occasion respecting the general importance of this department of labour, I shall now more particularly exhibit to you the manner in which it may be effectually occupied.

The means which may be brought into bearing for this purpose are chiefly two: *example*, and *conversation*.

1. With respect to *example*, there are several prominent aspects of it highly deserving of attention.

First may be noticed the *general spirit* of our deportment. Selfishness, vanity, pride, positivity, censoriousness, frivolity, artfulness, bitterness, envy, jealousy, and many other evils, are the native fruits of a corrupt heart, and are largely produced in general society. Although we may now be christians indeed, we also once walked after the course of this world, and shall find too much cause to confess remaining imperfection in one or other, if not in many of these respects. If we wish to render our example influential to good, it should be our earnest care to detect and mortify these and similar evils. Humility, benevolence, candour, simplicity, and their kindred graces, should be cultivated by us with the most sedulous attention. A demeanour which shows no sentiment of self-importance or desire of self-exaltation; a modest and unassuming address, a watchful and delicate regard, not only to the interests, but to the feelings of others, to some extent in preference of our own; an unfeigned delight in others' welfare, and a prompt sympathy in their joys; a frank and open countenance

which assumes no disguise, and lips which use no guile; together with a careful avoidance of unnecessary censure, and the common half-malicious gossip about other people's concerns, will not merely adorn our profession, but eminently tend to make our example winning and instructive.

We may next refer to the regulation of the *temper*. We all know how many things are perpetually occurring to try the temper, as well as how frequently it breaks forth in passion, if not into rage. In this respect a constitutional infirmity attaches to many persons, which requires the more resolute guard. In few cases is more expected from a religious professor than in the control of his temper. Ill governed passions invariably attach to us a strong censure, while effectual self-control gains for the most part a high encomium. And if this is the case in society at large, it is more especially so in the domestic, or other more limited circles, in which our conduct is more closely observed, and the influence of our temper more directly felt. A whole circle may be rendered happy or miserable according to the temper of almost any individual in it; so that it becomes not only a conspicuous indication of character, but a highly influential one. Vigorous attention therefore should be directed to this subject. In addition to an habitual meekness and gentleness of manner, we should endeavour to be well guarded against occasional petulance and irritation. We should cultivate an ability to meet vexatious occurrences without being betrayed into fretfulness, and to bear insults without passionate emotion. I need scarcely say that we should more especially resolve on being masters of ourselves in reference to those little things,

those really groundless causes of irritation, from which after all many of the most violent bursts of passion arise.

To an amiable deportment and a well regulated temper, should be added a *devotional habit*. I do not mean by this term such an absorption of mind in religious contemplation as either to withdraw us from, or to unfit us for, an attention to occupations of an earthly kind; if the mind of any person—it is by no means a frequent fault—were in such a state as this, it would undoubtedly be his duty to seek after a better regulation of it. But without approaching to such an evil, it is obvious that, in the course of ordinary life, our general habit and manner may be more or less devout. Religion may be used like the garments which are worn only upon special occasions; it should rather resemble those which are worn every day alike. Divine things may be treated with such evident neglect, as to give any observer an impression that they hold no important place in our regard, and furnish none of our principal pleasures; and it is plain that such an impression must tend to confirm a disesteem of religion in the mind of the observer himself. If, on the contrary, we cultivate a manifest acknowledgment of God, a spirit of gratitude for his incessant bounties, a readiness to turn our thoughts and converse towards him on all suitable opportunities, as though religion were really our element and delight, our favourite companion, our perpetual help, and strength, and consolation, such an exhibition of character can hardly fail to produce a beneficial effect. It need not for a moment be supposed that such a habit would identify itself with an austere or gloomy temper. Far from it. However it

might check levity, which we suppose will not be considered as an evil of *great* magnitude, it would inspire placidity, which is far more amiable; and it would tend to produce what is always to be admired, the well-tempered union of gravity with cheerfulness.

It is highly important, further, to maintain the practical exhibition of *right principles* of action. The occasions are of continual occurrence which call for the exercise of integrity in various forms, whether of truth, fidelity to engagements, or honesty, strictly and largely understood. What deficiencies in this direction are current among men of the world, is too well known; and it is a direction in which they are particularly observant of professors of religion. I may add that in this respect professors are not likely peculiarly to excel. Practices of this sort are so blended with their interest in the most tangible forms, so enforced by former habit, and sanctioned by prevailing example, that the entire renunciation of them may be expected to require an effort. But the effort is demanded, and should be made. A shuffling, evasive, double-faced manner of transacting business; a method of saying what you do not seriously mean, and of not doing what you have said; a habit of flying from your word, or failing in it; of taking advantage where you can, and being strictly honest only when you cannot help it; these and many such things should be thrown to the utmost distance from the dealings of every christian. A principle of high and sustained honour, a strict and unbending integrity, should be your invariable guide, and should not only be your guide in fact, but in appearance. Let every man be convinced that you are of most scrupulous integrity, that every

transaction is not only straight-forward, but transparent; that no pressure of adverse circumstances will lead you to an evasion, or a meanness; that he may trust you with property to any amount, and that your word is as valid as an oath, and as firm as your bond. It is not merely to the more considerable transactions of business that I apply this remark; it is capable of an important application to the very smallest, and to those who buy or borrow, as well as to those who sell.— These are things which worldly people know must spring from the power of religion, and they will make our profession appeal to the heart.

In order to render our character exemplary, it will be further needful to bear in mind the *relations* in which we stand. These are obviously of great variety; and all of them have appropriate and congruous dispositions. The character can have no appearance of consistency if these dispositions are not cultivated. Consistency, indeed, lies much more in manifesting the dispositions which are *peculiarly* appropriate to us, than those which, however excellent in themselves, have no such distinguished propriety. If a man be a parent, whatever may be his virtues in other respects, if he be a bad father, this one fault attaches to him a deep and indellible stain. It is the relations we bear which throw us out most prominently into public view, and hence the manner in which we fill them has a very large proportionate influence on the estimate and effect of our character. Every relation we sustain, therefore, is worthy of a separate study; nor should we be satisfied till we enter into the spirit of it, and excel in its appropriate graces. The husband and the wife respectively should strive to manifest the mutual af-

fection, respect, subserviency, and support, as well as the relative subordination, which their union requires. Parents have to show a practical devotedness to their children's welfare, wisely regulated alike in respect of indulgent fondness, and fruitless severity. Children likewise have obligations of great peculiarity. In combination with the vivacity and aspirations of youth, they have to cultivate a filial reverence for age, as well as a habit of ready submission to parental counsels, and affectionate concealment of parental failings. The circle which is occupied by brothers and sisters of the same family needs a strong guard upon feelings of self-will, petulance, suspicion, and jealousy. In the station occupied by a master or mistress, care should be taken to exercise authority not only without oppression in substance, but without harshness in manner; to cherish a kind regard to the welfare of servants, as well as to exact their labour; and to show that we take no advantage of their inferiority of station, to inflict either an injury on their rights, or a wound upon their feelings. With servants, on the other hand, it should be a particular endeavour to show all good fidelity; to identify themselves with the interest of the employer; not purloining; not answering again; not in idleness, disobedience, or wastefulness; not in talebearing, or violation of confidence; but by a steady course of kind, faithful, and willing service, to exemplify the spirit of their station. Without multiplying references further, let me now repeat, that the cultivation and exercise of these and other dispositions appropriate to our several stations, is not merely of general importance, but is especially adapted to render our example useful to others. If we

wish to hinder our own usefulness, we can scarcely do it more effectually than by some considerable defect in this direction. Be a tyrannical father, a wilful child, a hard master, an impertinent servant, and the tendency of your example to do good will speedily be reduced to nothing.

Once more: we are all of us liable to be observed under *different aspects*, and we should take care to appear consistent in them all. We are to be seen not merely in the family, but often in the social circle, and sometimes in more public walks. All these changes require from us corresponding diversities of conduct, as they bring different phases of character into view, and put us to the test in different points. Care will be well bestowed in cultivating the fitness appropriate to every separate sphere, and the habitual watchfulness which may give unity and harmony to our appearance in them all. It will be a grievous thing if, with whatever propriety of behaviour in comparative privacy, we are unguarded and inconsistent in company; or if, with whatever seeming excellency abroad, we throw off restraint at home. Private, social, and public life, engagements religious and secular, should demonstrate us to be the same persons; actuated in all cases by the same principles, aiming at the same ends, and maintaining the same government of ourselves. I need not spend a moment in showing that such an example as this will be powerfully eloquent of the worth of piety. Be such as I have described, and you will deserve the appellation of "lights in the world."

2. The endeavours which may be thus habitually made for the conversion of sinners by the force of ex-

ample, may be rendered considerably more influential by a well directed *conversation*. The current of our words, indeed, is one principal method of exhibiting that of our feeling; and so far as the tenor of conversation is simply illustrative of our character and principles, it may be considered as included in the observations already made. But in the general intercourse of life a further use may be made of the same instrument, with a view to spiritual good. What I mean is, that current conversation, without any specific object or personal address, may be impregnated largely and influentially with instructive and beneficial matter.

I am by no means disposed to maintain that our conversation should always be religious, or to banish from social intercourse topics of public or private interest, or matters of business or politics, literature or science; but, without approaching to such an extreme, or infringing in the least degree on the measure of attention which may justly be claimed for such subjects, it must be obvious, I conceive, that a much ampler leaven of useful tendency might be infused into conversation than ordinarily pervades it. Let us only recollect for a moment how the portions of time pass during which the course of conversation is quite at our own option. How much of them is occupied in speaking of the merest trifles, as the accidents of the weather or the wind; how much in an absolutely trivial chit-chat, furnished by the slightest incidents of the passing moment; how much in a sort of desperate effort to ward off an impending silence by saying something, though one has nothing to say; how much in retailing what one has seen or heard of others, deserving no better name than gossip, and very often a



much worse ; how much in little puns and witticisms, or strokes of satire, having no better object than merely to create a smile ; how much in the narration of ludicrous stories, which are thought to answer admirably if they produce a hearty laugh ; how much, in a word, in any thing and every thing but useful conversation ! Or let us each call ourselves to account on the same score. Let us ask ourselves what efforts we have been in the habit of making to render conversation beneficial. When did we think of furnishing ourselves with useful matter, and cherish the purpose of introducing it whenever it might be practicable ? When did we try to stem the current of trivial discourse, and turn it into a profitable channel ? Perhaps never. We may stand convicted of having invariably resigned ourselves to the stream, if we have not even augmented its force. Or if we have done otherwise, it has surely been with far less frequency and with far less vigour, than would have afforded us satisfaction in the review.

Now if these things be so, here is plainly an enlarged view of our scope for habitual exertion for spiritual good. We are perpetually conversing in the hearing of irreligious persons ; and the topics to which a large portion of our conversation may be, not only unexceptionably, but most excellently directed, are precisely such as are adapted to their good. Probably much ignorance or want of information exists among them ; perhaps much prejudice or misunderstanding ; perhaps much perplexity or doubt ; perhaps much indecision or fear ; perhaps much hostility to the truth. Weighty sentiments are not to be supposed to be inoperative when they are not connected with a personal and

pointed address; they have always their appropriate power, and sometimes a greater efficacy when presented in a cursory and general view. If therefore we really do wish to be useful, a line of operation for every hour, and almost every moment, is clearly marked out to us. Let us make it our study to charge habitual conversation with beneficial matter; that it may resemble a stream whose current has run over beds of gold, and deposits the precious grains on the whole region through which it passes.

One material step towards the accomplishment of this design will be taken, if, after allowing due attention to lighter topics, we resolve to omit from our conversation every thing which is not profitable. Such a resolution might impose upon us occasionally an unwelcome and somewhat singular taciturnity; but it is better to say nothing than to say what is useless. Besides, it is only by such a method, perhaps, that we shall discern how large a portion of conversation is open to the injection of better themes, and generate within ourselves an effectual impulse to the effort. While we allow ourselves to converse trivially, we shall make little progress in the art of conversing profitably. Let me recommend to you therefore the resolution, when you have nothing appropriate or useful to say, to say nothing. Make a determined excision from your discourse of all trivialities, witticisms, gossip, and jests. Give no indulgence to a vein of satire, or a sense of the ridiculous. Take no delight in setting a company in a roar of laughter. All such propensities are better mortified, and the very effort of mortifying them will do you good.

Your care should be directed in the next place to the filling up the vacuum thus produced. Expelling the frivolous and ludicrous from your conversation, study to introduce instructive matter in its stead. It may seem difficult, but it will not be so in reality, if your own heart is well regulated and near to God. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh; and one grand source of the vanity of your discourse in times past you will find to have been the too prevalent vanity of your mind. If your mind be serious and solemnly impressed with divine things, you will find little difficulty in giving conversation a useful turn. Serious topics will be the first that occur to you, and those of which it will be most natural and easy to you to speak; while an abiding sense of their importance will provide an impulse sufficient to break through the little hindrances which may resist. In the first instance, therefore, be yourself serious: in the next, be thoughtful. Make it an object to have your mind stored with subjects of an interesting and beneficial kind; such as you may readily glean from the source of your own scriptural or other reading, or derive from the exercises of your own mind, or from observation of the world. Cultivate also a wise method of introducing them. Strive to sustain a useful conversation that has once been begun. Do not discourage yourself by an apprehended want of talent; such conversations never droop but for want of *courage*; and if you have not always stores of knowledge to impart, you may often, by well applied questions to other persons, open richer fountains than your own.

Having thus exhibited to you the principal means to be used in habitual exertion for spiritual good, I have

a few remarks to add respecting the manner in which they should be employed.

In many cases endeavours of this class must be altogether general and indirect. In general company, of whom we know nothing, our concern can only be to maintain an example and a conversation as consistent and useful as, under the circumstances, they can possibly be made. In this method much good may be done. But there are many cases also, in which, with a knowledge more or less extensive of those in whose presence we are, we may be able, without any personal address or pointed reference, to give both our example and our conversation an important and appropriate bearing. If we speak of the pleasures of religion, we may present them in one aspect to the young, in another to the aged; and, if we are aware that those who hear us are in distress, to them in a third. Before persons of amiable character and moral habits, we may speak of the necessity of an inward change; before persons of reckless profligacy, of the force of righteous obligation, or the solemnities of judgment to come; before those who are entering on life, of the necessity of guarding against its snares; and before those who are closing it, of the instruction to be derived from its review. But the recital of cases would be endless; and it is needless; since it is manifest that conversation may, with great facility and effect, be directed to warn the thoughtless, to relieve the doubtful, to cheer the desponding, to quicken the sluggish, and to almost any other beneficial end which circumstances may present. Nor is it conversation alone which can be turned to this excellent account. Much may be done by mere example in the same way, by setting it stu-

diously in opposition to evils we may wish to check, or by prominently exhibiting virtues we may wish to commend. If you are with those who think religion melancholy, you may try more especially to show yourself happy; or if you are with those who accuse professors of laxity, you may take the more pains to exhibit a delicacy of conscientious rectitude.

After these observations, dear brethren, I am not afraid that you will accuse me of not having presented to you a wide scope for habitual exertion for the good of souls: I am much more apprehensive that you may shrink from the magnitude and the constancy of the effort. You are saying, perhaps, 'What an arduous undertaking! What perpetual labour! Is there to be no time of ease, no period of relaxation? To be *always* trying to do good!!' I know indeed that the course I have recommended may interfere much with our habits of ease and levity, and self-indulgence; that it may require strenuous efforts, and lead us into some difficulties. But why, after all, should I suspect you of making these complaints? I am to suppose myself addressing you, not as slothful christians, but as *active* ones; resolved to waste none of your master's goods, but to make full proof of your ministry. You are not inquiring how you may indulge yourselves, but how you may be faithful to your Lord. It is enough for you, therefore, to have shown you where and how labour is to be done for God. You are not the people to refuse or hesitate. It is not in vain that in retirement you have disciplined your hearts, and devoted your lives to the Saviour; you will go into the world, and you will live unto his praise.

Or if you do hesitate, let me ask you why. If the service of God and the souls of men were a hated employ, an unwelcome drudgery, then I could imagine how too much of it might be disagreeable to you : but, upon this supposition, I never should have wasted breath in exhorting you to it at all. I have been speaking all the while upon a supposition totally different ; namely, that the service of God and the saving of souls was your delight, and among the very highest delights this world can afford you. If this be not true, correct me ; if it be, rebuke yourselves. Of what worldly joy does a large measure fill you with so much aversion ? If an effectual plan had been presented to you for turning every moment to the acquisition of wealth, would it have made you exclaim in equal melancholy, ‘ Alas ! to be all the day long acquiring riches ? ’ Ought you not rather to esteem it a most happy circumstance that your whole life, including all its fleeting moments, may be applied with success to such a blessed and invaluable end ? Would you really rather that efforts for the conversion of sinners were confined to the comparatively infrequent occasions on which they can be specifically made, and that the great mass of life, and all its fragments, should be consigned to an utter fruitlessness ? If such a representation were to be made to you, would you not be ready to exclaim, ‘ I hope not ; ’ and to set yourself in action to try whether some part of life’s waste might not be reclaimed from such afflictive barrenness ? You should rather rejoice that the whole of it is set before you as a fruitful field. Every moment you may be sowing for God : in the morning sow your seed, and in the evening hold not your hand.

Do you feel that it is difficult; that it is more than you shall be *able* to do? Be assured that the whole difficulty of it lies in the carnality of your own heart. Nothing considerable is to be referred to want of talent. Persons of the very smallest capacity and information have been eminent in this department. And so will any of you be who will *try*. Of course it needs that the heart should be kept near to God, and deeply imbued with love to Christ; but this is nothing peculiar. This is necessary for other objects, and on other grounds; it is a primary matter of christian duty, which may not on any account be neglected. And it requires nothing more than this, in order to keep up the continual aim, the observant watchfulness, the holy and grateful endeavour, of which I have been speaking. Clearly, therefore, you need not despair. You should rather resolve to be fit for any thing for which consistent and eminent piety may fit you.

If, after all, I should fail in any case to engage the active resolution I desire, I only ask you, dear brethren, whether any of you will say that *you will not* aim at this improvement of life. Are you resolved to spend life idly, and to waste the powers which might be applied to such invaluable ends? Do not think to evade this question by attempting to leave the matter undecided, or in a state of suspense. Either you will or you will not thus labour for God; and you are this moment resolved either upon the one or the other. If you are not determined for labour, you are determined against it; and all the pains you may take to hide this determination from your own eyes, only shows that you are conscious of a wrong you will neither acknowledge or reform. Can you bear to remain in so hollow

and suspicious a state of heart? Will not he that searcheth the heart estimate it aright, when he calls it a spirit of ingratitude and treachery? Reconciled rebel! Redeemed sinner! Flee from the remotest suspicion of such a crime, and by all that is obligatory, grateful, or sincere, place yourself among the devoted band who are resolved to shine as "lights in the world."

If such be your aim, I may perhaps not unprofitably warn you, that one of your greatest practical difficulties will be to maintain an habitual *remembrance* of your object. We are so much accustomed to be about our own business, and on many occasions are following it with such intense occupation of mind, that we too readily forget, not merely our obligation and design to do good to others, but almost the very fact that we are living in their sight. The prevalence of such forgetfulness will obviously be quite destructive of the end in view, and, as a matter of practical wisdom, any thing should be done to correct it. With this view, make it a part of your morning exercises in retirement to impress upon yourself a vivid recollection of the fact that you are about to spend a day in the presence of ungodly persons, whose good your example and general conversation should promote. In addition to this, take such opportunities as the course of the day may afford you (and a moment is sufficient for the purpose,) of recalling your attention to the same topic, and of casting your eye around you, to observe who are spectators of your conduct, and what is the probable aspect of your conduct in their eye. Such efforts as these may be a little troublesome, though scarcely so if your heart be right; but they will be abundantly



beneficial, and will go far towards rendering you in fact the light in a dark place which you desire to be. To remember this desire is almost the same thing as to fulfil it. The memory of it will serve, like the gunner's hand, to apply the spark to the materials which are always prepared to attest its power.

## LECTURE VI.

### SPECIFIC ACTION.

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PSALM CXIX. 60.

*I made haste, and delayed not.*

SUPPOSING you to be prepared for action, dear brethren, it was my aim in the last lecture to exhibit to you the methods of *habitual exertion* for the good of souls; methods by which you may at all times, and in all circumstances, pursue this important end, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. If, however, the spirit of the Active Christian be within you, I may be sure that, with whatever diligence you make habitual efforts, you do not confine yourselves to them. You do not forget that you are surrounded by opportunities, more or less numerous and ample, of *direct and specific exertion* for the same end. Though you cannot be always communicating religious knowledge, you may be so *sometimes*; and whatever may be the frequency with which such opportunities occur to you, a spirit of consistent dedication to your Lord will clearly lead you to improve them. I hope I may regard you as entering upon the duty of *specific* as well as habitual exertion for the conversion of sinners; and as prepared to receive with interest, and practically to apply, the observations to which the subject of the evening leads.

I need not stay to cast another glance at the various opportunities of direct religious instruction which may occur; but one of them, *family worship*, possesses so much peculiar interest and importance, that I cannot refrain from making on it a few remarks.

I suppose, dear brethren, I may take it for granted, that every pious man among you, and every pious woman also, presiding over a household, maintains family worship. To suppose the contrary, would be to suppose a measure of sinful neglect and inconsistency in the highest degree afflictive. What I have now more particularly in view is the manner of conducting this exercise. Of course you maintain the reading of the more instructive and profitable portions of the holy scriptures, and the united offering of serious and appropriate supplications. But I wish to recommend to you something further than this; namely, the practice of *addressing serious observations to your household when assembled at your family altar*. It is not necessary that this should be done invariably; allowance may be made for circumstances inducing and justifying an occasional omission. Nor need it be done at great length, a *few* observations, perhaps, being more conducive to usefulness in such an exercise, than many. Neither is it indispensable that it should be of the nature of scriptural *exposition*, to which perhaps you might conceive yourselves incompetent; the very plainest observations of a serious kind being suited to the purpose, whether connected with the portion of scripture which you have been reading or not.

The circumstances of your household when assembled for worship afford not only an unquestionable, but a most advantageous opportunity for such an exercise.

They are then withdrawn from their ordinary occupations of domestic service, their attention is expressly challenged to sacred objects, and the whole habitation is, as far as practicable, reduced to a state of repose and quietness, adapted to favour the exercise of beneficial reflection. The various members of the family are then especially gathered around you as its head, and more particularly as presiding over it in a religious view. By conducting the worship of the family, you officiate as its priest; in reading the divine word, you become the mouth of God to them; and in supplication you become their mouth towards God: In these circumstances, therefore, what can be more fit than that you should speak out of the fullness of your heart, and press home upon these waiting auditors the great things of God? Is it not a scene pre-eminently inviting to such an effort, and, as it were, created on purpose for it? And if this be omitted, does not the chief thing seem to be wanting, the beauty and crown, the life and soul, of the entire service? Here the whole influence of your parental and magisterial relations would throw its weight into your instructions, since you would speak not as the friend merely, but as the master and the parent. Your knowledge of individual character, and of the mental exercises, dangers, or necessities of each, would give a most beneficial adaptation to your words, and enable you to address to each, by character, if not by name, encouragement or admonition of invaluable appropriateness; while the affection which your family bear you (and, if you fill your station like a christian, this will not be small,) will give additional weight to the words which fall from your lips, and make them sink perhaps more deeply than any others into the heart.

Now it is an established and admitted principle that the existence of an opportunity for useful exertion, creates an obligation to exertion. Every opportunity of doing good *ought* to be improved; so therefore ought this which has now been described. As a pious head of a family, you profess that you desire to be useful among them, and to wish, perhaps, either that you knew better how to be so, or that you had more opportunities of being so. But where have you been looking? Behold the opportunities immediately before you. If you have family worship twice in the day, which in the great majority of instances may be the case, here are at least seven hundred opportunities of usefulness to the souls of your household every year, of which, perhaps, you have hitherto made no improvement at all! Will you improve them from henceforth? Or do you mean to attach to your apparent anxiety the character of mere pretence, by neglecting so obvious a method of exertion?

You may probably hesitate under a sense of the difficulty of the exercise, and of your own incompetency. If I were urging you to any thing which required a peculiar talent, I would admit the force of this objection: but it has really no foundation whatever. There is nothing frightful or overwhelming in your audience; an audience composed entirely of your children and servants, or other domesticated persons, with whom you are upon terms, not only of perfect familiarity, but of tender love. You are continually speaking to them with the utmost freedom upon innumerable other matters, and it is past belief that you can be incompetent to speak to them in a similar way about religion. What insuperable obstacle is there to your saying to

them—‘ Dear members of my household, who must soon be in eternity, and for whom I must give an account, how awfully important it is for you to seek the Lord! Are you seeking him? And, if you are not, will you not seek him while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near?’

I acknowledge indeed that you may find a difficulty, and perhaps a great one; but I am convinced that it will arise much more out of the state of your own heart and your want of practice, than out of the nature of the exercise itself. As for the timidity and tremor which may arise from want of practice, it is perfectly childish to think of giving way to it. There are few things which we do not perform with some tremulousness the first time; but we know by multiplied experience that this inconvenience speedily vanishes. The obstruction arising from the state of the heart is of a more serious kind; but this also should and may be overcome. We do not feel deeply enough for the eternal welfare of our household! And how long is this sinful condition to endure? The remedy of it is obvious. Spend but five minutes every morning, before you enter your family circle, in realizing their spiritual condition, in stirring up yourself to care for their souls, in thinking what you may say for their good, and in beseeching God to make you a blessing to them, and I will venture to affirm that all your difficulties will vanish, like chaff before the wind. Instead of finding it impossible to open your lips, you will find it impossible to restrain them.

But it is time that we should return to the general subject of this discourse, and to observations applicable to all those who may be engaging in specific en-

deavours for the salvation of souls. Accept from me, dear brethren, in your arduous and often perplexing work, a few remarks, first, on *the method you should pursue*, and, next, on *the dispositions you should exercise*.

I. In explaining to you *the method* you should pursue in your endeavours to turn a sinner to God, I may anticipate your glad attention; inasmuch as amidst your various embarrassments, you may have often lamented that you knew not how to carry on, or even to begin, the work of religious instruction.

I suppose you, then, for the sake of rendering my counsels more distinct, to be entering into conversation with an irreligious man for his conversion. Now I hope I need not here again enjoin what I have already pressed upon you,\* namely, to aim *directly at his conversion*, and at nothing short of it; and to frame all your exhortations *in conformity with the scriptures of truth*. I will rather enter into some detail of the process you should seek to accomplish.

I. Your first object should be to convey *a just knowledge of duty*. It is plain that this is the beginning of all valuable religious knowledge; and in all cases it is of admitted importance to begin at the beginning. Without doing so, there is little prospect of a satisfactory progress. Apart from correct views of duty, there can be no adequate, and scarcely any rational, conviction of sin; and, apart from conviction of sin, no due appreciation of salvation. Nor may it by any means be taken for granted that, upon so simple and elementary a subject, a sufficient degree of knowledge exists; upon the contrary,

\* Individual Effort, Lect. X. p. 223.

facts abundantly prove that men are as ignorant upon this point as they are upon any other ; and, in truth, that this is the radical and fundamental ignorance, which throws its baneful shadow over all other subjects of instruction. Nor is it ignorance alone which prevails in reference to the principles of human obligation and duty. Enmity shelters itself under cover of the darkness; and there is even a greater unwillingness to admit, than difficulty in perceiving them.

As I have said, therefore, let your first object be to impart a just knowledge of duty. In this respect begin at the beginning, and show the person with whom you converse why, and on what ground, he is under obligation towards God. For this purpose you have to set before him the fact that God is his maker, and to instruct him that out of his relation to God there arises an obligation to love him, or to treat him kindly. This phrase, *treating God kindly*, I purposely use as expressive of the love to God which is the primary duty of man. It is the love of benevolence, which, in other words, is kindness,—exalting the idea of kindness towards God as much as you please, by considerations drawn from its greatness and glory. You are thus prepared to show a sinner that his duty consists, not merely in avoiding outward wickedness, or in doing good works, but in *cherishing a right state of heart*, namely, a uniform and prevalent kindness towards God, manifest in that care for his honour and concern to please him, which are characteristic of such a state of mind.

If it should seem tedious to take this method, or be deemed that more rapid and effectual progress might be made by coming at once to charges of sin, or by



immediately discoursing of the love and sufferings of our Lord Jesus, without depreciating these endeavours, I may safely affirm that their success is very liable to be much more specious than real. A charge of sin to a man who does not know the ground of his obligation or the scope of his duty, if it be not altogether an unintelligible thing, may be an irritating rather than an humbling one; while the tears which you may cause to flow by details of the sufferings of Christ may have little connexion with moral emotions, in one who has yet to learn his need of a saviour. On the other hand, although you may advance with seeming slowness when your labour is directed to establish the first principles of moral science, every measure of progress that you actually gain is real and solid; of substantial value in itself, and fitted to be the foundation of an excellent and durable superstructure. In building a house, no man ultimately regrets the time or pains expended in laying a firm foundation. One of the principal reasons, perhaps, of the lamented instability of apparent converts, may be found in the defective manner in which these fundamental truths have been learned.

2. To a just knowledge of duty, you will of course be concerned to add a *deep conviction of sin*. The general necessity of this is obvious; since without it there can be no rational apprehension of danger, or of the need and value of salvation. Every thing desirable in the subsequent exercises of the mind, or in the ultimate formation of character, will bear a proportion to the depth and extent of this important process.

Without insisting further, however, on the general necessity of producing adequate conviction of sin,

it may be more material to point out the course which such efforts should take. And here it is principally important, that you should effectually open to the person with whom you are conversing "*the plague of his own heart.*" You may find it easy to adduce instances of outward sin; you may conceive it to be the most obvious and effectual manner of bringing home the charge of actual guilt, and you may be more particularly tempted to act on this principle in cases of gross profligacy, where immoralities constitute the grand aspect of character: but in all cases, if you do not entirely avoid this method you should lay on it very little stress. Make no use of the sins of drunkenness, lying, profanity, sabbath-breaking, or any other outward sin, but as an occasion of tracing up these acknowledged wrongs to the source of evil within the breast. If you do not exhibit and establish the fact that *the heart* is evil, that the indulged passions and cherished purposes of the soul are wrong, you do nothing towards the production of any valuable effect. A man who does not know and acknowledge this, neither acknowledges nor knows his real criminality, and can never take his right stand before God. You should therefore be very particular in this respect; and press with earnestness and perseverance the instructions and illustrations by which this often strange, and always unwelcome truth, may be fully manifested to the understanding, and riveted on the conscience.

In this effort you will derive much assistance from the previous instruction I have recommended, as to the ground and nature of man's duty to God. What principally leads men to think that outward evils are their only sins, is the antecedent notion that outward right-

eousness is their only duty. If they are honest, and sober, and kind, and a few such things, they conceive that they fulfil all their duty; and hence, very naturally, when you attempt to convict them of sin, their ideas are confined to some breach of these obligations: but, if you succeed in making them understand that their duty to God lies in cherishing *a kind state of heart* towards him, your way is prepared for showing the existence of sin apart from outward conduct, and for demonstrating that inward source of iniquity to which all the streams are to be referred.

To those of you who have made any attempts to convict a sinner of wickedness of heart, I need not say that it is a conclusion which a thousand efforts are made to avoid. Innumerable pretexts, excuses, and evasions are resorted to, in order to take off the edge of conviction, and to cover or extenuate what can no longer be denied. It is for you to observe and to follow all these shiftings, and to see that the object of your compassion shall have 'no cloke' for his sin. While a man contends that his heart is good, that he means well, that he wishes to be good, and would be so if he could, but that he cannot, or maintains any of the large class of fallacies akin to these, little or no progress is made in convincing him of sin. Whatever addition may have been made to his knowledge, no change is induced in the state of his heart; he retains all his pride, he cherishes every iniquity, he hastens to his ruin. However tedious or difficult it may be, therefore, to pursue the fugitive into successive and apparently endless subterfuges, and to fight battle after battle at successive points of defence, all the value you attach to his salvation urges you to per-

severe. Leave him to be the victim of any one of these fallacies, and he is undone.

You should remember, also, that when you have induced an acknowledgment of sin, your work in this respect is not completed. It is indispensable to inspire *humiliation*. There is a vast capacity in fallen man of making an unfeeling acknowledgment of the most touching truths; and so you will find it with the fact of his own criminality. A sinner who may at length admit every thing that you wish, may yet continue obdurate and unaffected. If you examine into the reason of this, you will find that it is because he is thoughtless; because the fact of his criminality, though acknowledged, is not reflected upon, or contemplated in the light adapted to render it influential. It remains for you, therefore, to bring the acknowledged fact again and again before his eyes, and to press home upon him the various considerations by which the *evil* of sin may be exhibited. You have to speak of the justice and force of the obligation which is broken, of the wretchedness which is introduced into the heart, of the awful and endless displeasure of the almighty judge; and in addition to these topics, of the inestimable sacrifice which has been offered in expiation. The bearing of the last of these is of peculiar importance, inasmuch as it is pre-eminently adapted to melt the heart by the display of unutterable love. It sets home conviction without an aspect of severity. But in order that it may produce this effect, it is necessary that it should be wisely and clearly put, and that the sufferings of Christ should be so associated with the just desert of our sins as to become to us the real measure of our own criminality.

3. Having proceeded thus far, your next object will be to induce a *right appreciation of the Saviour*.

Safe as it might be deemed, experience proves that it is not safe, to assume that every person knows the general character, or even the name of the Saviour of sinners; while it is certain that multitudes who are much less ignorant than this, have no correct ideas of the nature or design of his work. Besides this, there is ordinarily found, in connexion even with enlarged scriptural knowledge, an immediate and obstinate tendency to self-dependence and self-righteousness. No sooner are anxieties respecting salvation awakened, than relief is sought from purposes of amendment, from exercises of prayer, or from some similar source. Against this evil it is of the utmost importance to guard. These are but delusive hopes, but refugees of lies; and those who betake themselves to an insecure refuge are in as imminent peril as those who seek no refuge at all.

Now in order to exhibit the Lord Jesus Christ to a sinner in his supreme and exclusive excellency, it is necessary to make strong and painful statements respecting the utter helplessness of his own condition. An awakened sinner finds his situation awful, and his feelings impel him, blindly no doubt, to do something for its amelioration. In this effort he does himself no good, while he entirely overlooks the all-sufficient Saviour. Nothing can be more important, therefore, than the strongest and most direct statements that all such efforts are useless, and that no advance whatever is made towards acceptance with God by any amount, or by any continuance of them.

Such a statement as this falls, and not altogether

unnaturally, like something harsh and incredible upon a sinner's ear. He is ready to say, perhaps, 'How hard is this! God is displeased with me for having done wrong; but he will not be pleased with me if I do right. Though I have been sinful in time past, I am now doing the very best I can, and surely I may expect a being so kind and merciful as God is to be satisfied with this, or if he is not, what can I do more?' Now this language, though containing much error, contains also some truth. God is kind and merciful; sufficiently so, not merely to welcome to his friendship sinners who do the best they can, but sinners who do not; a truth which it is of the highest importance to maintain unquestionable. But if so, why may not a man who is striving to the utmost indulge hope of safety?

The only satisfactory method of meeting this question, is to exhibit with simplicity and clearness the truths relating to the *moral government of God*; to explain that God is not dealing with us simply as a father, but as a governor and a judge; and to show how a person who has to conduct affairs of government is required to impose a restraint on his private feelings, and to proceed undeviatingly in the administration of public justice. The fact of the Divine Being having instituted such a government being understood, and its justice and excellency perceived, a sinner will come to know where he stands, and to realize his condition as one of righteous helpless condemnation before the bar of God. He will be prepared to see that the soul that sinneth must die; to admit that for a convicted criminal there is necessary a righteousness better than his own; and to appreciate the occasion, the necessity, the adaptation, and the excel-

lency of the righteousness of Christ, together with the boundless love which has been exercised towards him in its provision.

It should be your endeavour to explain also by what method a sinner may secure to himself the benefit of the death of Christ. It is too commonly imagined that the death of Christ only makes way for the acceptance of what men do for their own salvation; and in many instances great perplexity exists as to the import of the terms *coming* to Christ, and *believing* on him. Make it your object to show that the benefit of Christ's death is to be secured *by submitting ourselves to his method of salvation*; by cherishing a state of mind breathing acquiescence in the provision of his grace; by giving ourselves up, as guilty, helpless, and undone, to Christ Jesus, that *he* may be our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

Still it is a question whether, after all this, the sinner whom you are instructing *may submit* himself to the righteousness of God. The probability is that he will long struggle against it; and that you will find it necessary to plead with him by various arguments of duty and of safety, of gratitude and of love, before he will rejoice your heart by adopting the language of an ancient pharisee, "What things were gain to me, those I have counted loss for Christ."

4. To these remarks I may add, that you will find it of great importance, in your endeavours to convert a sinner, to induce *a habit of meditation*.

The two objects that you wish to effect are the acquisition of knowledge, and the production of feeling. In any case an habitual thoughtlessness would be an almost insuperable barrier to your progress; but more

especially so in this, in which the truths you have to communicate are unwelcome, and the whole heart is in arms against the impression you aim to produce. Now thoughtlessness upon religious subjects is the uniform characteristic of ungodly men; and has been found, to a most melancholy extent, to baffle the efforts which have been made for their conversion. This will be your grand enemy, and you will do well to wage war against it from the first, by solemn injunction and earnest entreaty.

As thoughtlessness is a powerful adversary to your success, so a habit of meditation will be a most important ally. The quantity of attention paid to an object is one of the conditions which determine the effect it shall produce on the mind. Whatever is much dwelt upon is deeply influential, even though it be a trifle; and if you can induce a frequent thoughtfulness of divine things, you secure for them a most valuable and proportionate power. Meditation after you have left, may do much more than the whole course of your conversation. It brings truth home again and again to the heart, and as by a process of digestion, incorporates it with the character. Truths thus taken up by a person's own thoughts begin to do their work, and enter into conflict with those antagonist feelings which they are designed to overcome.

You will always find a person whom you can get *to think*, making some progress. In your successive visits you will not observe him precisely at the same point. He will have something to say to you, or will be ready for you to say something to him. Having been exercised by reflection, his mind will be continually presenting some new aspect, which will be highly favour-



able to your work of instruction, and will give to your labour, not only a present charm, but a cheering prospect of success.

It is, perhaps, a yet more important reason why you should enforce a habit of meditation, that you have to enjoin upon the sinner with whom you converse the production of a change in his own mind,\* (for such is the tenor of your exhortation when you urge him to turn to the Lord, or to flee to the Saviour,) and reflection is the instrument by which this is to be accomplished. He has proud and other sinful feelings with which he is to contend; but with what weapon? Tell him that divine truth is his sword, and meditation the hand that must wield it. Tell him that his force for the transformation of his own heart lies in taking up the truths of God, and in making an intentional and vigorous application of them to his own case; that with an evil heart to subdue, he is loudly called upon to use this method; and that if he does not, his ruin is his own.

With these views, make it an importunate request to any person whom you wish to turn from the error of his ways, that he will go into solitude for a portion of time, say half an hour, every day; and that he will spend it scrupulously in the consideration of what relates to his spiritual welfare, whether in the examination of his own heart, in the perusal of the word of God, or in the recollection of instructions he may have received—always, be it understood, with direct application to his own case. If you succeed in this request, I do not hesitate to express my conviction that you

\* See *Individual Effort*, p. 226.

have gained your great object, and that you will soon see conversion follow. Never was it known yet, that a man pursued a course of sin who for half an hour every day looked eternal things in the face; and the first instance of it that occurs will deserve to be recorded as nothing less than a miracle.

II. A brief space only now remains to notice *the dispositions* which your work will require to be in exercise.

1. The first of them is *resolution*. The necessity of this will arise partly from yourself. When the opportunity of action arrives, every inward impediment may come afresh into existence, or aggravate itself into greater force; so that, after all, if you are not resolute, the work may not be done. The necessity of it may arise partly from others. You may find religion an unwelcome subject; or if general conversation on it may be tolerated, a determination may be manifested to evade, or even to resent, any approach to a personal reference. Carefully avoiding any thing which may be really *unwise*, you should be resolved to do what is right. Firmly carry out your conviction of duty, and fully discharge your conscience of its burden. A sick child may refuse medicine, and a person in imminent danger may scorn help; but you do not yield to the petulance of either the one or the other: how much less ought you to suffer an effort to be repelled, which aims at the prevention of spiritual and eternal woes!

2. To resolution add *promptness*. Time is always flying, and opportunities of usefulness, when they arrive, instantly begin to take their departure too. They should therefore be embraced immediately. How often

may we linger, unwilling to begin the effort, until a large portion, or perhaps the whole, of the time which might have been usefully employed is gone! We should be quickened by the consideration that opportunities, when they are gone, *never return*: whatsoever therefore our hands find to do, let us do it with our might.

3. Your endeavours will require the exercise of *watchfulness*. Ever-varying circumstances will demand an ever-observant eye. At the outset, you may find reason to postpone your intended effort to another opportunity; or as you proceed, you may discover the operation of some cause rendering it desirable that you should desist. The effect of your conversation may need to be watched. Perhaps it may irritate; or the drift of it may be misapprehended; or some new aspect of character may appear, calling for a change of address; or you may discern a beneficial influence, affording you great encouragement to proceed. All such things as these are important, and the prompt notice and the skilful use of them may be very closely connected with your success. The object you have in view is awfully delicate, and your endeavour should be conducted throughout with a trembling care lest your own hand should mar your design and destroy your hope.

4. Another disposition indispensable in your labour of love is *patience*. You must not expect to accomplish every thing in a moment, or to carry the heart of an enemy to God by storm. A state of ignorance, prejudice, and sinful passion, presents many difficulties in the way of its own cure; and we may be very thankful if we accomplish it even by slow degrees. Truths which appear to us with the utmost plainness, or the

most decisive evidence, may be very doubtful or obscure to those with whom we converse; and feelings which have so long been excited and moulded by worldly or sinful objects, may but very gradually yield to the influence of the most powerful transforming considerations. Continued ignorance and obduracy under our most sedulous instructions should be treated, not with anger or severity, but with the utmost gentleness and pity; lest any manifestation of impatience upon our part should obstruct our access to the understanding and the heart, and forfeit the love and confidence in which the chief power of a teacher consists.

5. In fine, your efforts should be made with *perseverance*. Whatever may be their want of success, never abandon them, so long as the opportunity of making them remains. You may have many temptations to do so. One may shew so much resentment, another so much stupidity, and a third so much inconstancy, that you may be ready to say, 'Every thing practicable has been done for these people; it is of no use to pursue them further.' But let a recollection of the immense value of their salvation check the influence of such a sentiment. If you do abandon them, it is to everlasting ruin. And can you do this? What! while life and hope remain? While God abandons them not, but prolongs the opportunity of repentance? All that is compassionate forbid! In various known instances persevering instruction has been effectual after many years of resistance, and for aught you know, at the very moment of your despair success may be about to be vouchsafed to you. Under all circum-

stances be steadfast and unmoveable; and, till a sinner is in hell, omit no effort to prevent his fall.

Such, dear brethren, are the counsels I commend to you for your assistance in your labour; let me only hope that you will combine diligence with wisdom, and act in the spirit of the Psalmist, when he said, 'I made haste, and delayed not.'

## LECTURE VII.

### TREATMENT OF VARIOUS CASES.

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PSALM xix. 7, 8.

*The law of the Lord is perfect converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.*

It might have been expected that, as all men are involved in a common ruin, and are the subjects of a common depravity, so the method to be pursued in endeavouring to turn them unto God would be one and uniform. If, however, even to a small extent, you have made such endeavours, you have doubtless found that the one wickedness of mankind exhibits itself in many aspects, and gives rise to cases of so great variety as to defy the application of a common method. These cases are often as new and diverse, in comparison with each other, as though they arose from different and even opposite causes; and the occurrence of them in your own practice has, perhaps, convinced you that, for their effectual treatment, they require no inconsiderable variety of knowledge and skill.

This variety of skill and knowledge, allow me to say, dear brethren, it is highly important you should attain. It is so, at least, if it is important that you should have any success in your work; because an unfitness to treat particular cases is plainly adapted,

not merely to impede, but to obstruct it altogether. If a sinner arrives at a point of ignorance, or mistake, or obduracy, at which you do not know what to do with him, it is clear that all hope of your being useful to him is at an end. I am prepared to hear you say, that, though important, this eminent skillfulness is not easy; and I grant it. But what matter connected with our own welfare do we abandon because it is not *easy*? We pursue every such object so far as it is *practicable*. Now it is unquestionably practicable to qualify ourselves for the proper treatment of all forms of human depravity. The word of God, the instrument we have to employ, is perfectly fitted for its work; and is also able to render the man of God "perfect, thoroughly prepared" for his labour. Our deficiencies in action result from previous deficiencies in the accurate knowledge and just application of divine truth. Our small utility as soldiers under the Captain of salvation arises, in great part, from our having bestowed little pains on acquiring the use of our weapon; the remedy of which evil is evidently necessary, and will as evidently be availing, to the efficiency of our services.

The subject is as extensive as it is important. All that I can do on the present occasion is to drop a few hints on some of the cases which most frequently arise, as aids to your further reflection. We may contemplate them *as they indicate either the state of the understanding or of the heart*.

I.—1. As referring to the state of the understanding, the first case we notice is that of *deep ignorance*. In many cases it may appear, that your conversation, although you have conceived it to be simple, is not

sufficiently so for the person whose good you seek. It takes for granted too much previous knowledge. And as, if you had been trying to make a child read who had not learned the letters, you would abandon the lesson and have recourse to the alphabet, so, in these cases, you should fall back on the most simple portions, the alphabet of religious truth.

As to the instances of *extreme* ignorance which sometimes occur, and which would be scarcely credible if they were not substantiated by unquestionable testimony, it is by no means to be concluded, that any of them, even the most desperate, are beyond effectual instruction. However slender the capacity may be by nature, or however deteriorated by the want of early instruction, if the mind be sane there is hope. God has fitted truth to the mind, and the mind to truth, and we may rely with perfect confidence on the wisdom and sufficiency of the adaptation. Our object should be, to arrive at the simplest and most elementary forms of truth, by reducing our own knowledge to its rudiments, and by searching the scriptures for the most apt illustrations. The comparison which, with the greatest facility, exhibits the nature and consequences of our relation to God, (the fundamental principles of moral truth,) and which the scriptures often employ, is drawn from the parental character. "If I be a father, where is mine honour?" Every sane man can understand that children ought to love their parents; and every one who can understand this, is capable of receiving all the truths which relate to his duty to God, and to his sin and misery, and, therefore, those which relate to his salvation.

2. Another case of frequent occurrence is that of



*unmeaning acquiescence.* Those with whom you converse, perhaps, instantly express their agreement in every thing you say, but in such a manner as to leave a painful conviction that they neither understand nor attempt to understand it. These are exceedingly tiresome cases, and apparently almost desperate. The real source of this empty assent is probably to be found in a desire to escape the trouble of any exercise of mind on religious subjects. They agree to every thing, that they may not have the fatigue of thinking of any thing; it is the most effectual way of keeping their minds quiet, and of sending you away, at the same time, satisfied with your visit. The method of treating this case is not so much by instruction as by motive. You have not so much to teach them that which they do not know, as to press upon them that which they do know. The deep sleep of the heart paralyses the understanding; it is your business to disturb it. For this purpose, make the strongest possible appeals to the passions, so as your appeals are grounded upon admitted truths. Strive to your utmost to touch the feelings. Do all that can be done to awaken hope, fear, grief, shame, or any other powerful passion, it scarcely matters which; for when any one comes into strong action, the understanding will begin to act, and the whole soul will be open to you at once. In such cases as these you should be particularly studious to bring out the whole pungency of divine truth, which cannot be supposed to be greater than it may be necessary and fit to employ. Do not shrink from adducing whatever in holy writ is most melting or most terrific; and, without asperity, adopt a manner of address as solemn and subdueing as you may be able to assume.

3. The third case we notice is that of *tenacious mistake*. It occurs when persons hold errors as unquestionable truths. Some, for example, are perfectly convinced that they were made christians in their baptism; others, that if they lead a good life they can be in no danger; and others, that, however they may be called upon, they really *cannot* do any thing that they ought. The influence of such mistakes is plainly very mischievous. They not only negative some important portions of truth, but they facilitate the evasion and neglect of all the rest. They exert an influence the more pernicious, because they are held, not as truths merely, but as parts of religious truth; so that in endeavouring to show their fallacy, you seem to be undermining their very faith itself.

Now, I do not mean to say that such persons cannot be converted without a special conviction of these errors, nor that your whole efforts should be directed to such an object; yet I conceive it important that they should not be overlooked. If they can be destroyed, a great obstacle is removed out of the way, and success very much facilitated; and there is no reason to despair of the attempt. It is important, however, to remember how this attempt should be made. We should keep at the utmost distance from bitterness or censure, we should never laugh at people for their ignorance, or even accuse them of it; we should never oppose error by mere assertion or positivity. Our endeavour should be to induce thought and examination; to open avenues of reflection, and furnish materials for it; to exhibit clear, solid, and convincing arguments, with great coolness, with no aim at triumph, and leaving them for consideration in order

to produce their full effect. It is of great importance, in such cases as these, to induce a habit of *independent* thinking; independent alike of others and of themselves. When you can induce a person to feel that he is not to hold an opinion because he has always held it, or because other people maintain it, or because it has been inculcated upon him by his religious teachers, or for any other reason but *because it is true*, you loosen some of the grand roots of the tree of error, and may the sooner expect to see it fall.

4. The last case we mention under this head, is that of *sophistical entanglement*. Many persons are, or profess to be, embarrassed with difficulties on various points; these become the topics of almost every conversation, and little progress seems to be practicable, as to the production of spiritual good, unless they can be silenced or removed.

Some cases of this class exhibit great tenderness of conscience, and anxiety of mind, the embarrassment is plainly real and not feigned, and the exercises resulting from it, perhaps, extremely painful. These persons should be treated with great gentleness. You should hear all that they wish to say, since the very utterance of it may relieve a burdened heart. Enter into every perplexity, and however clear the point may be to you, spare neither time nor pains in the kindest manner to render it so to them. Bear compassionately with their weakness; and go over the same ground with them again and again, if necessary, endeavouring not to evade, but really to *meet* every difficulty, and to treat each subject in a manner that *ought* to be satisfactory. Combine prayer with your converse; since

nothing tends more to lead the understanding to rest, than a devout and a tranquil heart.

Cases of perplexity are for the most part, however, of a different kind. You meet with doubts and objections in far greater numbers among persons who evidently amuse themselves with them, and make them an occasion of trifling with you. It requires some wisdom and resolution to deal with such people as these. If you will suffer them to direct the conversation, they will lead you, perhaps, through the whole region of controversy, touching upon one subject after another so rapidly as to allow of the effective consideration of none. Such trifling as this should be cut short. You will do well, in the first place, to limit the discourse to *difficulties actually felt by the person with whom you converse*. It plainly can be of no importance at all to converse with him upon any other; yet you may often find, when a doubtful point is started, that it is merely for the sake of conversation, and that no embarrassment respecting it actually exists. All such topics discard. You will find it an advantage, secondly, to refuse to answer *objections to the sentiments of other persons*. You will commonly have much of this sort of work provided for you; something has been found in such a book, or said by such a minister, or held by such a professor, against which heavy objections may be brought. But you are not bound to answer those objections. It will be much better for you to be prepared with your own representation of truth, for which alone, of course, you can be held accountable. Whatever objections may be brought against this, you will be expected, and you should be able, to repel; but you may thus secure the opportunity of making a represen-

tation not liable to *some*, perhaps not liable to *any*, of the objections with which your antagonist meant you should have to contend. Your advantage, in this respect, is still greater, if your study of the word of God should have led you into views of truth so modified as to avoid *all* the objections of the infidel, and as to extort the confession, 'If things are so, they are perfectly reasonable, and liable to no complaint.' He will tell you, perhaps, that he commonly hears a very different account; but hold yourself quite independent of other men's opinions, that you may link yourself with no man's errors. Let your only question be, Are not these views true? Thirdly, it is important to press upon every such person *a faithful regard to admitted truths*. No man will say that every thing is false; *something*, at all events, is true, and is acknowledged to be true by himself. But every moral truth is adapted to exercise a practical influence to which it is obligatory to yield. If a person acknowledges only that God is his maker, out of this truth arises an obligation to love his Maker, which it is imperative on him to fulfil. Press this obligation home. That some truths are enveloped in darkness, is no reason why those should be neglected which shine as in a blaze of light. Whatever may be said as to doubtful points, resistance to admitted truths is clearly wrong. If you press this successfully, you gain every thing. The heart which yields to one truth will speedily discover more. Finally, make it your endeavour to *produce seriousness*. You will scarcely fail to discover evidences of prevailing levity; and without settling any controverted point, you will be able to show, that topics which involve such awful issues as belong to

life, death, and eternity, ought not to be treated with levity. In such an exhortation, if you yourself are serious, every man's conscience will be your ally; and if you succeed in inducing seriousness, you do much to facilitate the exercise of beneficial consideration.

II.—1. Among the cases which may be referred to the state of the heart, may be ranked, in the first place, *fallacious confidence*. You meet, doubtless, with many persons who are well satisfied with their state, upon grounds which afford no satisfaction to you; so very well satisfied, indeed, that it is a matter of no small difficulty to induce even an inquiry on the subject. Now it cannot admit of a doubt that every means should be employed to break up such a ruinous confidence. While it continues, it is obvious that no progress whatever can be made in saving knowledge. It shields the heart from every thing which may be adapted to pierce it, and inevitably frustrates every attempt at conversion. It is of the first importance, therefore, that this obstacle should be removed. To leave it in existence is to abandon the sinner to his ruin.

As to the question *how* it should be attempted, I readily answer, that it should be done in the gentlest way possible. It is at the very best a painful work, both to him who performs it, and to him for whose sake it is performed; and, as in a surgical operation, any unnecessary severity may well be spared. But if gentle measures do not prevail, undoubtedly more powerful ones should be resorted to. If hints and insinuations are sufficient, by all means let a deceived sinner learn his misery by means of them; but if they are not so, let it be declared to him in the broadest and

plainest terms. Even hesitation in this respect is treachery to the soul's welfare, and, instead of being commended as tenderness, ought to be condemned as cruelty. There is no interest but that of the soul that we should treat in such a ruinous manner. If a person's house were in flames, would any one hesitate to say to him, If you do not escape, you will be burnt? And why should we feel so much less deeply for men's souls, as to shrink from telling them, in direct terms, if we can show them scriptural grounds for it, that they are in the way to hell? All that is really compassionate forbids such treacherous tenderness, whatever may be the immediate or apprehended results of a bolder and more faithful course.

2. There are cases, secondly, of *intentional deceit*. People with whom you converse not unnaturally wish to stand well in your eyes; and they frequently give a better account of themselves than truth would warrant. Sometimes this extends only to a disclaimer of grosser faults; at others a cloak of religion is assumed, in part perhaps for the sake of expected charity. I have known instances of this kind of deliberate imposition, even upon the very verge of eternity. That it is of the utmost importance to make your way to the heart and conscience of such persons, admits of no doubt; and though it may be difficult, much may be done towards it by searching conversation, and by collateral inquiry. Whether any benefit may arise from intimating your suspicions, or from bringing forward your evidence of their hypocrisy, is doubtful, and must be decided by your own discretion in each particular case. But one method is of undoubted propriety and suitableness. It is to trace iniquity to the heart, and

endeavour to lead to its detection there. We are, perhaps, apt to lay too much stress upon outward sins, in our efforts to produce conviction; and though I do not say that they should be wholly unnoticed, yet it is far more important to lead a sinner to a just knowledge of his own heart, than to convict him merely of external guilt. Let any one who wishes, however falsely, to disavow charges of open sin, have the full benefit of such a disavowal. Say that it is of no consequence whether he is or is not guilty of the wickedness he disclaims; that if he be innocent of it, he is still corrupt at heart, and an enemy to God; that this is his great iniquity, and that which equally ensures his destruction. No fraud can be practised upon you in reference to this charge. If he pretends to deny it, the book of God is at once your authority and your proof; if he falls under it, your object is attained.

3. You may meet with many cases of *ill-directed effort*. Where you have so far succeeded as to awaken anxiety, or where, in the first instance, you may have found a measure of it to exist, you may nevertheless discover that the endeavours to which it leads are altogether of an unsatisfactory kind. Some you may find betaking themselves to a diligent keeping to their church; some to leading a better life; some to regular attendance at a place of worship; some to reading and prayer, and religious associations.

Now some of these things are most excellent in themselves, and may be regarded as pleasing and hopeful indications of commencing piety; but we should take great care to encourage no satisfaction, either in ourselves or in others, in that which after all is not of a saving character. A broad and decisive



distinction requires to be drawn between things which are good in themselves, and things which have an adaptation to rescue a sinner from sin and misery. Nothing, for example, can be more excellent than holiness; yet the condition of a sinner is such, that, if he were to be henceforth as holy as an angel, he would gain nothing as to deliverance from condemnation. For this purpose there is required an atonement for sin, which God has provided in the death of his Son; and *submission to that atonement* on the part of a sinner is the only method whereby the benefit of it can be derived to him. It should be carefully observed by us, whether this state of mind is or is not induced. If it be, every thing is well; if it be not, every thing is wrong. It may be conjoined with any or all of the pleasing appearances above noticed; but, on the other hand, any or all of these may be separated from it. It is not certain that a sinner has submitted to God because he is thus hopefully exercised; he may have done so—or he may not.

None of these pleasing appearances exercise a more plausible and delusive influence than prayer. To a very great extent a notion prevails, that sinners may be saved by prayer; and there is something so excellent in prayer itself, and, considered as a spiritual exercise, so much identified with the existence of sincere piety, that many pious persons have either imbibed the same sentiment, or are startled at the opposite. To me it appears to be one of the simplest and most obvious truths, that no man can be saved by prayer. If it be a spiritual exercise (which is far from being always the case,) it may be, like holiness, an *evidence* of salvation, but not the *instrument* of it. It is not that

which a sinner is to do in order to be saved, or that by which he can be saved. It does nothing towards his salvation, but leaves the question of acceptance or wrath just where it was. Now, even if prayer might always be taken as an evidence of piety, it would be an unscriptural and mischievous thing to confound the *evidences* with the *method* of salvation. But, as I have just hinted, prayer is by no means uniformly a spiritual exercise. Much of it is formal, and much that is not formal is natural—the utterance of an awakened, but not of a subdued, heart. This is even no evidence of piety; and yet it is the prayer by which multitudes hope to be saved. It is not only a truth, therefore, but a very important truth, that a sinner cannot be saved by prayer; that if his prayer be unaccompanied with submission to God, it leaves him under condemnation; that if it be accompanied with submission to God, it is not prayer that saves him, but submission; and that reliance placed upon prayer serves only to blind him to his condition, and to render prayer itself an instrument of his ruin.

It is the more material that prayer should be set in its true light, because by many persons it is regarded, not merely as that which will save them, but as the only thing which it is either requisite or possible for them to do in reference to their salvation. ‘If prayer does not answer the end,’ they are ready to say, ‘what can we do more?’ And as it uniformly happens that prayer does not answer an end for which it is unscripturally and inappropriately used, it hence follows, that they conclude they have nothing else to do, and make themselves satisfied in a state of sin and condemnation; as though they would say, ‘I have prayed

to God, and that is every thing; and now, if I am not converted and saved, it is not my fault.' It is evident that, in such a state of mind, the attention of a sinner is withdrawn from all scriptural views of duty, and from every impulse to right action. The Scripture speaks of humbling ourselves before God, of repentance, of godly sorrow, of submission to Christ's righteousness; all which are thus, most unjustly and injuriously, superseded by prayer, an exercise by the performance of which, in whatever manner, a sinner deems himself exonerated from all obligation to these scriptural and essential duties. Instead of being useful, the very exercise of prayer becomes in this method a tremendous mischief. I do not here need to be told of the fallen and helpless state of human nature, or of the thousand encouragements to prayer which are contained in the divine word; admitting these most readily, I must maintain also that it is a sinner's *direct and immediate* duty to turn to God, and submit to his Son, a duty from the obligation and necessity of which not a whole century of prayers could relieve him. Make it your business, dear brethren, to see that no person under your instruction shall ruin himself by this melancholy delusion.

If you find reason to think that, amidst whatever hopeful exercises, the heart is not bowed to the righteousness of Christ, you should not only indulge no satisfaction yourself, but you should allow none to exist in the mind of those whose conversion you seek. It may be a very hard lesson for them to learn, and not a little painful for you to inculcate it; but it is of indispensable necessity for you to say, that, notwithstanding all their goodness, they are as truly in the

way to hell as ever. Such an annunciation may be received with grief, with surprise, with resentment; but, however modified in language or in manner, substantially it is indispensable. Of course you will endeavour to make it clear by scriptural instruction and proof; which, if you can gain attention, you may readily effect by a review of the condition into which sin has brought us. You should be prepared also for the question which you may instantly expect: 'What then am I to do?' Be ready with your answer—'Submit yourself to God's righteousness.' Show the righteousness which God has provided in its just attitude, and in its blessed adaptation to our need, and press the obligation and necessity, as well as the privilege, of counting all things but loss, in order to win Christ and be found in him.

4. You may find instances of *cherished neglect*. There may be some who will allow you to converse with them, who, nevertheless, have no intention of paying any regard to your instructions, but who both cherish and avow a contrary purpose. These are persons plainly to be pursued with the force of motive. Every thing that is solemn in manner, and weighty in sentiment, should be brought to bear on them. Sometimes appeals of melting compassion derived from the love of God; sometimes of awful terror drawn from his wrath. But perhaps the topics from which the most salutary influence may be expected are these. In the first place, a well-sustained charge of criminality. Endeavour to show such a person that, in purposely disregarding eternal things, he does what is wrong in itself, and what his own conscience condemns. Intentional neglect is a state of mind which, however he

may wish to cherish it, he will never pretend to justify; and if you succeed in making his conscience speak, in awakening a fixed sense of criminality and self-reproof, you effect, perhaps, the most hopeful step towards a change. In the next place, endeavour to induce a conviction that he is rushing on his own ruin. Disabuse him of the notion that he is born for destruction; that he is the victim of irreversible fate; that he is to be borne down by irresistible wrath. Make him know that his destiny is in his own hands; that life and death are exhibited, for himself to determine which shall be his portion; that all things are ready for his blessedness; that he is endowed with capacities for securing it, and that, if he falls into hell, the act of destruction is his own:—and you thus impart views from which much benefit may be derived.

5. You may sometimes incur *direct resentment*. Smothered resentment may often exist; but it may occasionally break out into open, and perhaps into violent expression. Perhaps you may be required to leave the habitation; perhaps forbidden to enter it again.

In such cases it may occur to you that you must have done something wrong, and have failed of the proper manner of conveying instruction. Doubtless you may have done so, and it is important for you to make the inquiry; but this conclusion by no means necessarily arises from the facts. Resentment in the hearer may arise without any fault in the speaker, as is manifest, not only in the case of Stephen, whose auditors gnashed upon him with their teeth, but in the history of our Lord, from whose preaching a similar result not unfrequently followed. Without shrinking

from a thorough self-examination on the subject, therefore, you may yet cherish a hope of having done nothing to deserve either your own reproofs, or those which may be lavishly cast upon you.

In the same way you may dispose of another suggestion which may arise in such circumstances, namely, that, having produced resentment, you can have done no good. I am not about to plead for the desirableness of inducing resentment; I readily allow that endeavours should be made to avoid it, if possible; but, if it should arise, I should be very far from being discouraged by it. I can by no means take it as a sign that no good is done, or is likely to be done. I look at it, indeed, altogether in a contrary light. It is precisely the effect which divine truth is adapted to produce on the conscience, while the heart resists it; and it is an evidence that, though truth has not reached the one, it has reached the other, and given testimony to its power. Nor does resentment, when it is without just cause, obstruct the avenue to the heart. It is very much adapted to give rise to subsequent consideration and regret, and being found causeless, to induce a more studious expression of kindness in future interviews. Such, in fact, has often been the case; and we are quite justified in saying, that it is much better and more hopeful for instruction to produce resentment, than to produce no effect at all. The most afflictive of all conditions is an unbroken apathy.

You should be on your guard, likewise, against imagining that, where you have been so unhappy as to inspire resentment, it is useless for you to attempt any thing further, or that it is better to do nothing

if you cannot act without provoking a similar feeling. Both these ideas are erroneous. All you have to do, is to see to it that resentment is inspired not by yourself, but by the truth, and that, while pressing home the most unwelcome topics, you preserve an evident and unquestionable aspect of benevolence. With these cautions, you may and must persevere. Too much is staked upon the issue to allow you to abandon the effort; and too many rewards have been given to unwearied kindness to allow you to despair of success.

I am very well aware that the observations which I have made are much fewer and more brief than is demanded by the subject to which they refer. I commend them, however, to your serious and candid consideration; and in closing, only press upon you again the sentiment, that you ought to be prepared for every case which may arise. If you find that you are not so, do not, under any pretext, rest satisfied with your deficiency. Observe carefully how much want of success in your labour arises from your unskilfulness in contending with its difficulties; and bring home to your heart the fact, that various persons are perishing in their sins, because you do not know how to relieve the difficulties of one, to answer the objections of another, or to reach the conscience of a third. Ought not such a state of things to be deeply painful to you? And more especially while there are means of remedying the mischief? There is no fault in your weapon. There is no aspect of human depravity or wickedness to which the word of God is not adapted. It is like an armoury, comprehending weapons of every class, and suited to warfare of every kind. Have you

studied it closely? Have you felt its application to the varied workings of your own heart? Are you habitually engaged in bringing it home to your own bosom, so as to learn the method of applying it to others? Are you abandoning yourselves to a variety of theological difficulties, without knowing your own way out of the labyrinth from which you have undertaken to extricate the perplexed? Do you find that the doctrinal views you entertain are not adapted for the work of converting sinners; that they have either no edge, or one that is easily and effectually turned aside? How long do you mean to remain in such a condition, so grievously disqualified for the prosecution of the most important of all labours? When will sinners be converted, if the war against their iniquities does not assume a different character from this? Is this feebleness of our array entailed upon us by the captain of the host? Or is it not the result of our own ignorance and inattention? Dear brethren, as workmen in this blessed employ, let me intreat you to be workmen who need not to be ashamed. Gird yourselves with the complete armour which God has provided; an armour not less complete for conquering others, than for defending ourselves. Scriptural study, reflection, and prayer, will accomplish the object. Let me hope that you will earnestly pursue it, and give yourselves no rest, until you have proved how fully the truth of God is adapted to all the aspects of the wickedness of man, as the provision of his mercy is to the entire depth of his ruin.



## LECTURE VIII.

### DIRECT EXERCISES AFTER LABOUR.

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#### PSALM cxviii. 25.

*O Lord, I beseech thee send now prosperity.*

I AM now to suppose, dear brethren, (and I hope that with some truth I may do so,) that you have been making actual endeavours for the conversion of sinners; that you have gone forth to instruct the ignorant, to warn the thoughtless, to reprove the wicked, and to beseech God's enemies to be reconciled to him. Your labour is now done: but did you drop all remembrance of it with the actual termination of your toil? I trust not; but that it has still a place in your recollection; and that it has been associated with your subsequent approaches to God.

As, in some foregoing discourses, I have pressed upon you the importanee of preparatory devotional exercises, I must here add that similar exercises are no less important now your labour is performed. If you have felt the propriety of them in the former circumstances, and more especially if you have reduced them to practice, I have no doubt but you will acknowledge the value of them in the present. The sacred exercises which should follow our endeavours for the salvation of our fellow men are closely connected with those which precede them; I might say they grow out of them. There is no man who enters his closet be-

fore he makes such endeavours, but will long to return thither afterwards.

The exercises now contemplated will naturally have respect to two principal objects. They may relate to ourselves or to others; to the success of our exertions with men, or their acceptance with God. It might most nearly accord with our feelings, perhaps, if I were first to notice the exercises connected with the *success* of our endeavours, since this is probably with us a very prominent, if not the most prominent object; but I turn rather in the first place to the *acceptance* of our services before God, which ought, in truth, to be a prior concern.

I. If our endeavours for the conversion of sinners are rightly made, they are made as acts of obedience and service to God, and as expressions of grateful love and dedication to his glory; and if so, then our first business obviously is to carry the services when rendered into his presence, and lay them at his feet. Such an exercise naturally arises out of the primary intention of the service itself; that intention being plainly left incomplete, unless the service, subsequently to its performance, be actually presented before the Lord. Moreover, it is only upon an accepted service that any blessing can be expected. If our labour be a rejected offering, we can have no hope that a benediction will rest upon it; so that the supplication of its acceptance in heaven is of essential importance to its efficacy upon earth. In addition to these reasons it is to be observed, that the gracious acceptance of our labours on the part of our heavenly Father, is a source of immediate and unutterable joy. It is an exquisite

delight, fitted to the taste of the spiritual mind, and one after which we ought to feel a longing appetite; it is a divine gratification, which God in the riches of his mercy is willing to bestow, and which he intends as the present recompense of our toil. Not to seek this acceptance, would be to overlook the very chief of all the pleasures with which devotedness to God is connected, and to separate from our services the highest recompense which eternal love has allotted to them. To be insensible to the value of such a recompense could indicate nothing less than an utter ignorance of experimental piety. It enters into the felicity of the Son of God himself, in respect of the execution of the great redeeming work committed by the Father to his hands; it constitutes the highest joy of saints and angels in the celestial world; in its amplest measure it is the bliss which is there prepared for ourselves; and there must be some afflictive and perilous peculiarity in us, if it be a delight for which we have now neither appetite nor taste. The holiest and most devoted of men have always entered most deeply into the joy of being by their labours "a sweet savour unto God."

Make it your first concern, therefore, after your endeavours for the conversion of sinners, to draw near to God, and to lay them at his footstool as services rendered to himself, and services of which you implore his gracious acceptance. Pray earnestly that he will accept them; and not only so, but that he will give you to know that he accepts them, and shed abroad in your heart a sense of his divine complacency. I hope I am not speaking to persons to whom this language will appear either unintelligible or enthusiastic. I trust, on the contrary, that you know enough of real

and intimate communion with God, to know how rationally such a privilege may be sought, and how truly it is within the scope of divine condescension and christian experience.

If we come to inquire *how* such an object is to be attained, we shall find in the onset the necessity of a *serious examination*. We shall have need to ask how much of our service it is possible to present for the acceptance of our master. It is by no means safe to presume that the whole of it can be so presented, although it might seem natural that this should be the case. It is plain, however, that nothing more can justly be presented to God than has been really rendered to him. What we have done under the actual influence of dedication to his glory, and grateful love for his mercy, that may clearly be laid at his feet; but if any thing should have been done, either through the operation of any other motives, or without the operation of these, that has not been done to God or for him, and cannot with any propriety, or with any possibility of acceptance, be presented before him. Now we cannot proceed far in a scrutiny of our labours, without perceiving that the operation of spiritual and holy motives has been by no means consistent and uniform. Even if we have been prevailingly actuated by love to the Saviour, and an eye to his glory, we may find cause to acknowledge that inferior impulses have added their force, and given a mixed character to the whole. How often may we have acted under a sense of duty merely, without the quickenings of gratitude and love! How often from the force of habit, almost without the conscious operation of any rational motive at all! How often influenced by an engagement with

others, or by the known observation of our fellow creatures! How often impelled by feelings centering in self, whether relating to the satisfaction we might feel with ourselves, to the esteem we might gain from others, or even to the pleasure of being useful! But if this be the case, and there is so much in our services which has not been done unto God, it is obvious that, before they are laid at his footstool, they should be thoroughly examined, *winnowed*, as it were, to divide the chaff from the wheat. For all that we have done under inferior motives like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, we may have our reward; but that reward can never be the smile and approbation of our Lord.

And what do you anticipate, dear brethren, as the result of such a scrutiny? You perceive perhaps in a moment that there is much of your labours which you can present before God with no feelings but those of shame and contrition, and with no prayer but for pardon. Ah! when we proceed to separate the precious from the vile, to take away from the general mass of our exertions, already too small, every thing which has not been influenced by love to the Saviour, and to put by itself that portion of our endeavours which has been thus actuated, what large and melancholy deductions have we to make from the apparent amount of our service! How much that might have been valuable, has now no worth, but is to be thrown aside as refuse; and in some cases, perhaps, almost or quite the whole of our exertions may be found wanting in the only qualities which can give them value before God! What an afflictive discovery is this! How much we have lost, and by what criminal heedlessness! But what is now to be done? Nothing, but to humble ourselves in the

dust, and pray to be forgiven. This whole portion of our labours contains matter of the deepest humiliation; and it is highly important for us to avail ourselves of the light which the presence of God thus throws upon them to disabuse ourselves of a groundless complacency in them. No exercise of mind can be more just or more salutary than, beneath the guilt of these unholy duties, to approach to the fountain which cleanseth from all sin.

But if our searchings of heart should leave any remainder of a more valuable kind; if in any degree we have been influenced by love to Christ and a heartfelt consecration to him, this portion of our services may be presented before him. No doubt this also is exceedingly defective and unworthy, and deep humility becomes us; but humility, however sincere or however deep, can never require us to overlook, to misinterpret, or to undervalue, the work of the Lord in our hearts. As dedication to his glory is a state of mind on which, viewed generally, he looks with approbation, so a measure of his complacency must be associated with every individual expression of it. Having access to God, therefore, through our Lord Jesus Christ, you may justly gather up your fragments of spiritual service, and lay them at his footstool with such language as this: "Here, Lord, are some small endeavours which I have made for thee, some slight expressions of love from a heart which thou hast won to thy glory; let it please thee graciously to receive them at my hands, and to shed abroad in my breast a sense of thy condescending acceptance of these my unworthy services. If I were in heaven, this would be my highest joy;

and it will be little less than heaven while I am on earth.”

If you find any unsuitableness in this recommendation to the state of your minds, it is, perhaps, because you fail in respect of the primary intention by which your labours for the good of others should be characterized. They are not consciously and expressly rendered as service to God, so that it seems strange to you to speak of presenting them for acceptance before him. This is an evil you should endeavour to remedy. Or it may be because you confound the acceptance of your services with the acceptance of your persons. In this respect a little correct scriptural knowledge will be highly advantageous to you. Remember that before God we stand as sinners righteously condemned; and that we never can be accepted of him but through the blood and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the sole and the all-sufficient ground of our justification, or our acceptance as righteous. No reference whatever to our works mingles with this; nor can the acceptance of any of our works be entertained for a moment until our persons be first accepted through the beloved. No services can be favourably received from a rebel still in enmity and under condemnation. But if our persons be first of all accepted, and through the perfect and glorious righteousness of the Son of God, by which we attain a high and complete standing in the divine favour, then the way is prepared for the acceptance of our services also. Being already in a state of friendship with God, undoubtedly offerings of friendship may be presented at his footstool, and must be acceptable there. Or perhaps while the ground is thus clear and well laid in scripture doctrine, you may fall into perplexed and un-

scriptural experience. You may suffer the acceptance of your persons and your services to be blended in fact, though in theory they are distinct. Be much aware of this. Before you present your offerings of gratitude, be careful to realize your own condition of acceptance. It is only so that you will discern the possibility of the acceptance of your unworthy sacrifice, or have your heart open to the overflowing grace that will be manifested therein; not otherwise will the spirit in which you offer it be that of generous friendship, or your breast accessible to the true expression of the divine complacency.

While presenting your services before God you should carefully endeavour to realize your personal acceptance in the beloved apart from them. You will, of course, never suffer yourselves to feel as though your dedication were the ground of your favourable approach to God. It would indicate a grievous amount of spiritual pride if you were to indulge such a feeling; while it would, with certainty, destroy the whole pleasure I am leading you to seek. There is an immense difference between seeking the divine complacency in our exertions and being complacent in them ourselves, and between the respective pleasures resulting from these states of mind. The joy of God's approbation is of an humbling and sanctifying, as well as of a most elevating character; the joy of self-complacency is nothing better than a miserable and fruitless inflation. Self-complacency can never arise while we keep our eyes open. In addition to the fact that so large a portion of our services is too unholy to be presented before God at all, we have to remember that, wherein better motives have influenced us, we are indebted for



this mercy to his own Spirit, while they have still operated so feebly, in comparison with their unmeasurable greatness, as to put us to utter confusion. Thus, while we ask our adorable Lord to accept some tokens of love, we present to him but the fruits of his own grace, and have to take shame to ourselves that they are not far more considerable; to wonder, in a word, that he will accept any thing where he has to forgive so much. O! the very thought itself is almost annihilating, that, not only with so much meanness, but with so much unworthiness, the ever-blessed God will condescend to accept any thing at our hands.

II. Having laid our endeavours for the conversion of sinners at our heavenly Master's feet, and implored his gracious acceptance of them through his dear Son, we may direct our attention in the next place to their *success*. This, undoubtedly, though not the primary, is a highly important object; and if we have entered into our work with any measure of a right spirit, it is one to which we shall be keenly alive.

It is manifest that, when our utmost efforts have been employed, the end at which we have been aiming cannot be considered as accomplished. We may have given instruction, exhortation, or reproof; but by these things we have only endeavoured to bring the mind into action, in order that out of its proper action there may arise ultimate beneficial results. The actual good is to be produced by subsequent reflection. We have been sowing seed, which must have time to vegetate and bring forth its fruit. There is a clear scope, therefore, for additional efforts; an opportunity of doing something else, in order to further the influence and secure the efficacy of that which we have already done.

But, it may be asked, what further can be done? While we are engaged with a person, we may exert an influence upon him; but in what manner can any be exercised after we have left him? Ah! there is a being who is continually present with him, and can exercise a constant power over his spirit; a being to whom you likewise may have access, and whose agency you may engage to give perpetuity and efficacy to your own. You know his name. It is God, the father of our spirits, and the God of all flesh. He can carry on the work when you are obliged to lay it aside, and bring into continual bearing on the conscience and the heart the words which you uttered but in a moment. Implore his aid, therefore. Bow yourself before him in prayer, and beseech him to make the work his own: "O Lord, I beseech thee send now prosperity."

You are well acquainted, moreover, with the general and important truth, that God himself is the giver of every good and perfect gift. No means are successful without his blessing; and although one may plant and another water, it is he who giveth the increase. To anticipate success without seeking his blessing on the means we have employed, would indicate an entire oversight of this truth, or a very high degree of self-confidence and presumption. Prayer in connection with our endeavours, is a most just acknowledgment of our weakness and dependence, together with the supremacy, the sovereignty, and the bounty of the Lord of all. If we do desire success, in what method can that desire so naturally and so justly express itself, as in supplication to him from whom all success proceeds? If we are not found imploring his blessing, what reason can we have to sup-

pose that we desire it? And if we do not desire it, upon what ground can we imagine that we shall receive it? Not to follow up our endeavours with prayer, is to cut ourselves off from the only fountain of energy by which vital power can be poured into the means we have employed.

It is further known to us, that our endeavours for the conversion of sinners are opposed by very peculiar and inveterate causes. We have the whole force of human depravity to contend with. We are striving to produce impressions which the feelings of every moment are adapted to efface, as the recurring waves obliterate instantly our footsteps on the sand. Perhaps ignorance is so dense as almost to defy our endeavours to communicate knowledge; or if we do make ourselves understood, our message is so unwelcome, that there is little probability of its being regarded, or even remembered. The world is loved with a fondness, and sin is held with a tenacity, which seem not only to repel but to deride our toil. We know, too, from him who searcheth the heart, and who in kindness has forewarned us of the depth of its wickedness, that, unless divine power interpose, all our endeavours will actually be repelled, and that it is to God's own arm alone that sinners will yield. And knowing this, to restrain prayer were not only the most unaccountable forgetfulness, it were little short of insanity. It would be greater wisdom to make no efforts at all for the conversion of sinners, than to separate them from earnest supplication that God will render them availing, as in the day of his power.

God has not required us to throw ourselves alone into the midst of these spiritual wickednesses, to our

certain confusion and defeat. His blessing is not less free than it is necessary. If it is essential to our success, he is also infinitely willing to bestow it. He is far from standing aloof, and leaving us to our weakness; he bids us lay hold on his strength, and readily girds himself also for the war. The outpouring of his blessed Spirit is promised in answer to prayer; and he hath never said, Seek ye me in vain. What therefore should we mean, if we were not to follow up our labours with prayer? To omit seeking that aid without which all our toil would be fruitless, while it would be most readily granted at our request? How glaring an inconsistency! How strange a contradiction! Dear brethren, surely you will not be guilty of it; but as often as you have been wrestling with sinners, you will be found likewise in your solitudes wrestling with God, that, prevailing with him, you may, like Jacob, prevail with men.

Care and enlargement in this exercise are the more necessary, because of the great principle of God's government, that he will honour those by whom he is honoured. By the manner in which he pours out his blessing, he exercises an important discipline over our hearts. Where he sees the deepest abasement, the most earnest desire, and in other respects an attitude of mind the most conformable with his will and glory, there he leads us to expect the most ample benediction; where, on the contrary, he sees the heart least humbled, least enlarged, and rendering him the least honour, he finds reasons to diminish or to withhold his blessing. This method is undoubtedly a wise and a holy one, and it ought to be powerfully influential with us. You will readily perceive that it bears

not only on the quantity of our prayers, but on their quality also. You know, doubtless, of what different qualities prayer may be, and of what various character the desires which have a real existence within us, and a sincere utterance before God. The nature of these desires needs to be closely examined. It is by cherishing such feelings as are most honourable to God, and by mortifying those which are least so, that we shall connect our labours with his most abundant blessing.

It might seem perhaps as though, if we did desire the success of our endeavours for the conversion of sinners, little danger of impropriety could attach to a feeling so obviously right. But let us look a little more closely into this matter.

Our desires need watching as to their *comprehensiveness*. They are apt to assume a very contracted and limited form. A familiar instance of this, to which I hope I may refer without offence, is to be found in the exercise of social or public prayer, in which it is frequently intreated that "some poor sinner" may be the subject of divine mercy on that occasion. But why is the petition limited to *one* of the "poor sinners" present? Do not all equally need the Lord's mercy? Have we not compassion enough to pray for all? Or do we think that God's mercy is not ample enough to extend to all? A tendency to something of the same kind may very frequently be detected by us. We desire and expect but little; and thus, like the king of Israel, who shot but three when he was desired to shoot as many arrows as he wished to obtain victories, we do dishonour to our bountiful God, and curtail the success of our own exertions.

God is bountiful, and ready to perform works of mercy on a large scale, yet we cannot expect to receive more than we desire. Why should the narrowness of our desires contract the vastness of his love? Why should we hesitate to expand our prayers to the utmost extent of his possible blessing; or need to be told twice, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it"?

Our desires need watching as to their *importunity*. It may not be quite certain, perhaps, that we long *very ardently* for the conversion even of those for whom we have been labouring; the strength of our desire, if justly estimated, may be far below the real value of the object. But let us beware of this. Importunity does much towards the success of prayer. The heart-searching God cannot be pleased to see us asking for inestimable blessings without proportionate earnestness. However sincerely we may ask for the conversion of sinners, if it be in a spirit of so little importunity that we can bear a refusal, a refusal may probably be given us. It is when our success becomes to us a matter of deep anxiety, of oppressive and almost overwhelming concern; when we make the interest of a perishing fellow sinner our own, and bear it before God so ardently as to say, with Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me;" it is then that we are most likely to prevail. These are the prayers which indicate the highest sense of the value of the blessing, and which God may most consistently honour with an answer of mercy. If you really wish to prevail therefore, stir up your heart to a just and intense importunity.

It is needful we should examine the *ultimate object* or reason of our desires. For admitting that it is the

conversion of sinners we desire, this may be desired for a variety of reasons, not all of them equally acceptable to God. We may desire it, for example, because they are persons with whom we have taken pains, and as a gratification to ourselves; or because they are in some particular relation to us, as parents, or children, or friends; or because they would be added to the church with which we are connected, or would afford joy to the minister whom we love; or for other reasons of a similar kind. Now it is manifest that all such desires may partake very little of a spiritual character, and that they do not extend to that which should be the great object of desire, namely, the glory of God and of his Son Jesus Christ. They may be described as essentially selfish, and as containing little or nothing which can be acceptable to our heavenly Father. To show this, only let us imagine ourselves putting them into words, and pleading with God on these grounds: "Lord, I have been taking great pains with these ignorant persons; now I beseech thee gratify me by their conversion." It is impossible we could use such language as this; but if the language be obviously improper, the thought, though less glaringly, must be equally so. This observation may be followed up, so as to apply to desires for the conversion of sinners even *for their own sake*. Not that it is *wrong* to desire the salvation of sinners because their destruction will be dreadful, but that it is *defective*. It is right so far, but it does not go far enough. We should view the salvation of sinners in all cases as connected with the glory of God, and desire it *for his glory*: otherwise we clearly fail of a right spirit herein. We are not to be censured for

feeling on the grounds I have enumerated, on the contrary they are all of them just and proper grounds of feeling: but as, on the one hand, our feeling should not stop there, but should always be excited in reference to the glory of God also, so, more especially, when we come to present our desires before him, all others should be merged in this primary and absorbing one. We should be able to say, "Lord, if I seek the salvation of these persons, it is not because my poor labours have been bestowed on their instruction; it is not because they are my relatives, and so peculiarly interesting to me; it is not because they will augment my party, or increase my estimation; neither is it because it will save souls from death; but it is because thy name will be glorified thereby. Gain thyself honour upon them by the victories of thy grace, and give them in recompense of the travail of thy Son." It is obvious that prayer of this tenor does more honour to God than all the rest, that it is more accordant with his will, and more adapted to obtain a blessing. He loves to see the creature shrink into nothing in the presence of the Creator, and to behold every wish amalgamating with and absorbed in the glory of his name. This is acceptable with him, and will eminently be honoured by him.

If we wish prayer to prevail, it should be the prayer of *faith*. I am aware, indeed, that on this subject there are two extremes to be avoided; and that false confidence is as much to be shunned as unbelief. Pious persons have sometimes indulged themselves in the positive expectation of particular results: as when parents have entertained a confidence that their children would be converted, or when a minister has



assured himself of a revival in the scene of his labours. Such feelings have commonly arisen from strong exercises of mind, from being much enlarged in prayer for these specific objects, or from a consciousness of having been enabled to bear them before God in faith. That out of such exercises there should arise a strong persuasion that the objects will be granted, is not perhaps unnatural in minds of a sanguine temperament: yet I cannot but conceive that it is carried much too far, when it is relied upon as a certain indication of the divine intention, or "almost as a promise." I know of no scriptural ground or warrant for such a persuasion. We have many assurances of God's willingness to hear and answer prayer; but as these cannot be understood to intimate that *every* blessing asked for shall be bestowed, (a result as impossible in itself as it is inconsistent with facts,) so neither, now that inspiration has ceased, can any authority be found for the certain expectation of any particular event. That some extraordinary fulfilments of such expectations have occurred is nothing to the purpose; there have doubtless been also many instances of their frustration. While God has done every thing to awaken activity and to encourage hope, he has authorised no certainty of single results. In every prayer he requires submission as well as trust; and in every case, our individual perdition and sinfulness excepted, when we have used every means, and presented the most earnest supplications, he calls upon us to be ready to say, if the issue should require it, The will of the Lord be done.

But if, on the one hand, there is danger of presumption, on the other there is far more danger of despond-

ency. If our desires are often small, our faith is generally less. Having perhaps a realizing view of the difficulties in the way of a sinner's conversion, but not having a due impression of the boundless power and mercy of the God of salvation, we make our supplication with fear and trembling, scarcely thinking it can be fulfilled, and often astonished if we find it to be so. Sometimes we are so much discouraged, perhaps, by the hardness of heart we have witnessed, that we think it can hardly be of any use to pray. And what justification do we think we have for such prayers as these? Or what effects do we expect from them? Are these the high thoughts of the Saviour by which we imagine to do him honour? Have we forgotten the declaration, "whatsoever things ye shall ask *believing* ye shall receive"? Did we never read the commendation of the prevailing supplicant, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt"? Do we wish the spheres of our labour to be blasted, like that desolate region in which Christ could do no mighty works because of their unbelief? If we do not, it is high time that our unbelief should be remedied. It is too long that we have gone to his footstool with the desponding language, "Lord, if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us and help us:" it is time we should hear the pungent rebuke, "If thou canst believe: all things are possible to him that believeth." Let us fix in our hearts the most unquestionable conviction that, in the conversion of sinners, there is nothing which Christ is unable or unwilling to do. It is this kind of prayer which, if I may so speak, makes room for his interposition, and gives

scope for the full sweep of that mighty arm by which all things shall be subdued under him.

By these observations it has been my wish to convince you that after your immediate endeavours of instruction have ceased, well adapted and mighty efforts may be made for their furtherance and success. Do not think your work done when you leave the listening class, or the tenement of sin; the same work remains to be pursued in your chamber, and if your prayers there be of a working kind, the most extensive and blessed results may follow. It should be your concern to see that you are not wanting in this respect: if success be not granted you, let it not be because you have not asked it, or asked it in a manner which God might acknowledge. Want of success under any circumstances is sufficiently grievous: but nothing can add so much to its bitterness as to discover that it has arisen from our own conduct. What pungent sorrow will it give us if we should have to say hereafter, 'I might have been more successful in the conversion of sinners, if I had more abounded in prayer: but I indulged a spirit of self-sufficiency, of indifference, of selfishness, or of unbelief, which made it necessary that success should be withheld for the punishment and correction of my sin.' What a terror is thus attached to the indulgence of evil! What a bounty is associated with the cultivation of a right spirit!—What is the real intensity of our longings for the salvation of those for whom we labour? Its whole force tends to impel us to our closets, and to melt our very souls into the language of the Psalmist—"O Lord, I beseech thee send now prosperity!"

## LECTURE IX.

### INDIRECT EXERCISES AFTER LABOUR.

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#### CANTICLES i. 6.

*They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.*

IN the preceding lecture I have shown you, dear brethren, that your endeavours for the conversion of sinners should be followed by devotional exercises, adapted to engage both your heavenly Father's acceptance of your labours, and his blessing upon them. But this is not all. Exertions of this kind *have an influence on personal piety* which demands attentive regard. While busily employed for the souls of others, you have need to look with peculiar care to the condition of your own. Your very activity may give origin to snares against which you should be on your guard, or to perplexities which you should be able to solve.

I. Exertion for the good of others may be connected with *self-neglect*. Every object that gains much of our attention and interest is apt to draw us off from the vigorous cultivation of personal piety; and though such an effect might be little anticipated from pursuits of a religious kind, yet experience has abundantly shewn that they are in this respect little, if at all, less dangerous than secular engagements. We may easily devote ourselves with so much eagerness to efforts of pious usefulness, as to overlook in part, or to pursue with less earnestness and diligence, the important ex-

ercises of the closet. The time allotted to these exercises may be infringed upon and shortened; or the attention paid to the discipline of the heart therein, may become less close and severe, through the distraction of the mind. This ill effect is so much the more probable, as it may seem to be justified by a sufficient reason. We should not suffer ourselves to abridge our closet duties, perhaps, for worldly business or pleasure; but to make this sacrifice for the sake of doing good to the souls of men is a different thing, and one for which much more may be said. It is, besides, much more easy and agreeable to employ ourselves in probing another's heart, than in examining our own. Of all the exercises of piety, those of the closet are the most difficult and unwelcome. They bring us under the weightiest influences of eternal things, and into an immediate strife with our inbred iniquities; they lead to self-reproof, they call for humiliation and renunciation of sin, they awaken strenuous effort: but the instruction and persuasion of others can be conducted without any of this trouble, and, indeed, with a sense of pleasure and satisfaction; so that, whenever it is thought allowable to transfer our attention to this latter object, there is a great probability of its being preferred. And why, we may sometimes ask, why should it not be allowable? The occupation is wholly of a religious nature; and may it not reasonably be expected, that in promoting the edification of others we shall find our own?

These plausible and seductive representations do but conceal a snare. They lead us, while keeping the vineyards of others, to neglect that which demands

our more immediate care, and thus both to inconsistency, to mischief, and to sin.

1. Neglect of personal piety is *sinful*, inasmuch as the cultivation of the heart is our primary duty. It matters not that what we are doing is good and useful; the maintenance of fellowship with God, the advancement of conformity to his image, the vigorous mortification of sin, are obligatory on us above all things, even above all good things; and there is no rectitude in neglecting a primary duty in order to attend to a secondary one. If with respect to efforts for usefulness it may be said, these things ought ye to have done; with respect to exercises of closet piety it may be said, also, these ought ye not to have left undone. By the neglect of them God is dishonoured and displeased. That we have been teaching the ignorant and reclaiming the lost, is no sufficient apology for the omission of those expressions of gratitude, dependence, and dedication, which are perpetually due from us to our Maker and our Lord.

2. Neglect of personal piety cannot be otherwise than *mischievous*. It is mischievous to ourselves, because it infallibly leads to declension. However willingly we may suppose that spirituality and holiness may be preserved by being in the midst of engagements of a religious nature, it will be uniformly found that this is not the fact. A lively state of mind in religion can never be maintained with a deserted closet. The heart requires to be often withdrawn from all inferior objects, and to be brought into immediate intercourse with the Father of spirits; otherwise, the sense of our relation to him is speedily lost, and with it every thing that is influential or valuable in religion.

It is in his light that we see light. Whatever power the things of an eternal world may at any time have exercised upon us, if we are not frequently looking at them afresh, their influence will quickly fade, and soon altogether vanish. The evils of the heart, if it be not habitually searched and disciplined, will resume a rapid growth, and acquire a prevailing dominion. To neglect the cultivation of personal piety, therefore, is inevitably to consign it to decay. And this is surely a most serious mischief. What can recompense us for a lukewarm and a deadened heart? What will be to us even the salvation of others, if we ourselves should perish? What will it avail us to have kept the vineyards of others, if our own be unfruitful?

But the mischief of a neglected heart is not confined to ourselves; it will extend also to others, and to the very exertions we are making for their good. For what is the impulse of these exertions? What is it that awakens us to the condition of the ungodly, that quickens our sloth, that subdues our shame, that unseals our lips, that inspires us with earnest solemnity? Is it not the force of inward piety, the power with which we realize the objects of a future world, and the influences we derive from communion with our beloved Lord? And when these decay, what is to become of the efforts which have sprung from them? They will infallibly decay also. You will lose your anxiety to be useful; the wretchedness of sinners will affect you less deeply; you will want a more powerful summons to draw you to the scenes of guilt and misery; you will be less prompt in improving opportunities, and even in seeing them; you will act

with less vigour; you will yield to the influence of sinful shame; you will be less earnest and solemn in your address; and the efforts of usefulness which you do not abandon will be converted into a routine of duties, cold, heartless, and loathed. And will all this be no mischief? What, to see those very exertions for the sake of which you have sacrificed your soul's prosperity, lie around you in neglected fragments, half abandoned, and wholly unprofitable? Dreadful result! Yet the sure issue of a neglected heart.

3. It must be added, that the neglect of personal piety while you are seeking the conversion of others is glaringly *inconsistent*. The principles which impel you to one are clearly adapted to lead you to both. If you value the soul of another because you have first learned to value your own, it is surely strange that, while you are caring for the spiritual welfare of others, your own should be forgotten. What can be the reason or the meaning of this? Either your neglect of personal piety throws ridicule on your concern for others, or your concern for them should put your negligence to shame. If the concerns of religion be important enough to lead you to press them on the attention of another, how is it that they do not engage your own? Some grievous inconsistency is here; and one from which you should make an instant escape, if you would not have all your exertions for others' good converted into cutting reproofs of your sin and folly.

See to it, then, dear brethren, that if, as I hope, you are diligent in endeavouring to turn sinners unto God, you are not thereby seduced from a close walk with him yourselves. While keeping the vineyards of



others, remember the paramount importance of cultivating your own ; think of the sin, the mischief, the inconsistency of neglecting it ; and so pursue every course of activity for the souls of men, that you may never have to utter the bitter lamentation, "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept."

II. Our exertions may give rise to *self-complacency*, or spiritual pride. Pride, which reigns in the heart of a carnal man, exists in that of the spiritual ; and is ready to avail itself of every thing on which it can feed. We shall not make many efforts to do good without having occasion to acknowledge its exercise ; and if we are not, like Jehu, betrayed into the exclamation, "Come, see my zeal for the Lord of hosts," we may detect ourselves in the indulgence of a secret satisfaction and complacency of no hallowed kind. I need not say to any experimental christian that this is a great evil. With all the sweetness which there may be in a feeling of self-complacency, there is in it no *happiness* : this lies in contrition and brokenness of heart. The indulgence of spiritual pride, indeed, constitutes a state of miserable inflation, in which there is no breathing of the soul after God, and can be none of his complacency in us ; which tends to conceal every sin, to extinguish every grace, and to annihilate every impulse of action and all sense of obligation. It is a state in which piety cannot prosper, in which every evil is rapidly generated, and which is never remedied but by painful and heart-breaking exercises.

The methods of preventing or mortifying such an evil are of the most obvious kind. As no feeling is

more ready to arise, so none has less cause. It is only to look it in the face, and recall a few familiar facts, and it will be withered and put to shame. It is not at all necessary that, for this purpose, we should overlook or depreciate whatever in us may be really devoted or laborious. Humility needs not to be fostered by delusions. It does not consist in seeing ourselves otherwise than we are, but in taking a right view of ourselves as we are. It is pride that is generated in falsehood, and nurtured by misrepresentation. Let it be admitted that you are in some measure, and, perhaps, in a considerable measure, active for God and the souls of men; set your labours before your eyes in their just magnitude and proportion; estimate them at their full value, and allow of no undue acknowledgments of sloth, of no spurious and uncalled-for abasement; and still we say, that you need but recollect two or three things, to exterminate your pride, and cover you with shame.

1. It is, in the first place, to be remembered, that whatever we have done has been moved by the Spirit of God, and not by our own. Devotedness to God and compassion for the souls of men are among the last things which would ever have been in our hearts, if we had been left to ourselves. Sloth, self-indulgence, shame, fear, indifference, these are our natural characteristics, and they would have remained so to this day, had it not been for the communication of an influence from heaven of which we are utterly unworthy. Touching as the considerations are which we have now been brought to feel, our hearts are base enough to have long disregarded them all; and in order to render us alive to them, it has required no less than

an almighty power. And are we going to feed our spiritual pride with this? Verily we ought rather to be overwhelmed with shame. What infinite condescension was it, that the blessed Spirit should transfuse his gracious influences into such hearts as ours, and make us the instruments by which he would display the wonders of his grace! Can it ever become a question with us, to whom the praise of such efforts belongs?

2. We may recollect, too, that, even if we have done *all* that corresponds with our obligations to our Lord and Saviour, we have done *no more*. We have been barely just. That which we have dedicated to him is only that which he first gave us; and which is become doubly his, by the costly purchase of redeeming blood. Not the smallest portion of it could we have withheld from him, without the perpetration of a robbery; and the consecration of all our powers and resources to our Lord is but a compliance with the most powerful and constraining obligations. Of what, then can we be proud? If we had been showing kindness to one who had no claims upon us, if we had been rendering gratuitous service, then, indeed, some little complacency might be pleaded for; but what man would think of making a boast that he was actually honest, and had neither robbed his master nor his creditors? Yet this is all we can say, even if we have done *all* that we might have done; and this is the sentiment which our Lord teaches us to adopt, when he says, "Having done all, say ye, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do."

3. But we may go further than this. Let us take a

just view of our obligations, and we shall find cause to acknowledge that we have come most afflictively short of them. One great reason, indeed, why our pride finds so much to feed upon, is, that we suffer ourselves to take so very contracted and erroneous a view of our duty. We compare ourselves most readily, either with ourselves at some former period, or with others at the present; and if we find that we are more active than others are, or than we once were, we almost infallibly indulge complacency on this account. But nothing can be more fallacious than such an estimate. Let us cease from these delusive and mischievous comparisons, and turn to a different standard. The question for us to ask is, what are our obligations. What extent of dedication do they require? With what power of motive do they enforce it? We cannot doubt for a moment that there is required of us an *entire* dedication to the glory and service of God; the dedication of every power, of every moment; the use of every means, the improvement of every opportunity; without fear, without shame, without apathy, without weariness. Nor can any thing be more touching or influential than the motives by which this entire consecration is pressed upon us. What can be of more weighty justice than our obligation to him that made us? Or what of more constraining tenderness than the love of him that redeemed us? Are we bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ, so that we are no more our own, but his? Are we by him reconciled to God, and restored to his friendship? And what if we fail in the duties of friendship so restored, or withhold in any degree the dedication of a heart and life so purchased? Yet this is what we have

done. To whatever extent our devotedness may have been carried, none of us can pretend for a moment that it has been perfect and without fault. But this is to say far too little. In comparison with the prompt and habitual dedication required of us, how much have we manifested of indifference and sloth, of self-indulgence and neglect! How often have we been unobservant of opportunities, or slow in improving them; how often have we been withheld by fear, or by a guilty shame! How often has the spirit of dedication been wanting in our exertions, so that there has been little or nothing in them on which our Lord could cast an approving smile! With all our activity, then, there still remains much to be lamented, much of criminal ingratitude, much of unkind return for love which ought to set all our hearts on fire; and with such a load of iniquity lying on us, is it possible we can swell out with pride? Are we going so to look at what we have done for Christ, as to overlook what we have not done; and to pass by so much ingratitude without any shame and bitterness of spirit? Let it never be, while our very services contain so much to abase us, and require to be presented at the foot-stool of our gracious Lord, unworthy offerings as they are, with so much shame and confusion of face.

III. Our labours may occasion *exhaustion*. I refer now to the state in which we may some times return from the scenes of our activity to our sacred retirements. We could have wished, doubtless, and perhaps we may have expected, to pass easily and delightfully from one mode of serving God to another, and to find the heart fully prepared to use, as matter of solitary piety, the topics which have engaged us for the

instruction of others. You may have been disappointed in this expectation. After such exertions, you may have entered into your closet only to find yourself utterly unprepared for the exercises of secret piety, and, indeed, incapable of them. Your thoughts are distracted, your feelings unawakened; or you might rather say, that you have no thoughts, no feelings, no head, no heart. You fail in every attempt you make to read, to think, to pray; and this perplexes, vexes, and afflicts you. It seems as though you had poured out all your religious feelings to others, and that none remained within your own breast.

1. Yet this is capable of explanation. In part it may be referred to the influence of bodily weariness. The work in which you have been engaged, if you have carried it to any considerable extent, is one which makes large, though perhaps unperceived demands upon your strength, whether it be by the effort of continued speaking or conversation, or by the exercise of the mind in endeavours to turn it to good effect. Without being fully aware of it, therefore, you may return in a state of great exhaustion; and if, in such a condition, you should enter into your closet, you would doubtless find all your exercises there affected by the general languor of your frame. It is manifest that such a case as this requires considerable allowance. It argues nothing in reality against the spirituality of your mind. The soul sympathises with the body, and is clogged by its weariness; but, nevertheless, it is neither just nor reasonable to attribute that to the soul which belongs exclusively to the body. Our Lord himself has said, and allows us on proper occasions to appropriate the sentiment, "The spirit, indeed, is will-

ing, but the flesh is weak." Under such circumstances, it is far better to betake yourselves to refreshment or repose, without tasking either the body or the mind for efforts of which at the moment they are alike incapable.

In reference to this mitigating consideration, it is doubtless important to possess a criterion, by which we may judge with some satisfaction whether our apparent deadness be of a physical or a moral kind; since no person of a tender conscience or a right spirit would be willing to avail himself of a mere pretext for disguising real indifference. Nor is it at all difficult for such a criterion to be found. Ask yourselves only, whether the unfitness which you feel for the exercises of religion extends itself equally to other occupations. If it does, you may safely refer it to bodily exhaustion; but if it does not, you have reason to suspect some lurking mischief. If you are well enough to attend to worldly business, to converse with earthly friends, or to read the newspaper, you ought to be well enough to read your bible, and to commune with God; and you would be so, if your heart were in a spiritual frame. If, on the contrary, you can do nothing else, of course it is not to be expected that you can attend to the exercises of religion; and then you may leave yourself with confidence in the hands of him who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust.

2. While our unfitness for devotional exercises may be ascribed in part to bodily exhaustion, it may be referred, perhaps, in a still greater measure, to the forcible direction of our thoughts into a different channel. It may have appeared to us, indeed, that the communication of religious instruction to others is so like the

application of it to ourselves, that it would be natural and easy to pass from the one to the other. But, in fact, the two exercises are widely different. In both cases, it is true, we are engaged substantially upon the truths of religion; but a little reflection will convince us that adapting them to, and bringing them to bear upon, the heart of another, is a very different occupation from that of applying them to our own. It is the difference between cooking and eating, between the preparation of food and the reception of it; and it was never known, I believe, that the preparation of food either nourished the body, or peculiarly sharpened the appetite. Our efforts in imparting religious instruction will have the same effect in unfitting us for the engagements of secret devotion that any other occupation would have; and we shall find occasion for as much exertion of thought and discipline of mind, as if we were retiring from the family or the world. The whole object and aim which we have in doing others good is distinct and widely diverse from that which we pursue in the discipline of our own hearts: in the two cases we look at different things, we seek different results, we use different means; we cannot, therefore, expect to pass from one to the other without being sensible of the change, or without an effort of reflection. It may be added, that our difficulty will be augmented in proportion to the intensity with which our minds have been engaged in the work of instruction; because the force necessary to divert our thoughts from a previous channel is always proportionate to that with which they have been impelled into it. For this reason it is probable that ministers of the gospel feel more of this trial than others, their minds being most



intensely occupied in preparation for public instruction; but other persons may anticipate the experience of it also, in full proportion to the strength and anxiety with which they may be engaged in their work and labour of love.

To explain this difficulty, however, is not to remove it. So far as it arises from an exercise of mind in a direction different from that of private devotion, it plainly requires to be contended with, like distraction of mind resulting from worldly business, or from any other cause. We should be very much aware of giving way to it, as a state which either need not, or cannot be overcome. Its direct tendency is to the diminution and decay of spirituality, as, if it be indulged, we shall soon find to our cost; and it is highly important, therefore, that it should be instantly checked. Nor is this by any means impracticable. It requires only the same efforts which are always found necessary to withdraw our attention from earthly thoughts. It needs only that we should recollect ourselves, and call to mind, that, as we have been teaching others, so now we are come to teach ourselves, and to lay open our own hearts before God. If the mind does not in an instant turn from one employment to another, it does so by degrees, and no well directed effort for this end is lost. A diligent and vigorous entertainment of suitable topics will succeed in turning our attention from the state of others to our own, and in attaining the fixed communion with God after which we aspired. What we should deeply impress ourselves with is, that this *is* necessary, and the more necessary in proportion to the abundance of our exertions. Our Lord Jesus

Christ spent whole days in instruction ; but he spent whole nights in prayer.

We should take heed, likewise, that we do not carry too far the allowance which may be justly made for corporeal exhaustion. If we may on this ground properly excuse ourselves from a vigorous effort of secret devotion in the evening, it does not therefore follow that the same excuse extends to the morning. Upon the contrary, with the return of bodily strength returns the obligation of retirement and prayer, and we should be watchful to apply the first of our restored energy to these sacred exercises. We shall find our inconstant and treacherous hearts too prone to make use of the apology, long after it has ceased to be just. The slightest consciousness of such a tendency must be considered as indicating that the actual omission of secret fellowship with God, however justifiable, has already done us mischief, and should impress us with the conviction, that a more than usual vigour of solitary piety will be necessary to prevent the permanence and aggravation of the evil. What you lose by weariness in the evening, you should endeavour to regain by extraordinary diligence in the morning.

IV. Our efforts may be attended with *conflict*. I am aware that conflict, though not a uniform, is not an unfrequent attendant on active experimental piety ; but we notice it now, as it may be more especially excited by augmented labours in the cause of God, and the souls of men. When your hearts are most powerfully stirred up to indentify yourselves with the honour of your Lord and the progress of his gospel, and to make the most resolute exertions on behalf of the guilty and the lost, you find, perhaps, that your closets

become the scene of an inward strife. You seem to have less sensibility to divine things than ever; you stand painfully convicted of feeling nothing, or almost nothing, either for God or for man; your prayers are embarrassed by the conscious feebleness, if not the entire absence of desire; you seem to fail in every attempt to get near to God; you find your secret exercises produce scarcely any other effect than an augmentation of your distress; and you leave the presence of your God with a heavy heart. You cannot say, indeed, that at these periods you are without comfort in the social exercises of piety, or without the presence of God in his work; but these things make it yet more strange and afflicting to you that your solitary hours should be so unsatisfactorily spent.

1. But these perplexities are not incapable of solution. When, according to your own perceptions, you are more than ever characterised by indifference, self-indulgence, and sloth, it does not necessarily follow that these evils are really most abundant. It is true that you see more of them; but this may be either because more light is thrown upon them, or because your discernment is become more acute. When a person who, during the night, had dimly discerned the objects around him, begins to see them more clearly, he does not imagine that the objects themselves are changed; he knows that the effect is to be ascribed to the dawning of the day. However perplexed the half-restored blind man might have been, who saw the "trees walking" converted into men, we know, and he soon came to know, that the change took place only in his organs of sight. It is thus when we see more of our inward evils. They were in our breast before,

in their full magnitude and enormity, though we did not distinctly or powerfully discern them; and the light which has discovered them to us has no more created them, than a lamp carried into a deserted building would create the owls, the bats, and the vermin congregated there.

If an augmented view of our corruptions does not argue their actual aggravation, neither does a new consciousness of a want of feeling establish an augmented insensibility. You reprove yourself more severely than you ever did, for indifference towards the great objects which should inflame all your heart; not, verily, because you are more indifferent to them than you were, but because, by a brighter view of their excellency, you are more deeply impressed with their desert. You are bitterly ashamed that you desire them so little; which is only saying, in other words, that your heart is more powerfully exercised about them than it has been. You suffer an inward conflict; your spirit feels its bonds, and pines that it cannot escape; that is to say, your desires are vigorously awakened, and you are making arduous efforts after growing dedication to the Lord.

The truth is, that instead of indicating a low and declining state of piety, your self-abasement and inward conflict are unequivocal evidences of vigour and prosperity. It is a general rule, that our corruptions most abound when they are least seen and contended with. The seasons when we really are most unconcerned and slothful, are those in which we should be least willing to acknowledge it, or should speak of it with the least severity of self-reproof.

2. In harmony with this view, and in confirmation

of it, I may observe, that such seasons of humiliation and conflict are not characterised by the neglect of practical piety. On the contrary, I think I may safely say, that you are never more jealous of your temper, never more careful of your example, never more resolved for action, never more watchful of opportunities, never more solemn and affectionate, never more prayerful and dependent, than at such periods. With however little comfort, you are constrained to be faithful both to your fellow-men and to your Lord; and with all the severity of your inward exercises, there is combined a weighty sense and an habitual remembrance of obligation, which bears you forward with an unusual steadiness through the duties of the day. But these are some of the best and most substantial fruits of piety. What better effects could any exercises of mind produce?

3. To this it may be added, that powerful exercises of mind, of whatever nature, may be regarded as an indication that God is fitting you for labour, and means to give you his blessing. Perhaps no kind of experience is more adapted to prepare us for usefulness, than such as partakes largely of self-abasement and conflict. It makes us know both our weakness and our strength; it opens to us the workings of our own hearts, that we may be the better able to trace those of others; it endears the Saviour to ourselves, before we go to recommend him to the lost. And is not all this well? Does it look as though God was angry with us, and meant to desert us in his work? Can we say that, in conjunction with such experience, he does desert us in his work? On the contrary, is he not with us? Does he not stand by us and keep us? And is it not in

such seasons, so far as we can trace his dispensations, that he grants our principal success ?

4. On this point it is not unworthy of notice, that many persons have trod the same path before us. And though the rule is by no means universal, yet in very numerous instances, men of eminent usefulness have been men of tried experience. It seems as though many of us could not be fitted for communicating spiritual riches, without ourselves being made to pass through the fire, in order to be purified from our dross. You will read the life of scarcely any person of considerable usefulness in the Lord's work, without meeting with accounts of deep abasement and distress. If we wish to partake of their joy, we must lay our account with partaking of their sorrows too; and if we do resemble them in our griefs, we may hope to resemble them in their success.

What we have to learn is, in one word, neither to misunderstand nor to repine at a state of mental trial and conflict. Without being pleasant or desirable on its own account, it is always profitable and gracious; it is an evidence that God is dealing with us in mercy; and we need only to keep near to him, to find that the end of the Lord herein is both for our good and for his glory. If, on the one hand, a lively state of the soul without conflict might be rather desired; on the other, the severest conflict is infinitely to be preferred to the peacefulness and tranquillity of slumber. The first matter of thankfulness is to be kept awake; and if we childishly repine at the difficulties which meet us when our eyes are open, we may, perhaps, be suffered to fall again into a sleep, with the wretchedness and mischief of which all the conflicts of christian experience are not once to be compared.

## LECTURE X.

### SUCCESS EXPECTED.

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#### 2 CORINTHIANS, x. 4.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds.*

UPON the supposition, dear brethren, which I trust I may entertain, that you feel it your duty to strive for the conversion of sinners, and that you acquit yourselves of the obligation, I have spoken to you of the engagements which should precede your labours, of the manner in which they should be performed, and of the exercises by which they should be followed. It might seem now that the subject was exhausted; but, before we quite take our leave of it, one topic of no inconsiderable interest awaits our regard. As your toil is directed to some ulterior object beyond the mere execution of the work, so your anxieties, it may be presumed, are by no means laid to rest when the work is done; there is a result anticipated and watched for, the fruit and the recompense of your labours. This result is the actual conversion of sinners to God by your instrumentality; an object which is fitted to awaken the most lively feelings, and in relation to which our minds need to be diligently cultivated.

In reference to this interesting subject, *the success of our labours*, I shall confine myself on the present occasion to three simple truths: the first is, that it

should be earnestly desired; the second, that it may be cheerfully expected; the third, that it should be justly estimated.

I. First, in our endeavours for the conversion of sinners *success should be earnestly desired.*

It might seem almost unnecessary to insist on so obvious a sentiment. Of course every one who engages in such a work does long for success, and with a degree of anxiety, it may be reasonably supposed, which has more need to be allayed than to be augmented; yet, however natural such a state of mind may be, and with whatever apparent safety its existence might be taken for granted, we shall find in fact that there is the utmost necessity for being jealous of our own hearts on this point. It is very possible for much to be done by us in the instruction and exhortation of the ungodly, with a marvellously small portion of desire for their actual conversion. Among the sources to which such an evil may be traced, two may be here noticed. In the first place, we may find ourselves apt to look rather at the work to be done, than at the object to be attained; we may enter upon it more under a sense of the obligation of discharging a duty, than impelled by a desire of accomplishing an end; and in this case we shall be equally prone, when our labour is over, to rest in the work performed, and to be complacent in having communicated instruction or reproof, without any eager looking for beneficial results. In the second place, despondency may produce a similar effect. Perceiving, what indeed is too obvious, that men are blind, inconstant, and stubborn, and reckoning it almost certain that little or no good will result from our endeavours, we may come to have little or no de-



sire that good may be done. Other causes no doubt contribute their influence to the same end. But the state of mind, however produced, is most evil and mischievous, and it demands an immediate remedy. On no point should we exercise a closer inspection of our feelings, or a more earnest care to rectify them.

Inquire then, dear brethren, how it is with yourselves. You labour, as I hope, for the souls of men. Do you seize upon their real conversion to God as the object at which you aim, and without accomplishing which you can have no satisfaction? Are you casting an anxious glance over the field you have been cultivating, to see whether the seed is springing up, and affording you any prospect of a harvest? Or, having laboured, do you retire contented with duty performed, scarcely knowing whether any good has resulted from your toil, or scarcely moved to sorrow if an entire unfruitfulness prevails?

1. If you should ask for the reasons why so ardent a desire for success should be entertained, I should have only to reiterate what I have already, and perhaps repeatedly, stated, as to the unspeakable value of the souls of men, and the intimate manner in which their salvation stands connected with the glory of God and the recompense of the Redeemer. It is by presenting motives drawn from these topics that I have endeavoured to urge you to labour; I have besought you to be active, because the object is so eminently worthy of your desire; if you have undertaken such labours at all, it ought to be, and I trust it has been, under the influence of these considerations; and if this has been the case, it may be most justly expected that you should desire the object as well as labour for

it. The reasons which have operated upon you are directly adapted to kindle desire; and it is only by doing so that they can be imagined to lead to exertion. If, for example, you have been actuated by a sense of compassion for souls; if you have felt their unutterable value, and yearned over their coming miseries, and have thus been led to instruct the ignorant and to warn the reprobate; how is it that you stop at this point, and that your feelings are not carried forward to their actual conversion? Is there any thing in their merely being warned and instructed, which so much betters their condition that your compassion can be satisfied with it? If indeed they listen to instruction, and by it are induced to flee from the wrath to come, then is your gratification reasonable; but if they do not, but on the contrary continue impenitent in sin, they are still, as in the first instance, in the way to ruin, and making an equal demand upon your pity. Nay, they make now a much larger demand upon your pity; for their condition is much worse than it was before, seeing they have anew hated instruction and despised reproof. Your very words of warning are, by their perverseness, turned into an aggravation of their guilt and wretchedness: if therefore you ever pitied them, your pity ought now to be more tender than ever; nor can you find any thing reasonable to allay it, short of their actual salvation.

Or if you undertook endeavours for the conversion of sinners because your heart burned within you for the honour of God, whose name was daily blasphemed and his commands trampled on in your presence; if you have rebuked the ungodly because, as the friend of God, you felt a holy indignation against his enemies,

and a longing desire to reduce them to submission before him; from this state of mind it might equally have been expected that you would have been content with nothing short of such an actual result. To see the enemies of God still insulting him, and the hand of rebellion perseveringly lifted up, notwithstanding your interposition, is surely adapted, not merely to keep the fire of your indignation burning, but to raise it to a higher flame, inasmuch as the dishonour done to your Maker is thus grievously augmented.

Or, finally, if you have been animated by love to the Saviour, and have striven for the good of sinners because you longed that he might be recompensed for his dying pains and enjoy the fruit of the travail of his soul, this feeling would naturally bear you on to the completion of your object. While those to whom you are imparting instructions refuse it, you are gaining nothing for your Lord. It is only by the actual turning of sinners unto him that you make any contribution to his joy. If your advocacy on his behalf is repelled, he in your person is being wounded afresh and put to additional shame.

When you consider, therefore, the nature and tendency of these impulses to your labour, you will perceive how justly it may be expected that your desires should go eagerly forward, and stop no where short of the actual conversion of those whom you instruct.

2. The fact that you have laboured for the conversion of sinners renders it additionally reasonable that you should desire it. Whenever we bestow pains upon an object, it not only indicates that we had a desire for it in the first instance, but it tends to increase the ardour of that desire. No man likes to lose his

labour, or to fail of obtaining an object to which his efforts have been applied. The husbandman does not cultivate his ground for the mere sake of labouring, but for the sake of the crop which his toil is to produce; neither does the merchant buy and sell for the mere sake of traffic, but of the gain which is to be acquired by his merchandize: and we know that the attention of such persons is eagerly directed to their respective recompense. It would be the same with ourselves in carnal things; and why is it not to be so in spiritual things? Is it when we exert ourselves for the souls of men, and only then, that we are content to labour for the mere sake of labouring, and that, after expending our best resources, we look for no return?

The very supposition that we do not feel an ardent desire for the actual conversion of sinners under our instrumentality, involves inconsistencies of the most striking and the most painful kind, even if it does not bring into suspicion the motives by which we have been actuated. Have we, or have we not melted with pity for men, glowed for the honour of God, and panted for the recompense of the Saviour? If we have not, why have we sought the salvation of souls? If we have, why do we not fix upon its actual accomplishment with more intense desire? Why are we in so great a measure lukewarm as to the attainment of the object we profess to have been seeking? If we do not desire it, why have we laboured? If we have felt enough to impel us to labour, whence the final languishing of our desire? It is probable that these perplexities must be unravelled by admitting, on the one hand, that these holy motives have not actuated us so extensively as they ought, and, on the other, that

their influence is afflictively transient. But let us see that this influence is revived and extended. Let us set the souls of men fairly before us; and by steady contemplation realize their intrinsic value, as well as the connexion of their salvation with the glory of God and the recompense of the Redeemer. Let us keep still in view the object for which we have been labouring; let us cherish an anxious inquiry after the fruit of our toil; let us follow our instructions with ardent longings for success; and never cease to watch the seed we have sown, while any hope of its fruitfulness remains.

II. Secondly, In our endeavours for the conversion of sinners *success may be cheerfully expected.*

I do not say this in ignorance of the pride and enmity of the heart of man, or in any fond imagination that the tidings of reconciliation will be spontaneously welcomed by the enemies of God. I know that the heart is desperately wicked; but I know too that the power of God will be employed for its transformation, even that mighty power whereby he raised Christ from the dead, and whereby he is able also to subdue all things unto himself.

Pious persons not unfrequently take a more discouraging view of the usefulness of religious exertions than appears to me either scriptural or reasonable. It seems to be doubted by many whether any considerable or satisfactory results can be relied on, and even to be set down almost as an axiom that, in the present age, Christians are appointed to a course of labour, not indeed totally, but in a great measure unsuccessful. In confirmation of such an opinion experience is often appealed to, and instances of unfruitfulness and disap-

pointment, of which no doubt many can be cited, adduced as forbidding the expectation of general or extensive effects. Now I know that in times past success has not attended every effort for God, and that it would be vain to rely upon it with any particularity or uniformity in time to come; I am willing also to make the largest allowances that can reasonably be demanded on the score of unsuccessful exertion; and yet I am ready to maintain that, in a general view, success may cheerfully be expected. The material point between those who form a more or less encouraging idea of the results to be anticipated from the use of religious means, is to ascertain the extent to which God himself has authorized the expectation of success. So far as we are warranted by scripture to expect it, it is clearly reasonable to go; and no farther. Let us enter briefly into this inquiry.

No one can imagine for a moment that the scripture authorizes us to expect the success of all endeavours made for the salvation of men; or even that of any one particular effort, singled out from the rest. Some exertions will fail, and any exertion may fail; but all will not fail. How many, or what proportion, will succeed? When we refer to the language of promise, we find it, however encouraging, still indeterminate; our labour shall not be in vain, but we know not which of our efforts shall prosper: yet the general aspect of the promises is clearly adapted to sanction the conclusion, that success will be the rule, and failure the exception. We may approach nearer to some definite idea, however, by observing that the language of the inspired writers indicates and establishes an analogy between the results of exertion in the natural and the

spiritual worlds. "They that sow shall reap. What a man soweth that shall he also reap. He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly. One planteth, another watereth, but God giveth the increase." Such is the language of the sacred penmen; language in which there could be no propriety, if there were not an analogy between the natural and the spiritual worlds, as to the relation between activity exerted and effects produced. If our endeavours for the conversion of sinners may be represented as the sowing of seed, the fruits of those endeavours, it appears, may be compared to those which reward the labours of the husbandman; they are as certain, and they will be as copious.

The analogy thus presented to us will be found applicable to the subject in all its aspects. It makes allowances for failures; since it is very well known that, of the millions of seeds scattered by the hand of the husbandman, no inconsiderable number never vegetate, and that of those which grow many do not become fruitful: besides which, there are blighted ears and blasted fields, there are seasons of scarcity, and years of famine. These are the representatives of our unsuccessful operations; and certainly no small measure of unrequited toil may be considered as fairly represented by these particulars. But look at the other part of the analogy. The toils of agriculture taken as a whole, are not unrecompensed, but satisfactorily and most bountifully rewarded. The perished seeds, the blighted ears, the blasted fields, the defective crops, never amount to the destruction of the harvest, nor entail ruin on the husbandman; on the contrary, they are lost in the general productiveness of the earth, and

forgotten amidst the plenty and the joy of the harvest-home. Such then, we are authorized to believe, will infallibly be the results of labours for the souls of men. We shall have many failures, but more successes; we shall behold too many spots of barrenness, but we shall see a general fertility; much seed will perish, and many green ears be blighted, but those who sow shall reap; and he that hath gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. On the whole, therefore, the success attending labours for God will be not only satisfactory, but abundant. It is too little to say that it will be enough to recompense the expenditure; it will be sufficient to inspire a grateful and overflowing joy, like the joy of harvest.

While this analogy presents a most cheering and animating prospect, it has a further advantage, namely, that it leads to no extravagant or overstrained expectation. While, according to the rule laid down, we shall be expecting enough to fill us with unutterable joy, we shall at the same time be expecting no more than is ordinarily realized in other species of labour. We shall be observing, and not violating, the general principles of providential administration; not anticipating for our labour any peculiar and surprising efficacy, but merely the common lot of well directed effort. There can be little hazard in indulging such an expectation. The wonder would be, not that it should be realized, but that it should be disappointed.

1. In confirmation of this line of sentiment, it may be observed, in the first place, that the connexion of labour with proportionate success is a constant feature of the divine government. In whatever case God has



commanded men to labour, he has secured a recompense for their toil. When he enjoined the cultivation of the earth on our fallen parents, his language was, "In the sweat of thy brow *thou shalt eat bread*:" and in whatever cases he has suffered such circumstances to exist as have induced men to labour, he has likewise provided for a happy issue of their exertions. In truth, he has so constituted us that we regard a prospect of success as essential to rational exertion; and that we feel a high probability, but above all a certainty of failure, a constraining motive to the abandonment of our toil. He neither induces nor expects us to spend our strength on what cannot be acquired. And as this is his uniform rule in natural things, so there is no reason to suppose that he has adopted a different rule in spiritual things. When, therefore, we find that he not only permits the aspect of the world around us to be such as is fitted to awaken our compassion and impel us to exertion, but that he himself engages us to it, not only by inducements of love, but by the voice of authority, with how much justice may we conclude that he proceeds upon the usual principle of his government, and means to requite the labours he impels. As he has given no intimation of an exception in this case, we clearly can have no ground to imagine one; and to this it may certainly be added, that in this case least of all it might be expected that an exception would be made. If the natural husbandman is secure of his harvest, still more may we believe that the same recompense awaits the spiritual husbandman, who sows more precious seed, and looks for a more valuable crop.

2. It is deserving of notice, in the second place, that

in religious efforts the means are eminently adapted to the end. The success of all measures is naturally proportioned to their adaptation to the end designed; and in any case in which it might appear that this adaptation was defective, an equal deficiency might justly be apprehended in the result. We are quite willing to allow the force of this argument in the instance of religion. If it should appear that the means employed for its diffusion are but imperfectly adapted to that purpose, that they are little fitted to enlighten, to convince, and to persuade, let our anticipations of success be reduced accordingly. On this point hear the language of the apostle in the text. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds." He is here expressing, not a sentiment of regret, but of gratulation. When he says "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," he is not lamenting the absence of kingly patronage, of a richly endowed establishment, of posts of honour, or of secular emoluments, by which men might be induced to assume the profession of christianity, or to defend it: he is rather rejoicing in the separation of the gospel from such powerless engines, and triumphing in the reflection that he was working with better adapted means. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal." Happily we are not operating in methods which could only tend to make men hypocrites instead of christians, and so to render our apparent success but a disguise for our real defeat. We bring into the field a more effective artillery. We have truths which make the understanding full of light, which take a fast hold upon the conscience, which present moving appeals to the heart, we have all that

earth, or heaven, or hell, can contribute to influence mankind; and these weapons are too well fitted to their work to be applied in vain; they are mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. The holy scriptures are able to make men wise unto salvation; and where the instrument employed discovers so eminent an adaptation to the end, it would be contrary to all rule not to anticipate a proportionate effect.

3. To these topics may be added, in the third place, a reference to the specific promises with which the sacred word abounds. The call to labour is never separated from some annunciation of success. "They that sow shall reap." Even the uncertainty allowed to be attendant upon labour is used as an argument to diligence. "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, this or that, or whether both shall be alike good." The louder the call to activity, the stronger is the assertion of its recompense. "Wherefore be ye steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." The very discouragement to which the labourer is liable is most graciously met and relieved by the declaration, "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless return again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Upon what principle could the oracles of truth present to us such passages as these, if a proportionate and ample success were not secured to our endeavours? If labour for God were to issue in the melancholy and cheerless blank which our fears sometimes picture to us, is it possible that a God of kindness and of truth would have thrown

such brilliant lights on the path of labour itself, and thus have cherished a fallacious expectation, by which final disappointment would be rendered more bitter and overwhelming ?

4. In confirmation of our general principle, we may appeal, in the last place, to the testimony of history : for with whatever instances of unsuccessful labour we may be met, we are convinced that the voice of history on the whole is decidedly in our favour. To as great an extent, and with as much certainty, as the tilling of the ground renders it productive, does the cultivation of the moral waste render it fruitful in righteousness. Never, on the one hand, has there been a time of drowsiness and inaction, in which the gospel chariot did not slacken its pace, or suspend its progress ; and seldom, on the other, has there been a season of wakefulness and energy, without a measure of enlargement and prosperity. We allow exceptions ; but we are sure all history testifies that this is the rule. Now even a doubtful principle is admitted to be established, when it has been tried by the test of experience, and found to hold good : if, therefore, in the first instance, there could have been any doubt as to the success of our labours for God, at length these doubts should be given to the wind. The principles of the divine government and the promises of divine love have been too long tried, and too often found faithful, to be called in question almost at the end of the world. If they were to be questioned at all, it should have been in earlier ages, in the protracted darkness of popish idolatry, or amidst the fury of pagan persecution ; but it must not be now, when our difficulties are less, when our prospects are brighter,

when we are visibly nearer the glorious consummation, and when all past ages are lifting up their voice to cheer us on to the final assault of the kingdom of darkness.

Whatever difficulties your own separate experience may present to you, therefore, dear brethren, set it down as an incontrovertible maxim, that labour for God shall not be in vain. Neither, on the whole, shall your own be so. Chide an unbelieving heart, and maintain a quarrel with a desponding spirit. Not only let your desires extend themselves, but let them be consolidated into expectations. Do not allow yourselves to think that no good will be done. Cherish a belief, on the contrary, that much good will be done, though you know not when, nor how, nor to what extent; and that good enough will be done, to recompense you for your trouble, and to give you a part in the joy of the harvest home.

III. Thirdly, in our endeavours for the conversion of sinners *success should be justly estimated*.

I have been leading you, in the former part of this discourse, to estimate it highly; and it might not unnaturally seem that it could not be estimated too highly. Neither can it be so, when viewed in itself; but it requires to be viewed in connexion with another object, by the influence of which our appreciation of it must be modified. This second object is *the glory of God*, an object to which the conversion of sinners bears an intimate relation. Now it is plainly incumbent on the friends of God to desire both the glory of his name and the conversion of sinners; but the glory of God should be primary, and the conver-

sion of sinners subordinate. We should desire the latter much, but the former more.

1. That this should be the case will appear if we consider, that the glory of God is essentially the first and most important of all objects. He is the Creator; all besides are creatures, and as such infinitely inferior to him. He is the fountain of all blessedness, the universal sovereign; and his glory is of more importance to the universe than any other consideration. Hence, therefore, in any rightly disposed mind, it ought to be, and will be, the first object of regard, taking precedence of all others, however interesting and important any others may be. With reference to the conversion of sinners it may be justly said, that it is of more consequence that God should be glorified than that any sinner, or that all sinners, should be saved.

2. In the scope of human duty likewise, the Creator stands before the creature. We are to love the Lord our God with our highest affection, and our neighbour only with that secondary regard which we are authorized to fix upon ourselves. The withdrawal of our supreme regard from our Maker is the essential character of iniquity, and the restoration of it eminently pertains to the reconciliation of a sinner to God. As every christian would prefer his Maker to himself, so will he prefer his Maker equally to his fellow-creatures; and he will consequently estimate even the salvation of men, however highly, still in subordination to the glory of God.

3. In truth, this subordination is manifest from the fact, that the conversion of sinners is to be desired in order that God may be glorified thereby. This is one

of the main reasons why every friend of God is called upon to labour for it. It is therefore obvious that, in this very work, the glory of God is the chief end, and the conversion of sinners the subordinate one. Though valuable for its own sake, it is not for its own sake alone that a christian pursues it; but because it is conducive to an end yet more valuable, namely, the glory of God our Saviour.

Having established the sentiment that the conversion of sinners ought to be estimated subordinately to the glory of God, I may be asked perhaps to what end I have done so, and whether the glory of God is not identified with the conversion of sinners. Now there is no question but the conversion of sinners is in all cases to the glory of God; but it requires to be observed, that, when sinners are not converted, God may be glorified still. If they listen to instruction and bow to reproof, this renders honour to the Lord; and if they harden their neck and perish in their sin, still will the Lord get himself honour upon them, if not as a merciful Saviour, yet as a righteous Judge. The honour of God is not suspended upon the penitence of the rebellious. By their submission he would be honoured in one way, by their obduracy he will be honoured in another; but in every case he will be glorified.

If it should be apprehended that the effect of this sentiment might be to harden the heart against sinners, and to render us less concerned for their salvation, there are not wanting means of obviating such an inference. It might be observed, that the view we have taken diminishes nothing of the value of salvation itself. To whatever extent God may be glorified

in a sinner if impenitent, his state of guilt and misery loses none of its afflictiveness : still it is as dreadful a thing for him to be subject to eternal wrath, and as urgently as ever are we impelled, by all motives of compassion, to snatch him as a brand out of the fire. It is an undoubted truth that God will be glorified by the ways of his providence ; although the distresses of the afflicted should not be relieved ; but no benevolent man allows himself, on this account, to look upon the woes of his species with indifference. Any person who should make such a use of the sentiment would stand convicted of a callous and unfeeling heart. It is the same in temporal and in spiritual things. The man who can look on unmoved while sinners perish, because God will be glorified in them whether they are saved or lost, is manifestly destitute of spiritual feeling. He takes ground on which no motive can ever reach him. He will do nothing until he sees that God's glory is absolutely suspended upon the issue ! Then verily he may resign himself to eternal sloth ; for *that* will never be.

It may, in like manner, be observed of all the other motives which impel us to exertion for the salvation of men, that the security of the divine glory in no degree destroys their applicability, or diminishes their force. Our minds may and should be yielded to the influence of pity for men, of love to Christ, and of calls to duty, as freely and as fully as though the glory of God were altogether out of the question. This may be to us a refuge from disappointment, but it can never be justly or consistently made a screen from obligation. Besides, a regard to the glory of God still combines its impelling power with that of the other



motives employed. For though God may be so glorified by the course of his administration towards impenitent sinners as to be complacent in its issue, although they perish ; yet the glory brought to his name by those who repent and are saved ought in every case to be most strongly preferred *by us*, and most ardently sought. When, at the last day, we behold the final destruction of the impenitent, we may, and doubtless shall, be enabled to acquiesce—may I say to rejoice?—therein, and to say, “So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord :” but as yet there is too much of human tenderness about us to fit us for such a scene. Happy as we may be in the thought that, whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear, God will be glorified, it were not only unchristian but unnatural and inhuman, if we were not ardently to wish that his glory might be won in the way of mercy, rather than of vengeance. The glories of God’s vengeance, even at the last, when we shall be much better fitted for contemplating them than we are now, will be awful, and demand a solemn acquiescence ; the glories of his grace will afford us matter of triumphant joy and everlasting praise. These are the glories which it is ours to win for him ; those of his wrath he will accomplish for himself.

The primary character of the divine glory, however, though it does not impair our motives to exertion, has an important bearing both on cases of failure and success. When our labour has had a blessed issue, and we have been instrumental in turning a sinner to God, we shall thus be led to recollect that there is an ulterior object to which this success is conducive, and for the sake of which we have sought it ; while amidst

baffled efforts and defeated exertions, it will afford us the consolation of knowing that one valuable end has been answered by our labours, although that at which we more immediately aimed has not been accomplished. The bearings of this sentiment, however, are too extensive to be entered upon here; and we shall have occasion to recur to it in the two lectures which remain.

## LECTURE XI.

### SUCCESS WANTING.

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ISAIAH liii. 1.

*Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

AND is this really the language, dear brethren, with which you are obliged to return from your attacks on the kingdom of darkness, after having gone forth to them as on the Lord's side, and having been encouraged by the assurance that the weapons of your warfare, being not carnal but spiritual, should be mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds? Are you constrained to return discomfited? Are the persons still ignorant whom you have been striving to enlighten; are those still obdurate whom you have been trying to subdue; and those still perishing whom you have been endeavouring to save? Surveying the field in which you have laboured, have you to say, with the lamenting prophet, that none have believed your report, and that the arm of the Lord hath not been revealed? I would fain hope that this is not the case with you all, nor altogether the case with any of you; but it is probably so to a sufficient extent to render appropriate and beneficial the consideration we may now bestow upon such a state of things.

I begin, then, dear brethren, by expressing sympathy in your grief. For of course it is to you a source of grief: unquestionably so, where those whose salva-

tion you seek are the objects of your tender affection, and their welfare ever present and ever dear to you; but I trust not in these instances alone. You labour for the conversion of some who are not bound to you by any other ties than those of a common nature and a common ruin; and if among these your efforts are unsuccessful, it may well be a matter of sorrow. In the first place here is labour lost. You have devoted a portion of time and bodily strength, some exercise of mind and efforts of heart, with perhaps some difficulty or sacrifice, to an object which, after all, you have not attained. You would feel disappointed and chagrined if you had exerted yourself for any earthly object and had not succeeded; how much more tenderly should you bewail a failure in one that is spiritual and eternal? In the next place, your labour is without one of the most natural and satisfactory tokens of your heavenly Father's acceptance. To him you have presented it, and you look for its fruitfulness as the token of his blessing; but while no such result appears, you have ground for apprehension that your services are not acceptable, that the Lord is not pleased to employ you for good, but rather that he throws you aside, as a vessel in which he has no pleasure. In addition to these considerations, which refer to yourselves, are some of a more generous kind. You see, for example, that the spiritual wretchedness of men continues, notwithstanding all your efforts to relieve it. Still are they blind and carnal, profligate and stubborn, guilty and undone; still are they beneath God's anger, and on the brink of perdition. These things you felt so strongly in the first instance, that they impelled you, in part, to the efforts you have made: how naturally then

should you bewail them now, seeing that they have lost none of their force, but are rather aggravated by continuance, and much more so by the rejection or the neglect of your kind endeavours. You see, too, what perpetual dishonour is done to God. Still his name is blasphemed, his glory disregarded, his law trampled on, his mercy despised; and can you, as a friend of God, look upon such a scene, and not glow with a holy indignation for his name? What can be more natural than that you should feel and say, with the psalmist, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law?"

If topics so justly adapted to move your feelings do not move them, depend upon it that something is wrong. Either you never did cherish a right temper in this respect, or there is come over you a spiritual callousness, rendering you insensible to what you once felt, or the just excitement of feeling is prevented by the influence of some erroneous notions or misapplied truths. Beware especially of this last source of mischief. Do not suffer your feelings to be blunted in regard to the spiritual wretchedness of sinners, because you are become familiar with it, or because your efforts have been met with lightness, resentment, or ingratitude, or because it may seem of no use to make any further exertion, or because God must work, and he will work his pleasure and save his elect. None of these considerations, whatever truth there may be in them, alter the sorrowful facts that the subjects of your unsuccessful labour are still in sin and misery, at once dishonouring God and ruining themselves, while your fruitless labours have only given them more instructions to despise, and assistance in accumulating greater

guilt. That they are obdurate and insensible makes their case but the more melancholy. You would not become indifferent to temporal distress on any such grounds as those just mentioned; and there is no point in which you should treat spiritual otherwise than temporal wretchedness, except that your feelings should be much more intense.

If your want of success is to you a matter of grief, dear brethren, allow us to say that we sympathize with you in that sorrow. It is a just, a holy, a generous sorrow; and it may well be ample. But sympathy is not all that we offer you; we proceed to address to you some considerations by which your feelings may be regulated and turned to advantage.

I. And, first, we may observe, that your judgment respecting your success is probably, and almost certainly, fallacious. It may seem to you, indeed, so far as you can judge, that your labours have been unsuccessful; but *how can you judge?* There are two grounds on which it may be made plain that we cannot, at present, form any thing like an accurate conclusion on such a subject.

The first is, that, even if every thing were known to us, it is much too soon for any judgment to be formed. Upon the supposition that no good effect has resulted hitherto from any thing that we have done, no proof whatever arises that benefit will not accrue hereafter. The time during which the instructions we have given may operate to produce conviction and conversion is not yet terminated, so that calculation is quite set at defiance. As seed may lie buried long in dust, and yet ultimately vegetate, so knowledge communicated and disregarded now may have decisive in-

fluence hereafter, when perhaps poverty, or sickness, or some other circumstance, shall induce reflection upon it. To this it may be added that your opportunity for exertion is not yet past; so that if what you have already done be not of itself effectual, it may become so in combination with what you may hereafter do, and may have prepared the way for successes which are at hand. I am not now concerned to show that you *will* have success; only that it is impossible for you to say you will *not*. The harvest is not yet; nor can you by any possibility, at least not without the gift of inspiration, to which I suppose you do not pretend, tell in the seed-time what the harvest will be.

In the next place, we are far from knowing every thing which has already occurred. Some of those for whose good we have laboured incidentally, as by the distribution of tracts on the way side, for example, are not within our observation at all, so that if any good is done by such means, we are never likely to know it till the day of God; others may be withdrawn from our instructions before any effect appears, so that the benefit imparted to them likewise may be unknown; and it is but a very imperfect judgment we can form even of those who are under our continual inspection. There is something in the commencement of piety often dubious or studiously concealed; and while we are lamenting what we conceive to be cases of hopeless obduracy, he who seeth in secret and penetrates the heart may be saying, "Surely I have seen Ephraim bemoaning himself." In a word, it is obvious that none of us can tell what the influence of our endeavours actually is, and it is strange that we should ever pretend to do so. It would seem as though we assumed the

attribute of omniscience for this purpose, and imagined ourselves to be upon an elevation where none but our Maker ever sits. We may not know that we have had success; but we can never be entitled to affirm that we have had none until the arrival of the final day, when for the first time the volume of providential history will be laid open to our view. Keep aloof, therefore, dear brethren, from such a disconsolate and groundless conclusion. It is always the language either of ignorance or of precipitancy. Be patient: your harvest may yet be abundant enough to put your murmurs to shame.

Instead of your actually having no success, your case amounts only to this, that the result of your labours is at present partly concealed. It is not only inevitable that it should be so, but it is wise, and you should here perceive an occasion for the discipline of your heart. You are not, it seems, to identify your impulses to labour too closely with your actual successes. You must be willing to work from principle, rather than for gratification; you must learn to look at some other objects besides the results of your exertions; you must know whence to derive influences independent of them; and in so far as success may be allotted to you, you must be content to wait for the knowledge of it, till a period when it can be more safely and advantageously given: and though you may have thus far to labour in darkness, your toil is surely sufficiently cheered by the promises of a faithful and gracious God, to authorize and encourage you to proceed.

2. But I am willing to accept your own statement, and to suppose that your success is quite as small as



you imagine it to be. No man hath believed your report, or yielded to your persuasion. I ask, what then? You say, probaby, "the arm of the Lord hath not been revealed: he has not granted a blessing to my labours." Doubtless this may have been the case; but it is needful for you to pause and to consider before you conclude it to have been so. Another case *may* have existed, and one of a very different kind.

Make it a matter of serious examination, whether your exertions have been such as to authorize the expectation of success. Defects and improprieties may have attended them, which will sufficiently account for their inefficiency, without attributing it to the absence of the divine blessing.

It is worth your while to inquire, whether you have made any real effort for the conversion of sinners at all. Much may go under this name, and wear this general aspect, which very little deserves to be so considered. You may be a teacher in a Sunday school, for example, and say almost nothing adapted to awaken pious emotion; or you may be a visitor of a christian instruction society, or otherwise may make visits apparently and professedly of a religious character, and suffer your discourse to turn principally or entirely upon inferior subjects. Now to whatever extent this may have been the case, it is plain that you have not been *trying* to convert sinners, and it can be no wonder that you have not succeeded. This is sowing, not wheat, but chaff, and can never produce a harvest.

Inquire further, whether, when you have striven to save a soul, you have used the divinely adapted and appointed means. This only means is the word of God, which throws light into the understanding, and makes

its appeal to the conscience and to the heart upon spiritual grounds. But in efforts for religious usefulness it is too often the case, that an appeal is directly or incidentally made to a sense of temporal interest. The relief of present necessities, to which a religious call not unnaturally leads, may be made, in whole or in part, the motive which is brought to bear on a person, as the reason why we expect them either to listen to us, or to attend a prayer-meeting in the neighbourhood, or to make their appearance at the house of God. However likely this method of bringing people *under the means*, as it is called, may be to do them good, the application of worldly motive is much more likely to do them harm, and it is clearly a proceeding upon which God can never be expected to smile.

Inquire again, whether, if you have used the right means, you have used them in a proper manner. In speaking for God, have you spoken of him the thing that is right, and presented his truth to the understanding of men in its simplicity and purity? Have you according to the scriptures, made clear the grounds of duty, the nature and evil of sin, the righteousness of God's anger, and the method of fleeing from the wrath to come? Or have your instructions been defective, inconsistent, or obscure? Have you brought forward the body of motives which the bible contains, exhibiting each in its due force and proportion? Or have you suffered the artillery of heaven to sleep, without uttering its voices, either of terror or of love? And withal, how much of solemnity, faithfulness, and tenderness, have you carried into the work? Have you always spoken of salvation as though you thought it of infinite moment? Have you shown so much ten-

dernes that a sinner could not justly be angry, and yet such resolved fidelity that his conscience could not evade your attack? You cannot but know how much of the adaptation of your endeavours to the end designed is involved in these things. No wisdom can be expected to result from obscure and defective instruction, no impression from a slender exhibition of motives, no efficiency from harsh or timid appeals; and in whatever measure we may have been wanting in skill or energy in the use of our weapon, it can excite no surprise that we have been unsuccessful in the war.

Inquire, lastly, whether your labours have been conducted in a right spirit towards God. You know the maxim of his government, "Them that honour me I will honour." Can your efforts bear the application of this rule? Have you gone forth under a deep sense of your own insufficiency and helplessness, and with an earnest supplication for his presence and blessing? Have you devoutly acknowledged the necessity and excellence of the holy Spirit's influence, and rendered due honour to his gracious agency? What has been your leading aim, and impelling motive? Has it been your first and ardent desire to glorify God, by bearing a testimony for him in his controversy with a rebellious world, and thus striving to reconcile sinners to him? Have you gone with a simplicity of motive, and a cleanliness of heart, which the heart-searching God could regard with approbation? If on such points as these we have been defective; if even the opposite evils have had place within us; if we have been induced by human entreaty, or have regarded human approbation; if we have indulged a spirit of self-

sufficiency, or of self-exaltation; these things are calculated to act like mildew on the seed we have sown, and to blast all our expectations of its fruitfulness.

I hope that in the course of such an examination, we shall not find uniform and unmingled evil; but, on the contrary, something of well principled and well adapted labour, for which to be both thankful and hopeful. Yet which of us in these respects is without sin? Which of us may not readily discover sin enough, in all these respects, to teach us how undeserving we are of success, and to make us acknowledge the forgiving grace of the Lord whom we serve, if any blessing be granted to our toil? When we think what means should be employed for the conversion of sinners, in what manner and in what spirit, we may find causes enough why we have not been successful, without ascribing it to the sovereignty of God. We should think it altogether strange and unwarrantable, if a husbandman who had neither carefully ploughed his fields, nor sowed clean seed, were to say, when he beheld his failing crop, "The Lord has not blessed me this year." The Lord has not blessed him! He should much rather confess that he has been wanting in that reasonable industry and skill which the cultivation of the soil requires. In like manner we, when we look on the spiritual barrenness of our field of labour, must be aware how we ask, why hath the Lord withheld his benediction; and must reflect with how much more justice we may inquire, why we have shown no more holiness, vigour, and wisdom. To how great an extent will it be

incumbent upon us to acquit our master, and to condemn ourselves!

3. Perhaps, however, after the most serious examination, you may be ready to hope that your labours have contained something on which your heavenly Father might smile, something, through grace, of a sincere dedication to his glory, and of an humble, however imperfect, employment of his word in his own strength; and yet you do not see the blessing you have hoped for on your toil. Conclude, then, that the Lord has been pleased to withhold from you his blessing; and observe the lights in which this state of things may be regarded.

It is to be considered, undoubtedly, as an act of that holy, wise, and gracious sovereignty, which the Most High is continually exercising in the administration of his affairs. You would not for a moment deny that he is entitled to such a sovereignty, or imagine that he can make an improper use of it. You know that he is infinitely exalted, and possesses, of unquestionable right, an absolute supremacy, doing according to his pleasure among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth. This divine sovereignty, of course, affects your affairs, as it does those of all other creatures; and however an enemy to God might rebel against it, this is not what is expected from a friend. You are in the habit of acknowledging the sovereignty of God in your temporal affairs, and when they are not conformable to your wishes, you say submissively, The will of the Lord be done; and why should you not cultivate a similar temper, as to what may really be the will of the Lord in reference to the conversion of sinners by your instrumentality? What would you

think of any husbandman who, in a bad season, should petulantly exclaim, "I have carefully tilled the ground, and why have I not a crop?" You will be long, I trust, before you exemplify in your own person such a spirit of absurd and sinful self-importance.

You will scarcely imagine that, in the sovereignty thus exercised towards you, there is any thing inconsistent with the promises on which you had established your hope. The promises of God are general, and so likewise is their fulfilment. There is a promise, an hitherto unbroken promise, of a harvest; but always some seeds perish, some ears are blighted, and some fields are barren. In sowing seeds of truth there is likewise a portion of unsuccessfulness. Now this must be allotted somewhere; and what if a measure of it is allotted to you? Will you therefore be ready to complain, as though nothing could satisfy you but an exemption from the common lot of partial disappointment?

Neither will you conceive, I trust, that in this respect, the Lord deals with you unkindly. You will at least have no reason to think so. If you look through the history of his ways, you will find that many of his most honoured servants have partaken of similar discipline. What but unsuccessful was the ministry of Enoch, and of Noah, of Elijah, and Elisha? You have heard the lamentations of Jeremiah; and if you have to say, Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed, Isaiah said it before you. Similar treatment fell to the lot even of your Lord himself, than whom no minister was surely better entitled to expect success, while none was ever more unsuccessful. Now the servant is not above his Lord:

it is enough, and should be enough even for you, that the servant be *as* his Lord.

You tremble perhaps for the cause of God, which you have desired to see prospering in your hands. But you need not do this. Your individual exertions constitute but a small fraction of the agency which is employed for the advancement of his kingdom, and is far too insignificant to affect materially the general result, whatever may be the measure of its success. The blasting of a single field does not sensibly affect the harvest. The resources of the Almighty are sufficiently ample to secure the accomplishment of his purposes, and the fulfilment of his promises too, whatever toils may be fruitless and unrewarded. Though *your* efforts may be abortive, his word shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that which he pleases, and prosper in the thing whereto he hath sent it.

Nor suffer yourself to imagine for a moment that any thing is really lost. If instruction and exhortation be not effectual to the conversion of the sinner, there is another purpose to which they are effectual, and one which it is worth while to accomplish, even by itself. It is conducive to the glory of God, since it carries into operation that system of equitable and merciful probation which he has established in his government of mankind, and by the result of which, alike in the penitent and the impenitent, he will be eminently glorified. It is on this ground, that, infinitely benevolent as he is, God himself submits to the obstinacy of the wicked, and suffers it to be perpetuated; and an end which gains his acquiescence may well induce ours. If sinners do not obey, we still bear a testimony for God, and not only uphold his rights and

honours in the world now, but prepare for their fuller and more glorious manifestation hereafter.

You may take even a further consolation. Not only shall an excellent purpose be answered by your labours, though unsuccessful in the conversion of sinners, but a better purpose than though success had been granted you. If there be any difficulty in making this clear in fact, we can have no hesitation in inferring it from the known and unquestionable character of the divine ways. God is of infinite wisdom. His sovereignty itself is wise. The ends which he brings to pass are, on the whole, the very best which could be attained. If any desirable end is passed by or frustrated, it is only that one more desirable may be secured. In this view it may be truly affirmed that there is no failure, and no unsuccessfulness. And if he who knows all things, and sees all things as they really are, sees it good that an object should be produced by our labours differing somewhat from that which we have contemplated, a firm ground is laid for our acquiescence in his will.

And we who labour shall not lose our reward. We may lose, indeed, what it would be unspeakably delightful to attain, namely, the rescue of sinners from the wrath to come; but still we shall gain something, even an appropriate and blessed recompense. We shall be a sweet savour unto God, both in them that believe, and in them that perish. The labours which are rendered to him will be graciously accepted by him, and be more than recompensed by his present and future approbation. This is not only a high reward, but the highest reward possible: that upon which our desires should be chiefly fixed, and which in all events



is sure. Suppose there were to be no other, and that the gratification arising from the actual salvation of sinners were to be wholly withheld from us, this ought to be more than enough to animate and to sweeten our toil.

4. I observe further, that, from whatever cause your want of success may have arisen, it is adapted to yield you instruction and benefit, which it should be your earnest endeavour to secure.

If, for example, you feel yourself justified in referring it to God's sovereign pleasure, you will find occasion for corresponding exercises of mind. It is probable that you feel somewhat of disappointment and mortification, akin perhaps to the feeling of Jonah when he sat waiting, not indeed for the salvation of Nineveh, but for its destruction. You may be tempted, like him, to say that you do well to be angry; but, as in the case of the ancient prophet, the Lord means to teach you otherwise. Here is something of self-will and self-importance to be brought down. You must learn that the glory of the Creator is far more than the gratification, and even than the salvation of the creature. You must learn to blend ardent desire with silent submission, and to resign without a murmur an object for which you have striven with your utmost ardour. It is the Lord, and not you, whose will is to be done.

You may thus learn, too, upon what object your heart should be chiefly set. It should of course be that which is most secure, and which exposes you to no risk of disappointment. Now this is the glory of God as promoted by your labours, rather than the salvation of men. The latter we may *hope* to attain; of

the former we may in all cases be *certain*. By such a dispensation God attaches to it the highest value, as a matter of practical pursuit. And herein, in truth, our hearts need discipline. We are too apt, either to confine our view to the salvation of men, overlooking entirely the glory of God, or to attach to it a disproportionate value. Let our disappointments rectify this evil: and without at all diminishing our desire for the salvation of men, for which we do not yet long with sufficient ardour, let them teach us that we ought to contemplate another as our chief end, and that in its prosecution we shall have a certain reward.

The benefit of our learning these lessons effectually will not be confined to our personal experience, it will extend also to our work. It is when we are annihilated before God that he may begin to exalt us; when we have learned to acquiesce in his will, he may grant us our own; when we come to seek first his glory, he may afford us more extensively the salvation of men. A high bounty is thus attached to our growth in spiritual wisdom, and to our right interpretation of God's dispensations. Let us remember that there is something more to be done with them than to *bear* them, whether with or without repining; we have to *improve* them, and in this method we shall be well repaid for our trouble.

If, on the other hand, we find reason to conclude that our want of success arises from our own defects, it is obvious that this is a loud call to humiliation and to diligence.

It is a call to humiliation. For what weighty matter of grief and shame it is that we should be unfit for the work of God! We, who ought to know how to

convince a sinner of sin, since we have been convinced of it; who ought to be skilled in pointing him to the Saviour, since we have found our way to his footstool; who ought to have a solemn sense of eternal things, since our eyes have beheld their glory; who ought to labour in a spirit of unfeigned devotedness to God, since we have felt the influence of his love; what an affliction it ought to be to us that *we* yet proceed to our work in so defective a spirit, and pursue it in so unskilful a manner, that it shall have little or no adaptation to success! Is it not a shame to us? Does it not call upon us to humble ourselves before God, and to bewail the evils which so fatally impede our usefulness in his work? It would be painful if our success were obstructed by *others*; but how much more painful to find it obstructed by *ourselves*! In a work which it belongs to us to do, and which we ought to be prepared to do, to be so unskilful as to do harm rather than good! To see the very persons among whom we have been labouring still ignorant, stupid, and undone, because we have been trifling or feeble, self-seeking or self-sufficient! And thus to become ourselves the murderers of the souls of men, and of the very souls we would save! “Deliver us from blood-guiltiness, O God!”

But our feelings should not evaporate in sorrow. There is a call to diligence, as well as to grief. It is not as though the evils which we bewail could not be removed. They may be removed; and, if we apply ourselves to the task, they speedily will be so. If we study it diligently and prayerfully, the word of God will dwell in us richly in all wisdom, and we shall become competent to wield the sword of the Spirit with

much greater precision and effect; if we live nearer to eternity, we shall carry a more solemn and tender sense of it into our converse with the guilty and the lost; if we enter more deeply into the spirit of piety, we shall enter more thoroughly into the spirit of our work. In a word, there is nothing pertaining to our fitness for this work of saving souls which we may not successfully cultivate. Are we not called upon to do this? How long do we mean that sinners should perish through our deficiencies? In what other case should we be content with evils which produced equal injury to others and disappointment to ourselves? In this case, above all others, we ought not to be so; but we are called upon by the strongest motives to give all diligence in becoming better fitted for a work which we may not resign, and the issues of which are so unspeakably solemn.

5. I remark in conclusion, that want of success in our labour ought not to induce either abandonment or despondency. Never suffer yourselves to say, "it is of no use to try any longer." As I have said already, you have an important object to effect, even if a single sinner be not converted; and under no circumstances ought you to desist from taking a part with God in his righteous controversy with mankind. But in addition to this, the object of saving men from everlasting destruction is clearly too important to be relinquished, while any possibility of accomplishing it remains; and if you are not competent to say what has been the effect of the past, how much less can you tell what may be the result of the future? As for despondency, it is one of the most injurious of all possible things. It

does endless mischief, and is utterly destitute of reason. Though no sinner may have been converted under our instrumentality, yet, the Lord's hand is not shortened that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. If he should be pleased to exert his power, he can open the blindest eyes and subdue the stoutest heart; and when he may do so you know not. It may be speedily; the day of his power may be even now arrived. It may be that, while you are fainting, he is girding himself for the battle. It may be that he only looks for another resolved effort on your part, and for a little more exercise of faith and patience, before he pours you out an abundant blessing. It is characteristic of his ways to try faith before he rewards it; he has often reduced men to straits before he has granted them a supply, and many have found the borders of despair to be the verge of triumph. If you seem reduced to the necessity of despondency, that is just a reason why you should imbibe fresh hope. All your self-sufficiency having perished, now make another effort, more eminently in the name and strength of the Lord, and peradventure the Lord will be with you. At all events banish despondency. This can do no good, but is inevitably mischievous. It enfeebles all the impulses of action, as well as action itself. Under its influence, you will either set about nothing at all, or nothing heartily. Making attempts without vigour, they will be equally without success, and already depressed by disappointment, you will yield yourself a prey to its severer influences. Nothing is to be wrought by a despairing hand. Rather "be steadfast, and unmoveable, always abounding in the

work of the Lord ; for as much as *ye know* that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Neither be weary in well doing ; for in due time you shall reap, if you faint not." At all events this promise must remain uncontradicted till the day of God, and if then you find it broken, chide him for the forfeiture of his word.

## LECTURE XII.

### SUCCESS GRANTED.

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2 COR. ii. 14.

*Now thanks be to God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.*

IF it is not *always*, dear brethren, that you can associate such language as this with your efforts of usefulness, I trust it is so *sometimes*. If, indeed, you are of that inconsistent, but I fear at present large number of professors, who never try to turn a sinner to God, then, of course, you have never succeeded. Such a result is scarcely to be fallen upon by accident. Of many of you, however, I hope better things. Indeed, I know that you have been labouring for God and for the souls of men; nor am I willing to believe that you have made prayerful, earnest, and persevering efforts, without being able to trace, in a greater or less degree, and however short of what you may have expected or desired, the beneficial influence of them. Having entered into contact with the ignorance, prejudices and passions of ungodly men, if often defeated, God has caused you on *some* occasions to triumph by Christ, whose truth and love have been your weapons in the war: and if not in every place, yet in some of the places where you have been endeavouring to make it felt that, as the salt of the earth, you have not lost your saltness, you have had the pleasure of seeing the

savour of his knowledge more or less extensively diffused. Now it is our present business to consider what exercises of mind become us when success has been attained. In order that this subject may be more effectively pursued, let it be your concern to fix your eye distinctly and steadily on the portion of success which God has granted you, whatever it may be. Glance over the whole field and course of your labours, not to dwell on their general results, or to bewail their comparative fruitlessness, but for the purpose of selecting the instances, or the solitary instance if there be but one, of successful effort, that you may the more vividly realize them as facts, and the more readily awaken your hearts to just and corresponding emotions.

It is not for a moment to be supposed that you can look upon even a single instance of success in the conversion of sinners, without emotion; and quite as little is it to be supposed that your emotions will be all that they ought to be. In the most devout mind, holy exercises never spontaneously rise to a due height, or escape the perverting influence of inward corruption. In this point, as in all others, though our involuntary emotions may be far from feeble, we shall find that our hearts cannot safely be abandoned to themselves; on the contrary, they will need a close watchfulness and vigorous discipline, if we wish either to avoid what is wrong, or to fulfil what is right. We should beware of suffering ourselves to suppose that, because when a case of success arises, we feel a thrill of gladness, or shed a few tears of ecstasy, or are led to bow in thankfulness to the giver of all good, we have felt all which it is proper or important to feel: we may



yet detect many an evil sentiment mingling itself with the good, or find that the good should be carried to a much greater extent.

What, then, are the emotions which a review of successful labour for the souls of men should awaken?

I. The first of them undoubtedly is *joy*. Upon this obvious topic it would be easy to indulge in general representations of the delight with which we all know the conversion of a sinner is regarded in heaven, and should be regarded on earth; but I propose rather to exhibit in detail some of the grounds on which gladness may be strongly cherished.

1. You may rejoice, then, when you see that your endeavours have been blessed to the conversion of a sinner, *on account of the nature of the change* which is thus produced. There is an excellency in the change itself, and a blessedness in its consequences, altogether striking and incalculable.

Trace what has occurred *in the mind* of a converted sinner. His understanding was once darkness, the seat of deep ignorance, of rooted prejudices, of long-established errors; but you have seen the light of truth penetrate it, and the beam from heaven disperse the shadows of every form, until you can say, "Ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." His conscience, though not altogether incapable of feeling, was almost utterly torpid and insensible, having been stupified and rendered callous by the long-cherished love and practice of sin; but you have seen it awake from its slumbers, throw off its torpidity, and assume a tenderness of sensibility, and a vigour of action, adapted to its supremacy in the moral constitution of man. You have seen the convictions

of an enlightened understanding reach it with the speed and force of the lightning, and the internal monarch utter his mandates as in a voice of thunder. You have seen the passions which were once as imperious and tyrannical, as they were wedded to iniquity, and unchecked in their career by the slumbering conscience, quail before its awakened power, and submit themselves, at first perhaps unwillingly, to a sense of obligation, which ultimately they have learned to love. And thus the whole character has been changed; old things are passed away, and all things, inward and outward, are become new. There is something in such a change unspeakably interesting and delightful. It is a change from sin to righteousness; from pollution to purity; from what is base and abominable to what is excellent and holy: it is the extermination of principles of iniquity, and the generation in their stead of a character after the pattern of God's own heart. No words can do justice to the greatness or the value of such a transformation. It is emphatically called "a new creation." You would doubtless feel much if you were allowed to be the spectator of a new world, as it should arise in beauty from its maker's hand; but you may and should feel much more in contemplating the production of that which, in the case of every individual convert, may be justly called the new world "wherein dwelleth righteousness."

From the mind of a converted sinner, pass on to *his condition*. While in sin, he was at once tormented by his own passions, abhorred by his Maker, and condemned by his judge. Wretched from the state of his own heart, though surrounded by sources of happiness, he was at the same time under a curse awful enough

to make the ears of every one that heareth it to tingle. There lay on him the just wrath of an offended God; he stood instantly exposed to the stroke of that indignant arm which drove rebellious angels to the horrors of the deep; and could not be secure one moment that he should not be the next in the regions of perdition and the anguish of despair. But what a change have you witnessed! By faith in Christ Jesus this wretched victim of his iniquities has been rescued at once from the yoke of his bondage, and the curse of the law. Cancelled for ever is the condemnation that was written against him, and he is passed from death unto life, while the chains are likewise burst asunder from his soul, and he springs into liberty as the Lord's freeman. You have thus beheld a rebel whom vengeance was pursuing, escape from the wrath to come; you have seen him welcomed to the footstool of mercy, and to the family of God; you have beheld him enter into the privileges of the saints on earth, and acquire a hope of their inheritance in heaven. Can you estimate the importance, or measure the immensity, of this change? Look down to the deeps of hell, and let your thoughts penetrate, as far as mortals may, the fathomless abyss,—'tis thence that this immortal has been redeemed. Look upwards to the realms of "light which no man can approach unto," and gaze as intently as you can on those distant, yet dazzling glories,—'tis thither that this rescued one is destined. Can you view such a change without joy? Forbid it all the powers of sympathy in the heart of man! Compare it with any of the touching occurrences which may be witnessed in ordinary life. You would rejoice if, beholding a shipwrecked mariner buffeting with the waves

which, tempest-tossed, threatened every moment to devour him, and exerting every sinew of his fast-waning strength to reach the shore, where all dear and tender ties held and racked the wife and the children who looked upon his fate as their own, you should see him at length safely clasped in their embrace. You would rejoice if, while you were looking on a criminal appointed to die with the morrow's dawn, and gazing on the palid countenance and the quivering frame too feebly indicating the unutterable agony of the inward strife, you were to witness the annunciation of his pardon, and the convulsed ecstasies through which he would return to the hopes and joys of the living, as from the very jaws of the grave. But how much more should you rejoice (for these occurrences, however interesting, are as nothing in the comparison) to see a perishing immortal escape from the brink of eternal woes, and reach, at one step, the gates of celestial glory!

Observe, further, the change in a converted sinner's condition *as it relates to God*. In his impenitence he was doing perpetual dishonour to his Maker, setting himself in an attitude of defiance to most just authority, trampling on righteous commands, and despising condescending mercy. Perhaps he was a blasphemer of the Most High, and his mouth full of imprecations. As a friend of God you beheld these things with no inconsiderable grief; your heart bled for your Father's honour, and the injuries aimed at him fell heavily on you. But in this respect, also, your wounds are now healed, and your tears are dried up. The once obdurate rebel is now submissive at his Maker's feet. No longer an enemy, he has laid down the weapons of the unhal-

lowed war; he acknowledges the righteousness of the law he resisted, and loves the obedience he abhorred. Confession of his iniquity takes the place of excuses; and while he comes with shame and confusion of face, he renders a willing honour to the Lord. In this, also, you may well rejoice. If you are on the Lord's side, *his* victories are *yours*.

2. If the conversion of a sinner by your instrumentality is thus in itself adapted to awaken your joy, it is yet more so *on account of your immediate connexion with it*. It must have engaged your attention with great intensity. Now the sympathy we feel in every case is proportioned to the force with which our attention has been drawn to it. It is, indeed, an obdurate heart which does not sympathize with the entire mass of sorrow which we know exists in the world; but it is not such a general reflection which most powerfully awakens our feelings. It is when we enter some single habitation of woe, and behold affliction in its individual forms, the hunger, nakedness, and destitution of the houseless wanderer, the ghastly paleness of the wretched dying, or the sobs and tears of the new made widow and fatherless, it is then that the heart is most deeply touched. On the same ground, while you rejoice at the conversion of sinners in a general view, your joy should be more especially awakened when such a result takes place by your own instrumentality. In this case you have been devoting a closer attention to the object. You have looked more nearly at the previous ignorance, depravity and ruin; you have had continually before you the awful peril from which an escape has been effected; you have narrowly watched the progress of the inward strife; and now that its

result appears, *your* heart should be prepared for the most vehement emotions of joy, emotions of a force which would leave the feelings of a stranger, though a pious one, far behind.

Your sympathy will naturally be still further heightened by the part you have taken in producing the effect. When we expend labour or resources of any kind upon an object, it tends to create an interest in it proportionately deep. We regard it then as an affair of our own, and identify ourselves much more closely than we otherwise should with the issue. Hence therefore your joy, when you see, not merely a sinner converted, but a sinner converted by your instrumentality. It is the success of *your own labour*; the happy issue of an endeavour which *you* have made. And this success may be the more interesting to you, because the labours from which it results have, perhaps, been far from inconsiderable. It is an object for which your efforts have been strenuous, your anxiety deep, your prayers importunate: you wanted it much, and you strove hard to attain it; and now it is attained, your delight is proportionate to the previous intensity of your concern.

There is something most delightful, also, though solemn and almost oppressive, in the thought of having achieved so vast an object. Our gratification in action always rises in proportion to the magnitude or value of the results we can produce; and we feel this particularly, when we have an opportunity of doing any thing out of the ordinary course. We derive peculiar gratification, for example, when we can give effectual relief to a case of unusual distress, or to an unusual number of cases of distress; or if circum-

stances occur which enable us to save life, as by rescuing a person from peril by water or by fire, or by procuring the pardon of a criminal condemned. This feeling is carried to an immeasurably greater height, when we entertain the thought that we have saved a soul from death, and have thus hidden a multitude of sins and prevented a multitude of sorrows. The words in which such a fact is expressed may be few and simple, and easily forgotten; but let the fact itself be weighed and realized, and it will be found to be vast and magnificent, even to oppression. If you have saved but one precious and immortal soul from eternal death, your existence has not been in vain. You have accomplished an object incalculably greater than the acquisition of wealth, or honour, or power, to whatever extent they might have been pursued; an object, the value of which it will need the glories of eternity to demonstrate to you; an object for which an angel, and a host of angels, might be well contented to have lived.

It may be observed, further, that the conversion of a sinner most delightfully recompenses the labour by which it is effected. It gains love, the chief treasure of the human heart. How delightful the love is which is borne you by a person whom you have been the means of turning to the Lord! Dear and precious to him as his rescued soul and his inestimable privileges are, he links you with them all; he looks upon you as, under God, his deliverer, and pours upon you his warmest benedictions. Is it nothing that, when he sees you, his eye beams with a delight which the aspect of no other friend causes to glisten there? Is it nothing that you have gained in his heart the place of a benefactor, second only to the Almighty himself?

Amidst all the sounds expressive of affectionate regard, and all of them are sweet, is not the most delightful that which conveys to you "the blessing of him that was ready to perish?" Nor is this all; something still more delightful awaits you. Look forward to the eternal world. The day is coming when you will meet this redeemed sinner in the realms of glory, and, with new views of the change you have been the means of working in him, will again clasp him to your heart; while, hand in hand presenting yourselves before your common Redeemer, you may say, with raptures yet unknown, 'Behold me and the recompense thou hast given me.' For what is *your* hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even these, in the presence of the Lord Jesus at his coming?

If it should seem superfluous to show with so much minuteness the reasons why you should be joyful when sinners are converted by your instrumentality, I can only say that, natural as joy is in such a case, it never rises to a proper height; and that it needs the distinct and serious consideration of the topics I have now exhibited to awaken any thing like an adequate emotion. We lose much by this defect, not only in pleasure, but in profit. Our joy is to be not only a gratification, but an impulse; and if on the one hand it is necessary, on the other it is highly important, that pains should be taken to raise it to a just elevation.

II. A second emotion to be cultivated in viewing the success of our labours is *gratitude*. That is to say, our joy should be blended with a reference to him who is the giver of every good, and not be suffered to degenerate into self-gratulation and complacency. Perfectly obvious as it is that this ought to be the



case, and natural as it will be to every devout or considerate mind, there is yet much danger, not merely of defect, but of transgression. Although not vain enough to say, with the open pride of an ancient king, "Is not this great Babylon which I have builded," we are nevertheless sufficiently corrupt to rest with an unhallowed and self-elevating pleasure on the fact that we have been successful in turning a sinner to God, and secretly to take to ourselves a part of the honour which belongs to him alone. The prevention or correction of such feelings, and the cultivation of a just and proportionate gratitude, may be promoted by such methods as the following.

1. *We should impress ourselves with the fact that the conversion of a sinner by our instrumentality is owing, not to the means employed, but to the blessing of God upon them.* I say we should *impress* ourselves with this fact, because it is one of which there is not wanting any proof. We know and fully admit, that every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights; and that, alike in the natural and in the spiritual world, while one planteth and another watereth, it is God who giveth the increase. We know and admit that, without his almighty grace, the perverse heart of a sinner would refuse all instruction, would resist all importunity, would despise all warnings; and that, if left alone, we should be abandoned, even in our most strenuous exertions, to the derision of the foes with whom we have ventured to contend. If in any case it is otherwise, and if we have seen the dark mind enlightened and the stubborn heart subdued, it would be contradictory to all our knowledge, and a matter of manifest absurdity, to refer the

efficacy of our endeavours in any measure to ourselves. Every right-minded and considerate husbandman, as he looks on the fields which are white unto the harvest, exclaims, Behold the goodness of God! And pre-eminently such should our language be, when, having gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, we return again rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us. What is wanting in this case is not to establish the truth, but to impress it on our minds, that it may have its due effect; otherwise it will be in a great measure useless, and the evil feelings which it is adapted to correct will revel in defiance of it.

2. *Our gratitude should be further awakened by a recollection of the condescending kindness which God has herein shown us.* For it is an exercise of kindness that he should even permit us to labour, and much more that he should make us successful. He does in fact confer upon us in this method a most unspeakable pleasure, and it is for the purpose of conferring this pleasure that he employs our instrumentality. He has no need of us; nor will he allow us to regard his call to action, however authoritative, merely as labour imposed, but as a privilege allowed. The salvation of sinners is an object which he himself pursues with gladness, and from which he derives divine delight: and among his reasons for employing us, this at least is one, that he wishes to impart to us a measure of his own joy. He has appointed that his word should reach the ear of sinners through our lips, and that his truth should be conveyed to their hearts through our hands, in order that the streams of that blessedness of which he is the fountain may flow into our breasts. How thankful we should be for such an arrangement!

What a happiness, what an honour it is, to be taken from that region of inferior pursuits in which we might have been left, and associated with the Almighty in the accomplishment of his most glorious purposes; and to be made links in the chain of instrumental causes through which he impels his effectual agency! Why should he condescend to employ any such instrumentality for the accomplishment of his will? And if any, why mine?

3. *Our gratitude may be fed also by a distinct consideration of the unworthiness, or I may rather say the sinfulness, of the endeavours which have been so graciously blessed.* For what part of our activity for God can we look upon with entire satisfaction? Is there not every where, at the very best, a sad deficiency and mixture of motive, an afflictive want of solemnity and tenderness, together with a multitude of other evils, adapted to frustrate the very endeavours we have made, and to provoke a holy God to withhold his blessing? Yet he has been so rich in mercy that he has forgiven all this iniquity, and granted a blessing notwithstanding all. In addition to this, we may be able to trace some of the success which has been afforded us to seasons of peculiar unworthiness, when we were more careless and prayerless than usual, when we were experiencing more especial barrenness, or when we felt more aggravated discouragement. If to such efforts the Lord has been graciously pleased to give a blessing, it must indeed be not for our sakes, but for his own name's sake, and to him should all the praise more carefully be given.

III. Finally, a view of our success should induce *enlargement* both of desire and exertion. Natural as

this influence might seem to be, it is far from being uniformly or consistently felt. We are very prone to sit down contented with what we have effected, and to make it rather a plea for subsequent repose than an impulse to new exertion. Against this injurious perversion of a slothful heart, we should be closely on our guard; and the more so, because our desire is always apt to be too contracted, and success has a valuable tendency, when rightly considered, to expand it.

If a thing be really delightful to us, the possession of a little is clearly adapted to create a longing for more. It is so with any food which particularly pleases the palate; it is so with wealth, honour, friendship, and the other objects which engage the warm passions of men; and if the salvation of souls be really delightful to us, why should not its effect be similar? Is this gratification so insipid to us that a little of it is sufficient? Having saved one or a few sinners from death, is the joy we derive from it so small that we court no more.

And as our success is adapted to augment our desire, so it is equally adapted to encourage and quicken our exertions.

1. *It demonstrates the practicability of the object.* We were impeded in the outset of our labours, it may be, by a vague but oppressive feeling of the improbability of any good resulting from them. We had a sort of conviction that it would be vain for us to make any attempt; as though we could have said, "I am sure I can do nothing, and it is of no use to urge me to it." But in our success we have a practical proof of the erroneousness of such an idea. It is now manifest that even such endeavours as ours may be effectual to

the saving of sinners, if God give them his blessing, since they have already been so, and what has been once may be again. When you look on the sinners who are still around you, therefore, it is no longer possible for you to say with any consistency or truth, "I cannot save them:" it is plain that, under God, you can, and that you have in your possession means truly and adequately adapted to the end. If henceforth you are slothful, it will evidently be, not because you cannot act, but because you will not. Do you mean that it should be so?

2. *It facilitates the attainment of the object.* It teaches us what the methods are in which success may be hoped for, and thus removes one of our early and most distressing embarrassments. In the commencement perhaps we felt as though the conversion of a sinner were a thing which we did not know how to set about; that we could not tell which way to begin, or what method to pursue. We did not know what appearances human guilt and perverseness would present, or by what methods we might rationally attempt to remove them. If we have been at all attentive to our work, this sense of ignorance can no longer exist. We have now come into close contact with the blinded understanding and the depraved heart of man; we have tried, however unskilfully, to meet their necessities; and through God's mercy, we have not tried without success. Now therefore we know, in a measure, both what to expect, and what to do. We have tried our weapons, we have found out something of their adaptation and their power, and we are in some degree acquainted with the method of their use. And our knowledge is the more valuable because it is alto-

gether practical. It is not the instruction of theory, but of experience; and it fits us decidedly for more easy and successful exertions in time to come. This surely is far from being a time to lay our labours aside. It would be a matter, not only of regret but of shame, to suffer the knowledge we have thus acquired to be useless. On the contrary, our consciousness that the greatest difficulty is past, and that we have now a facility for the work which we have not had before, should clearly lead us to continued and extended activity.

3. *It realizes the anticipated pleasure of success*; and so tends to diminish the *vis inertiae*, the love of repose, which impedes every new exertion. The call of duty is indeed enforced in the first instance by the declaration that a reward *shall* be given; but the recompense is distant, if not uncertain, and is far from being vividly realized. Now, however, the sweets of successful labour have been actually tasted by you; and you can tell by experience whether the recompense is adequate to the toil. How do you now feel respecting the exertions you have already made? Are you at this moment sorry that the voice of duty effectually penetrated your ear, and reached your slumbering conscience; that the motives which summoned you to action, however unwelcome, were pressed home upon your heart till your long resisting indolence was overcome; that you contended with your fears, that you encountered the embarrassments of your early toil, and made whatever sacrifices it might involve of personal ease and gratification? Do you now wish that you had persevered in your resistance or evasion of every call; that you had still sheltered yourself

under vain excuses; and maintained undisturbed your criminal repose? I am sure you do not. To say nothing of the immediate reward with which duty and rectitude are always connected, you have found the joy of saving one sinner outweigh all the conflict, and toil, and sacrifice it has cost you. For such a result how gladly would you endure it all again! Endure it then again! That is the very thing I am urging upon you. Behold hundreds and thousands of other sinners perishing around you; and what you have done for those you have rescued, do for those who are yet in peril. Their salvation will be as precious a recompense to you as that of those on whom you now look with such ravishing joy. Will you not seize it? Or why should you yield to slothful impediments in this case, which in the former you rejoice to have resisted and overcome?

4. *It supplies evidence of God's faithfulness to his promises.* These, from the first, have been the foundation of your hope; and yet often perhaps have been regarded with unbelief. You have feared that they would not be fulfilled, at least to *you*. Notwithstanding it was said to you, "Be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord," though you did not contradict, you doubted whether it would be so. Others indeed might be blessed; but you scarcely expected a blessing upon *your* labours. See now how you are confounded and put to shame! Though your unbelief has tended to preclude you from the benefit of the promise, yet in God's eternal faithfulness it has been fulfilled. *Your* labour has not been in vain in the Lord. The fidelity of the divine promise, therefore,

is now not a matter of faith, but of experience. You can doubt it no more, because it is a fact in your own history. Behold, then, the light which your own experience casts upon the future. You now *know* that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord: you will no longer hesitate, then, to act up to the full import of the exhortation founded upon this fact, "Therefore be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Or should you not do so, we shall have occasion to suspect that even the recompense which the promises of God hold out to you is insufficient to awaken your desire, and to overcome your sloth.

5. *It gives a present recompense to toil.* When our labour for the souls of men is compared to that of the husbandman, and our instructions and diversified endeavours to the sowing of the seed, we should recollect that the only period which can properly be called the *harvest*, is "the end of the world." We must wait till that day for the whole result of our exertions, and we might not unnaturally have been required to wait as long for every portion of it. To witness the fruitfulness of our scattered seed, and to bring the sheaves home with joy, is the work of the harvest rather than of the seed-time. Yet a measure of this is graciously granted us now. In the present life we not only sow, but reap; and if at one period we are going forth weeping, bearing precious seed, at another we are returning with joy, bringing our sheaves with us. Is this condescending kindness to be lost upon us? If we dislike toil so much that we will not *sow*, are we likewise so idle that we will not *reap*? He that reapeth receiveth wages which may well recompense him for his toil, when he gathereth in fruit unto life eternal.



And if this partial reaping on earth is blessed, how much more blessed to the faithful and persevering labourer shall be his reward, when the harvest of the whole earth shall be ripe, and he shall reap, with unutterable gladness, the crop which grace has promised and eternal love secures!

Such are the influences, dear brethren, which you should derive from success. Be joyful, be grateful, be enlarged. And the Lord make both your labours and your success a thousand times more than they are, until you shall be able to say with the apostle, "Now thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest by us the savour of his knowledge in every place!" Amen.

THE END.

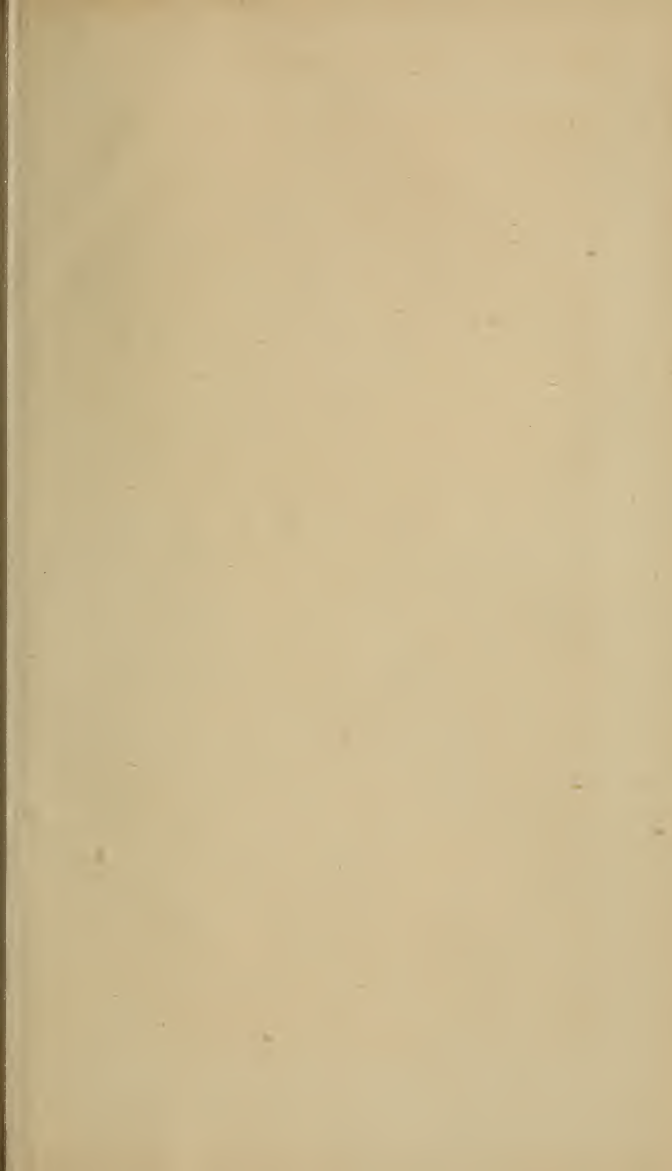
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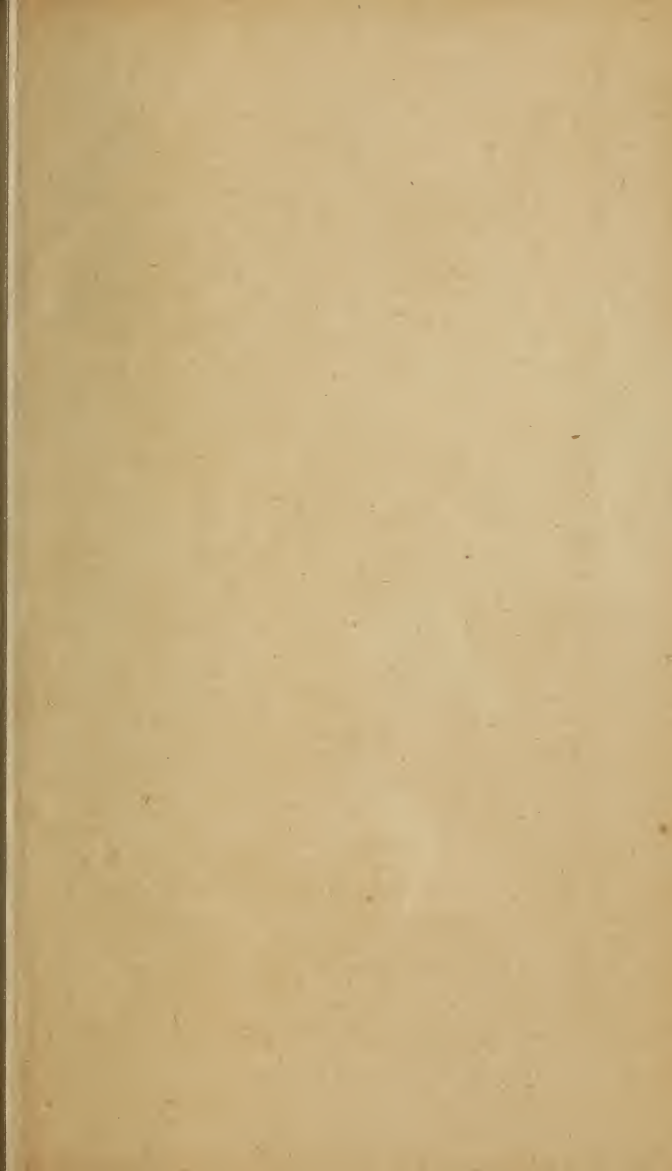
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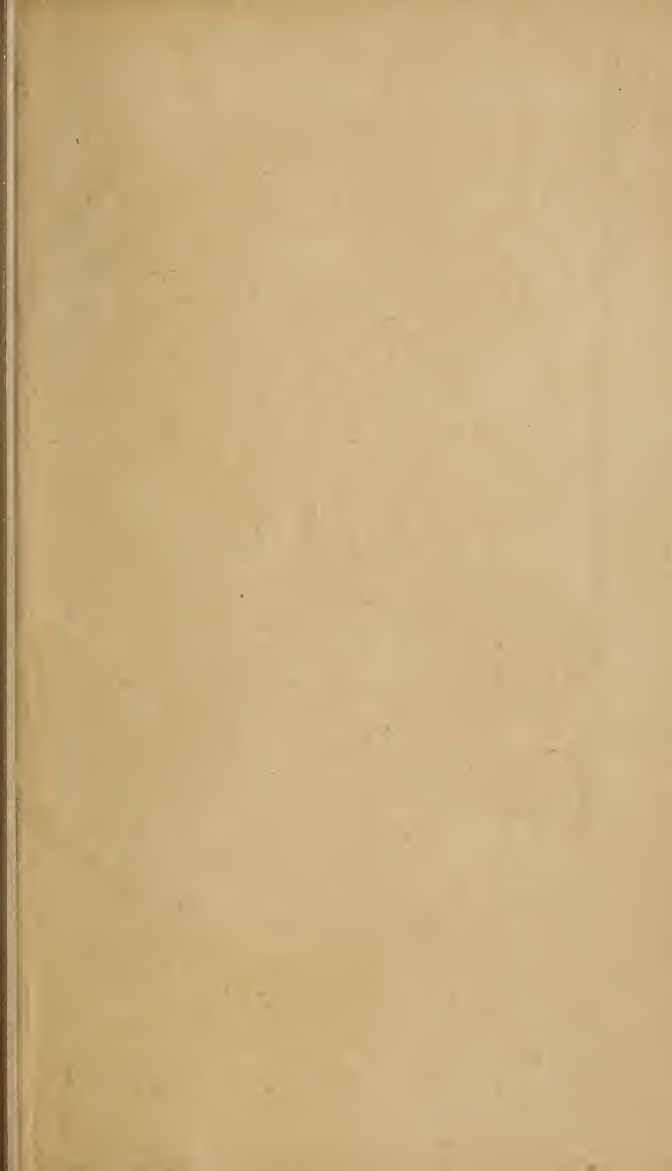
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