

The Free Grace Broadcaster

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Our Purpose

*"To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness of heart and life."*

The Sin of Unbelief

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The White Devil

John Bunyan

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."—John 6:37

This doctrine of coming to Jesus Christ for life, informs us of the evil of UNBELIEF; that wicked thing which is the only or chief hindrance to the coming sinner. Doth the text say, "Come"? Doth it say, "And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out"? Then what an evil is that, that keepeth sinners from coming to Jesus Christ? And that evil is UNBELIEF: for by faith we come; by UNBELIEF we keep away. Therefore it is that by which a soul is said to depart from God: because it was that which at first caused the world to go off from him, and that also, that keeps them from him to this day. And it doth it the more easily, because it doth it with a wile.

This sin may be called THE WHITE DEVIL. For it oftentimes, in its mischievous doing in the soul, shows as if it were an angel of light: yea, it acteth like a counsellor of heaven. Therefore, a little to discourse of this evil disease, I observe:

1. It is that sin, above all others, that hath some show of reason in its attempts. For it keeps the soul from Christ, by pretending its present unfitness and unpreparedness: as want of more sense of sin, want of more repentance, want of more humility, want of a more broken heart.
2. It is the sin that most suiteth with the conscience. The conscience of the coming sinner tells him, that he hath nothing good! that he stands inditable for ten thousand talents; that he is a very ignorant, blind and hard-hearted sinner, unworthy to be once taken notice of by Jesus Christ; and will you (says UNBELIEF) in such a case as you are now, presume to come to Jesus Christ?
3. It is the sin that most suiteth with our sense of feeling. The coming sinner feels the workings of sin, of all manner of sin and wretchedness in his flesh; he also feels the wrath and judgment of God due to sin and oftentimes staggers under it. Now, (says UNBELIEF) you may see you have no grace; for that which works in you is corruption. You may also perceive that God doth not love you, because the sense of his wrath abides upon you. Therefore, how can you bear the face to come to Jesus Christ?
4. It is that sin above all others that most suiteth the wisdom of our flesh. The wisdom of our flesh thinks it prudence to question awhile, to stand back awhile, to hearken to both sides awhile; and not to be rash, sudden, or unadvised, in too bold a presuming upon Christ. And this wisdom UNBELIEF falls in with.
5. It is the sin above all others, that continually is whispering in the ear the soul, with mistrusts of the faithfulness of God, in keeping promise to them that come to Jesus Christ for life. It also suggests mistrusts about Christ's willingness to receive it, and save it. And no sin can do this so artfully as UNBELIEF.
6. It is also that sin which is always at hand to enter an objection against this or that promise, that by the Spirit of God is brought to our heart to comfort us. And if the poor coming sinner is not aware of it, it will by some exaction, slight, trick, or cavil, quickly wrest from him the promise again, and he shall have but little benefit of it.
7. It is that above all other sins, that weakens our prayers, our faith, our love, our diligence, our hope and expectations. It even taketh the heart away from God in duty.
8. Lastly, this sin, as I have said, even now, appears in the soul with so many sweet pretences to greater safety and security, that it is, as it were, counsel sent from heaven; bidding the soul be wise, wary, considerate, well-advised, and to take heed of too rash a venture upon believing. "Be sure, first, that God loves you; take hold of no promise until you are forced by God unto it; neither be sure of your salvation; doubt it still, though the testimony of the Lord has often been confirmed in you. Live not by faith, but by sense; and when you can neither see nor feel, then fear and mistrust, then doubt and question all." This is the devilish counsel of UNBELIEF, which is so covered over with specious pretences, that the wisest Christian can hardly shake off these reasonings. But to be brief. Let me here give the Christian reader a more particular description of the qualities of UNBELIEF, by opposing faith unto it, in these particulars.

Faith believeth the word of God, but UNBELIEF questioneth the certainty of it (Psa 106:24). Faith believeth the word, because it is true; but UNBELIEF doubteth thereof, because it is true (1 Tim 4:3; John 8:45). Faith sees more in a promise of God to help, than in all other things to hinder; but UNBELIEF, notwithstanding God's promise saith, 'How can these things be?' (Rom 4:19-21; 2 Kings 7:2; John. 3:11,12). Faith will make thee see love in the heart of Christ, when with his mouth he gives reproofs; but UNBELIEF will imagine wrath in his heart, when with his mouth and word he saith he loves us (Matt 15:22-29; 25:24).

Faith will help the soul to wait, though God defers to give; but UNBELIEF will take offence and throw up all, if God makes any tarrying (Psa 25:5; Isa 8:17; 2 Kings 6:33). Faith will give comfort in the midst of fears; but UNBELIEF causeth fears in the midst of comforts (2 Chron 20:20,21; Matt 8:26; Luke 24:25). Faith will suck sweetness out of God's rod; but UNBELIEF can find no comfort in his greatest mercies (Psa 23; Num 12). Faith maketh great burdens light; but UNBELIEF maketh light ones intolerably heavy (Mal 1:12,13). Faith helpeth us when we are down; but UNBELIEF throws us down when we are up (Micah 7:8-10; Heb 4:11). Faith bringeth us near to God when we are far from him; but UNBELIEF puts us far from God when we are near to him (Heb 10:22; 3:12,13).

Where faith reigns, it declareth us to be the friends of God; but where UNBELIEF reigns, it declareth us to be his enemies (Heb 3:18; Rev 21:8). Faith putteth a man under grace; but UNBELIEF holdeth him under wrath (Rom 3:24-26; Eph 2:8; John 3:36; 1 John 5:10; Heb 3:17; Mark 16:16; John 8:24). Faith purifieth the heart; but UNBELIEF keepeth it polluted and impure (Acts 15:9; Titus 1:15,16). By faith the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us; but UNBELIEF shuts us up under the law to perish (Rom 4:23,24; 11:32; Gal 3:23).

Faith maketh our work acceptable to God through Christ; but whatsoever is of UNBELIEF is sin. For without faith it is impossible to please him (Heb 11:4; Rom 14:23; Heb 11:6). Faith giveth us peace and comforteth our souls; but UNBELIEF worketh trouble and tossings, like the restless waves of the sea (Rom 5:1; James 1:6).

Faith maketh us see preciousness in Christ, but UNBELIEF sees no form, beauty, or comeliness in him (1 Pet 2; Isa 53:1-3). By faith we have our life in Christ's fulness; but by UNBELIEF we starve and pine away (Gal 2:20). Faith gives us the victory over the law, sin, death, the devil, and all evils: but UNBELIEF lays us obnoxious to them all (1 John 5:4; Luke 12:46).

Faith will show us more excellency in things not seen, than in them that are; but UNBELIEF sees more in things that are, than in things that will be hereafter (2 Cor 4:18; Heb 11:24-27; 1 Cor 15:32). Faith makes the ways of God pleasant and admirable; but UNBELIEF maketh them heavy and hard (Gal 4:6; 2 Cor 12:10,11; John 6:60; Psa 2:3).

By faith Abraham, Isaac and Jacob possessed the land of promise; but because of UNBELIEF, neither Aaron, nor Moses, nor Miriam could get thither (Heb 11:9; 3:19). By faith the children of Israel passed through the Red sea; but by UNBELIEF the generality of them perished in the wilderness (Heb 11:29; Jude 5). By faith Gideon did more with three hundred men, and a few empty pitchers, than all the twelve tribes could do, because they believed not God (Judg 7:16-22; Num 14:11,14). By faith Peter walked on the water; but by UNBELIEF he began to sink (Matt 14:22-33).

Thus might many more be added, which for brevity's sake, I omit; beseeching every one that thinketh he hath a soul to save, or be damned, to take heed of UNBELIEF; lest seeing there is a promise left us of entering into his rest, any of us by UNBELIEF should indeed come short of it.

(This article available in tract form.)

Departing from the Living God

William Gurnall
(Abridged)

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you, an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." Hebrews 3:12

Unbelief is the prince of sins. As faith is the radical grace, so is unbelief a radical sin,—a sinning sin. As, of all sinners, those are most infamous, who are ring-leaders and make others sin, which is the brand which God has set upon Jeroboam's name, "Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who, sinned, and made Israel to, sin" (1 Kings 14:16), so among sins they are most horrid that are most productive of others, such is unbelief above any other: it is a ring-leading sin, a sin-making sin. The first poisonous breath which Eve sucked in from the tempter, was sent in these words, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen 3:1). As if he had said, Consider well on the matter; do you believe God meant so? Can you think so ill of God, as to believe he would keep the best fruit of the whole garden from you? This was the traitor's gate at which all other sins entered into her heart; and it continues to this day of the same use to Satan, for the hurrying souls into other sins, called therefore "*an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.*" The devil sets up this sin of unbelief, as a blind between the sinner and God; that the shot which come from the threatening, levelled at the sinner's breast, may not be dreaded by him; and then the wretch can be as bold with his lust as the pioneer is at his work, when he has got his basket of earth between him and the enemies' bullets: nay, this unbelief does not only choke the bullets of wrath which are sent out of the law's fiery mouth, but it damps the motions of grace which come from the gospel; all the offers of love which God makes to an unbelieving heart, they fall like seed into dead earth, or like sparks into a river, they pare out as soon as they fall in.

"The word" (it is said, Heb. 4:2) "did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." The strength of the whole body of sin lies in this lock of unbelief. There is no mastering of a sinner, while unbelief is in power; this will carry all arguments away (whether they be from law or gospel) as easily as Samson did the door, posts, bar and all, from the city of Gaza (Judges 16:2). It is a sin that does keep the field; that which the sinner is last convinced of, and the saint ordinarily last conqueror of. It is one of the chief strengths and fastnesses into which the devil retreats when other sins are routed. O, how oft do we hear a poor sinner confess and bewail other sins he has lived in formerly, with tears, but will not hearken yet to the offer of mercy in Christ! Bid him believe on Christ, and he shall be saved, which was the doctrine Paul and Silas preached to the trembling jailer; alas! he dares not, he will not; you can hardly persuade him it is his duty to do, so. The devil has now betaken himself to this city of gates and bars, where he stands upon his guard; and the more strongly to fortify himself, he has, the most specious pretences for it of any other sin. **It is a sin that he makes, the humbled soul commit, out of a fear of sinning, and so stabs the good name of God, for fear of dishonoring him by a presumptuous faith. Indeed, it is a sin by which Satan intends to put the greatest scorn upon God, and unfold all his cankered malice against him at once. It is by faith that the saints have all obtained a good**

report; yea, it is by the saints' faith, that God has a good report in the world; and, by unbelief, the devil does his worst to raise an evil report of God in the world, as if he were not what his own promise and his saints' faith witness him to be. In a word, it is a sin that hell gapes for of all other.

There are two sins that claim a preeminence in hell; hypocrisy and unbelief; and therefore other sinners are threatened "to have their portion with hypocrites" (Matt 24:51), and "with unbelievers" (Luke 12:46); as if those infernal mansions were taken up principally for these, and all others were but inferior prisoners. But of the two, unbelief is the greatest, and that which may, with an emphasis, be called above any other, the damning sin. "He that believes not is condemned already" (John 3:18). He has his warrant already to jail; yea, he is in it already in a sense; he has the brand of a damned person on him. The Jews are said, to "be shut up in unbelief" (Rom 11:32). A surer prison the devil cannot keep a sinner in. Faith shuts the soul up in the promise of life and happiness as God shut Noah into the ark. It is said, "The Lord shut him in" (Gen. 7:16); thus faith shuts the soul up in Christ, and the ark of his covenant, from all fear of danger from heaven or hell; and, on the contrary, unbelief shuts a soul up in guilt and wrath, so that there is no more Possibility of escaping damnation for an unbeliever, than for one to escape burning that its shut up in a fiery oven; no help can come to the sinner, so long as this bolt of unbelief is on the door of his heart. As our salvation is attributed to faith, rather than to other graces, through there are none wanting in a saved person; so sinners' damnation is attributed to their unbelief, though other sins are found with it in the person damned. The Spirit of God passes over the Jews' hypocrisy, murmuring, rebellion, and lays their destruction at the door of this sin of unbelief, "They .could not enter in because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:19).

O, sinners, who live under the gospel, if you perish, know before-hand, what is your undoing,—it is your unbelief. If a malefactor be offered his life by the judge, upon reading a psalm of mercy, and he reads it not, we may say, his not reading hangs him. The promise of the gospel is this psalm of mercy which God offers in his Son to law-condemned sinners; believing is reading this psalm of mercy. If you believe not, and are damned, you go to hell rather for your final unbelief, than any of your other sins, for which a discharge is offered you upon your receiving Christ, and believing on him. Let this cause us all to rise up against this sin, as the Philistines did against Samson, Whom they called the destroyer of their country (Judg 16:24). This is the destroyer of your souls, and that is worse; yea, it destroys them with a bloodier hand than other sins, which are not aggravated with this. We find two general heads of indictments, upon which the whole world of sinners shall be condemned at the great day (2 Thess 1:8), where Christ's coming to judgment is expressed; and those miserable, undone creatures, that shall fall under his, condemning sentence, are comprised in these two,—such as "know not God," and such as "obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ." The heathens' negative unbelief of the gospel, shall not be charged upon them, because they never had it preached to them. No, they shall be sent to hell for not knowing God, and so shall escape with a lighter damnation by far, than Jews or Christian Gentiles, to whom the gospel has been preached (though to some of these, with a stronger and longer continued beam of light than others). The dismal charge which shall be brought against these, is, that they have not obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus; that is, not believed on Christ, called therefore "the obedience of faith" (Rom 16:26). And certainly we cannot but think, that there shall be a torment proper to these gospel refusers, which those that never had shall not feel in hell. And among those that obey not the gospel, the greatest vengeance awaits for them have had the longest treaty of mercy allowed them. *These are they who put God to the greatest expense of mercy, and therefore must necessarily expect the greatest proportion of wrath and vengeance to be measured to them; yea, their unbelief puts Christ and the grace of God in him, to the greatest shame and scorn that is possible for creatures to do; and it is, but righteous that God should therefore put their unbelief, and themselves with it, to the greatest shame before men and angels.*

Is faith the chief of graces? Let this make us the more careful we be not cheated in our faith. There are some things of so inconsiderable worth, that they will not pay us for the pains and care we take about them; and there to be choice and scrupulous is folly. But there are other things; of such worth and weighty consequence, that none but he that means to call his wisdom in question, can be willing to be mistaken in. Who, that is wise, would pay for a precious stone, and have a pebble, or, at best, a Bristol-stone put upon him for his money? Who, when his life is at stake, and knows no way to save it, but by getting a rich drug which is very scarce, would not be very careful to have the right? O, my dear friends, does it not infinitely more concern you, to be careful in your merchandise for this pearl of precious faith! Can you be willing to take the devil's false ware, a mock faith, which he would cheat you with, rather than the faith unfeigned, which God has to give unto his children; called, therefore, the faith of God's elect? When you go to buy a garment, you ask for the best in the shop. In the market you would have the best meat; when with the lawyer, the best counsel; and of the physician, the best directions for your health. Are you for the best in all, abut for your soul? Would you not have a faith of the best kind also? If a man receives false money, whom does he wrong but himself? And if you are gulled with a false faith, the loss is your own, how will you be confounded! When at God's bar you produce your faith, and hope to save yourself with this, that you believe on the Lord Jesus, but shall have your confidence rejected; and God tells you to your teeth, it is not faith, but a lie in your right hand and therefore he will not accept the payment, though it be Christ himself you offer; nay, that he will give you up into the tormentor's hand, not only for not believing, but also for counterfeiting the King of heaven's coin, which you do by pretending to faith, when it is a false one;—this were enough to awaken your care in the trial of your faith. But to give (farther weight to the exhortation, note these three considerations.

1. As your faith is, so are all your other graces: as a man's marriage is, so are all his children legitimate or illegitimate. Thus, as our marriage is to Christ, so all our graces are. Now, it is faith by which we are married to Christ. "I have espoused you to one husband," says Paul to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2); how, but by their faith? It is faith whereby the soul gives its consent to take Christ for her husband. Now, if our faith be false, then our marriage to Christ is feigned; and if that be feigned, then all our pretended graces are base-born, how goodly an outside soever they have (as a bastard may have a fair face), our humility, patience, temperance, all bastards; and you know, "A bastard was not to enter into the congregation" (Deut 23:2). No more shall any bastard grace enter the congregation of the just in heaven. He that has children of his own, will not make another's bastard his heir. God has children of his own to inherit heaven's glory, in whose hearts he has by his, own Spirit begotten those heavenly graces, which truly resemble his own holy nature; surely he will never settle it upon strangers, counterfeit believers, that are the devil's brats.

2. Consider, the excellency of true faith makes false faith so much the more odious. It is by faith we become the sons of God (John 1:12): what a high presumption is it then, that by a false faith you pretend yourself to be a child of God, when no heaven-blood runs in your veins, but have more reason to look for your kindred in hell, and derive your pedigree from Satan, "I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not but are the synagogue of Satan." (Rev 2:9) God loaths such with his heart. A false friend is worse than an open enemy in man's judgment; and a hypocritical Judas more abhorred by God than a bloody Pilate: either, therefore, true faith, or pretend to none. The ape because he has the face of a man, but not the soul of a man, is therefore the most ridiculous of all creatures, and of all sinners, none will be put more to shame, at the last day, than such as have aped the believer in some exterior postures of profession, but never had the spirit of a believer, so as to perform one vital act of faith. The Psalmist tells us of some, "whose image God will despise" (Psalm 73:20). It is spoken chiefly of the wicked man's temporal prosperity, which, for its short continuance, is compared to the image or representation

of a thing in the fancy of a sleeping man. This God will despise at the great day, when he shall not give heaven, by the estates and honors, that men had in the world, but tumble them down to hell, if graceless, as well as the poorest beggar in the world. But there is another sort of persons, whose image God will, at that day, despise more than these, and that is, the image of all temporary believers and unsound professors, who have a fantastical faith, which they set up like an image in their imaginations, and dance about it with as many self-pleasing thoughts as a man does that is dreaming himself to be some great prince; but this great idol shall then be broken, and the worshippers of it hissed down to hell with the greatest shame of any other.

3. None stand at greater disadvantage for the obtaining a true faith, than he who flatters himself with a false one. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him" (Prov 26:12); that is, more hope of persuading him; of all fools, the conceited fool is the worst. Pride makes a man incapable of receiving counsel. Nebuchadnezzar's mind is said to be hardened in pride (Dan 5:20). There is no reasoning with a proud man; he castles himself in his own opinion, and there stands upon his defence against all arguments that are brought. Bid a conceited professor seek for faith, or he is undone; and the man will tell you, that you mistake. It is the ignorant person, or profane, you should go to on that errand; he thanks God he is not now to seek for a faith, and thus he blesses himself in his good condition, when, God knows, "he feedeth on ashes; a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his own soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (Isa 44:20). The ignorant, profane person, like the Psalmist's man of low degree, is plain vanity. It is not hard to make them acknowledge, that they have nothing, deserve nothing, can look for nothing, as they are, but hell and damnation; but such as pretend to faith, and content themselves with a false one, they are (like men of high degree) a lie, which is vanity as well as the other, but with a specious cover over it, that hides it; therefore the devil is forward to put poor silly souls on believing, that he may forestall the Spirit's market, and prevent the creature's obtaining of a true faith, by cheating it with a counterfeit, like Jeroboam's wicked policy, who, to keep the Israelites from going to Jerusalem, and hankering after the true worship of God, set up something like a religious worship nearer hand at home, in the golden calves; and this pleased many so well that they missed not their walk to Jerusalem. O, friends, take heed, therefore, of being cheated with a false faith! Every one, I know, would have the living child to be hers, and not the dead one. We would all pass for such as have true faith, but be not your own judges: appeal to the Spirit of God, and let him, with the sword of his word, come and decide the controversy, which faith is yours, the true or false.

By this, time you may be solicitous to know what your faith is, and how you may come to judge of the truth of it. Take these directions taken from the manner of the Spirit working faith:

It is incomparably the greatest work that passes upon the soul from the Spirit of Christ; it is called, "The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe" (Eph 1:19); observe with what a heap of expressions the Spirit of God loads, our weak understandings, that, laboring under the weight of them, and finding the difficulty of reaching the significancy of them, we might' be the more widened, to conceive of that power, which can never be fully understood by us, (being indeed infinite, and so too big to be inclosed within the narrow walls of our understandings)—power, greatness of power, exceeding greatness, and, lastly, exceeding greatness of his power, that is, of God. What angel in heaven can tell us what all these amount to? God (with reverence be it spoken) sets his whole force to this work. It is compared to, no less than "the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power," (verse 20, 21). To raise any one from the dead is a mighty, an almighty work; but to raise Christ from the dead, carries more wonder with it, than to raise any other; he had a heavier grave-stone to keep him down than any besides,—the weight of a world's sin lay upon him, yet,

notwithstanding this, he is, raised with power by the Spirit, not only out of the grave, but into glory. Now the power God puts forth upon the soul in working faith, is according to this of raising Christ; for, indeed, the sinner's soul is as really dead in sin, as Christ's body was in the grave for sin. Now speak, poor creature, are you any way acquainted with such a power of God, to have been at work in you; or do you think slightly of believing, and so show yourself a stranger to this mystery? Certainly, this one thing might resolve many, if they desired to know their own state, that they have no faith, because they make it so trivial and light a matter as if it were as easy to believe, as to say they do; and it were of no more difficulty to receive Christ into their souls by faith, than to put a bit of bread into their mouths with their hand. Ask some, whether ever such a day or time of God's power came over their heads, to humble them for sin, drive them out of themselves, and draw them effectually unto Christ; and they may answer you as those did Paul, when he asked, whether they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed; "they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost" (Acts 19:2); so these might say, We know not whether there be any such power required to the working of faith.

But, to a more particular consideration of this powerful work of the Spirit upon the soul for the production of faith, it will be necessary to consider what posture the Spirit of Christ finds the soul in before he begins this great work; and then how he makes his addresses to the soul; and what acts he puts forth upon the soul for the working faith.

1. For the posture of the soul. The Spirit finds the creature in such a state, as it neither can nor will contribute the least help to the work. As the prince of this world, when he came to tempt Christ, "found nothing in him," to befriend and further his tempting design; so when the Spirit of Christ comes, he finds as little encouragement from the sinner; no party within the castle of the soul, to side with him, when he comes first to set down before it, and lay siege to it; but all the powers of the whole man in arms against him: hence it is that so many scornful answers are sent out to the summons that are given sinners to yield. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11). Never was, any garrison more resolved to stand out against the batteries of an assailing enemy, than the carnal heart is against all means that God uses to reduce it to his obedience. The noblest operations of the soul are "earthly, sensual, and devilish" (James 3:15); so that, except sensual and spiritual please one palate, God and the devil agree, there is no hope that a sinner, of himself, should like the motion Christ makes, or that with any argument he should be won over to like it, so long as the ground of dislike remains in his earthly, sensual, and devilish nature.

2. How the Spirit makes his addresses to the soul, and what acts he puts forth upon it for the working faith. Now the Spirit's address is suited to the several faculties of the soul; the principal of which are, understanding, conscience, and will; these are like three forts, one within the other, which must all be reduced before the town be taken, the sinner, I mean, subdued to the obedience of faith; and to these the Spirit makes his particular addresses, putting forth an act of Almighty power upon every one of them, and that in this order; first, the Spirit makes his approach to, the understanding, and on it he puts forth an act of illumination: the Spirit will not work in a dark shop; the first thing he does in order to faith, is to beat out a window in the soul, and let in some light from heaven: hence believers are said "to be renewed in the spirit of their mind" (Eph 4:23); which the same apostle calls being "renewed in knowledge" (Col 3:10). By nature we know little of God, and nothing of Christ, Or the way of salvation by him. The eye of the creature therefore must be opened to see the way of life, before he can by faith get into it. God does not waft souls to heaven, like passengers in a ship, who are shut under the hatches, and see nothing all the way they are sailing to their port; if so, that prayer might have been spared, which the Psalmist, inspired, of God, breathes forth in the behalf of the blind Gentiles (Psa 67:2), "That thy way may be known upon earth, and thy saving health among all nations." As faith is not a naked assent

without affiance, and resting on Christ, so neither is it a blind assent, without some knowledge. If, therefore, you continue still in your brutish ignorance, and know not what Christ is, and what he has done for the salvation of poor sinners, how they are interested in him, you are far enough from believing. If the day be not broke in your soul, much less, is the Sun of Righteousness arisen in your soul.

When the Spirit of God has sprung with a divine light into the understanding, then he makes his address to the conscience, and the act which passes upon that is an act of conviction. "He will reprove the world of sin" (John 16:8).—Now this conviction is nothing but a reflection of the light that is in the understanding upon the conscience, whereby the creature feels the weight and force of those truths he knows, so as to be brought into a deep sense of them: Light in a direct beam heats not, nor does knowledge swimming in the brain affect. Most under the gospel know that unbelief is a damning sin, and that there is no name to be saved by but Christ's yet how few of these know this so as to apply it to their own consciences, and to be affected with their own deplored state. He is a scriptural, convinced sinner, who, upon the clear evidence of the word brought against him by the Spirit, is found by his own conscience to be so. Speak now, poor creature, did ever such an act of the Spirit of God pass upon you as this? Which, that you may the better discern, try yourself by these few characters.

A sinner truly convinced, is not only convinced of this or that sin, but of the evil of all sin. It is an ill sign, when a person seems in a passion to cry out at one sin, and to be senseless of another. A parboiled conscience is not right; soft in one part, and hard in another: the Spirit of God is uniform in its work.

The convinced sinner is not only convinced of acts of sin, but of the state of sin also; he is not only affected with what he has done (this law broken and that mercy abused), but with what his state and present condition is. Peter leads Simon Magus from that one horrid act he committed, to the consideration of that which was worse, the dismal state that he discovered him to be in; "I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23). Many will confess, they do not as they should, who will not think by any means so ill of themselves, that theirs is a state of sin and death; whereas, the convinced soul freely puts himself under this sentence, owns his condition, and dissembles not his pedigree. I am a most vile wretch, saith he, a limb of Satan, as full of sin as the toad is of poison. My whole nature lies, in wickedness, even as the dead, rotten carcass does in its putrefaction. I am a child of wrath born to no other inheritance than hell-flames; and if God tread me down thither, I have not one righteous syllable to object against his proceedings, but there is that in my own conscience which will clear him from having done me any wrong.

The convinced sinner does not only condemn himself for what he has done and is, but he despairs as, to any thing he can do to save himself. Many, though they go so far as to confess they are vile wretches, and have lived wickedly, and for this deserve to die; yet, when they have put the rope about their neck by a self-condemning act, they are so far from being convinced of their own impotency, that they hope to cut it, with their repentance, reformation, and a bundle of good works, which they think shall redeem their credit with God, and recover his favor: and this comes to pass, because the plough of conviction did not go deep enough to tear up those secret roots of self-confidence, with which the heart of every sinner is woefully tainted; whereas every soul, thoroughly convinced by the Spirit, is a self-despairing soul; he sees himself beyond his own help, like a poor, condemned prisoner, laden with so many heavy irons, that he sees it is impossible for him to make an escape, with all his skill or strength, out of the hands of justice. O, friends, look whether the work be gone thus far in your souls! Most that perish, it is not their disease that kills them, but their physician; they think to cure themselves, and this leaves them

incurable. Speak, soul, did the Lord ever ferret you out of this burrow where so many earth themselves? Are you as much at a loss what to do, as sensible for what you have done? Do you see hell in your sin, and despair in yourself? Had God got out of this Keilah, and convinced you, if you should stay in the self-confidence of your repentance, reformation, and duties, they would all deliver you up into the hands of God's justice and wrath, when they shall come against you? Then indeed, you have escaped one of the finest snares that the wit of hell can weave.

The convinced sinner is not only convinced of sin, so as to condemn and despair of himself, but he is convinced of a full provision laid up in Christ for self-condemned and self-despairing ones: "He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness (John 16:8). And this is as necessary an antecedent to faith, as any of the former. Without this, the soul, convinced of sin, is more likely to go to the gallows with Judas, or fall on the sword of the law, as the jailer attempted to do on his, when he thought his condition desperate, than think of coming to Christ.

The third and last faculty to be dealt with is the will, and on this (for the production of faith) the Spirit puts forth an act of renewing whereby he does sweetly but powerfully incline the will (which before was rebellious and refractory) to accept of Christ, and make a free, deliberate choice of him, for his Lord and Savior; I say a free choice, not pounded into him with apprehensions of wrath, as one may run under an enemy's roof in a storm, whose door he would have passed by in fair weather. Speak, soul, do you go to Christ, not only for safety, but delight? So the spouse, "I sat under his shadow with great delight" (Song 2:3). As Ruth, who, when Naomi spake the worst she could to discourage her, yet liked her mother's company too well, to lose it for those troubles that attended her. Speak, soul, has the Spirit of God thus put his golden key into the lock of your will, to open the everlasting door of your heart to let Christ, the King of Glory, in? Has he not only opened the eye of your understanding, as one awoke from sleep in prison, and caused the chains of senselessness and stupidity to fall off your conscience, but also, opened the iron gate of your will to let you out of the prison of impenitency, where even now you were fast bolted in; yea, brought you to knock at heaven's door for entertainment, as Peter did at the house of Mary, where the church was met? Be of good comfort; you may know assuredly, that God has sent, not his angel, but his own Spirit, and has delivered you out of the hand of sin, Satan, and Justice.

Is faith so precious a grace? Let it Provoke you, who want it. Can you hear of this pearl, and not wish it were yours? Wherefore has the Spirit spoken such great and glorious things of faith, but to make it the more desirable? Is there any way to have Christ, but by faith? or do you not think that you need Christ as much as any other? There is a generation of men in the world, who would almost make one think this was their judgment, because their corruptions have not broke out into plague-sores of profaneness, and left such a brand of ignominy upon their name, as some others; their conversation have been strewed with some flowers of morality, whereby their names have kept sweet among their neighbors; therefore they do not at all listen to Christ, neither do their consciences, much check them for this neglect. And why so? Surely it is not because they are more willing to go to hell than others, for they do that to escape it which many others will not; but because they think the way they are in will bring them to heaven without any more ado. Poor, deluded creatures! Is Christ then sent to, help only some more dehauched sinners to heaven, such as drunkards, swearers, and of that rank? And are civil, moral men left to walk thither on their own legs? The word tells but of one way to heaven for all who mean to come there. As there is but "one God," so but "one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5); and if but one bridge over the gulf, judge what is likely to become of the civil, righteous man (for all his moral life), if he miss this one, and goes on in the road he has set out in for heaven. O, remember, proud man, who you are, and cease your vain attempt! Are not you of Adam's seed? Have not you traitor's blood in your veins.

If every mouth be stopped (Rom 3:19,20), how dare you open yours? If all the world become guilty before God, that, by the deeds of the law, no flesh can be justified in his sight; where then shall you stand to plead your innocency before him, who sees your black skin under your white feathers, your foul heart through your fair carriage? It is faith on Christ that alone can purify your heart, without which your washed face and hands (external righteousness, I mean) will never commend you to God; and, therefore, you are under a horrible delusion if you do not think that you need Christ, and faith in him, as much as the greatest sinner in the world.

Let me, therefore, again and again, beseech all that are yet destitute of faith, to endeavour for it speedily. David resolved not to give sleep to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids, till he found out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob (Psa 132:4;5). The habitation which pleases God most, is a believing heart, "that Christ may dwell in your heart by faith" (Eph 3:17). O, how dare you sleep a night in that house where God does not dwell! and he dwells not in you, if you carry an unbelieving heart in your bosom. There is never a gospel sermon you hear, but he stands at your door to be let in. Take heed of multiplying unkindnesses in denying him entertainment. How know you but God may, finding your heart so often shut by unbelief against his knocks, suddenly seal you up under final unbelief?

Question: But how can unbelief be so great sin, when it is not in the sinner's power to believe?

Answer: By this reason, the unregenerate person might wipe off any other sin, and shake off the guilt of it with but saying, It is not my fault that I do not keep this commandment or that, for I have no power of myself to do them. This is true; he cannot perform one holy action holily and acceptably: "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:8): but it is a false inference, that therefore he does not sin, because he can do no other.

Because this inability is not created by God, but contracted by the creature himself. "God made man upright, but they sought out many invention" (Ecc1 7:29). Man had not his lame hand from God. No, he was made a creature fit and able for any service his Maker would please to employ him in; but man crippled himself; and man's fault cannot prejudice God's right. Though he has lost his ability to obey, yet God has not lost his power to command. Who among ourselves thinks his debtor discharged by wasting that estate whereby he was able to have paid us?

Man's present impotency to yield obedience to the commands of God, and, in particular, to this of believing, where it is promulgated, does afford him no excuse: because it is not a simple inability but complicated with an inward enmity against the command. It is true, man cannot believe; but it is as true, man will not believe: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). It is possible, yea, ordinary, that a man may, through some feebleness and deficiency of strength, be disabled to do that which he is very willing to do, and this draws out our pity: such an one was the poor cripple who lay so long at the pool (John 5:5). He was willing enough to have stepped down, if he could have but crept thither, or that any other should have helped him in. But what would you think of such a cripple, that can neither go himself to the pool for healing, nor is willing that any should help him, but flies in the face of him that would do him this friendly office?

Every unbeliever is this cripple: he is not only impotent himself, but a resister of the Holy Ghost, that comes to woo and draw him unto Christ. Indeed, every one that believes, believes willingly; but he is beholder, not to nature, but to grace for this willingness: none are willing till the day of power comes (Psa 110:3), in which the Spirit of God overshadows, the soul, and, by his

incubation (as once upon the waters), he new forms and moulds the will into a sweet compliance with the call of God in the gospel.

Take heed of resisting or opposing the Spirit of God. If ever you believe, he must enable you; take heed of opposing him. God makes short work with some in his judiciary proceedings; if he finds a repulse once, sometimes he departs, and leaves a dismal curse behind him as its punishment: "I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden, shall taste of my supper" (Luke 14:24). They were but once invited, and for their first denial this curse clapped upon their heads. It is not said they shall never come where the supper stands on the board, but they shall never taste. Many, sit under the ordinances, where Christ in gospel dishes is set forth admirably, but through the efficacy of this curse upon them, never taste of these dainties all their life; they hear precious truths, but their hearts are sealed up in unbelief, and their minds made reprobate and injudicious, so that they are not moved at all by them. There is a kind of madness, in which a man will discourse soberly and rationally, till you came to speak of some particular subject that was the occasion of his distemper; here he is quite out, and presently loses his reason, not able to speak with any understanding of it. O, how many men and women are there among us, frequent attendants on the Word, who, in any matter of the world are able to discourse very understandingly and rationally; but when you come to speak of the things of God, Christ, and heaven, it is strange to see how soon their reason is lost, and all understanding gone from them; they are not able to speak of these matters with any judgment. Truly, I am afraid, in many (who have sat long under the means, and the Spirit has been making some attempts on them), this injudiciousness of mind in the things of God, is but the consequence of that spiritual curse which God has passed upon them, for resisting these assays of his Spirit. I beseech you, therefore, beware of opposing the Spirit. Does he beam any light from his word into your understanding, whereby you (who were before an ignorant sot) come to know something of the evil of sin, the excellency of Christ, and can discourse rationally of the truths of the Scripture? Look now to it, what you do with this candle of the Lord, that is lighted in your mind: take heed you are not found sinning with it, or priding yourself in it, lest it goes out in a snuff, and you, for rebelling against the light; come at last to die without knowledge, as is threatened (Job 36:12).

Again, may be the Spirit of God goes yet farther, and does not only dart light into your affections: my meaning is, he from the word displays Christ so in his own excellencies, and the fitness of him in all his offices to your wants, that your affections begin to work after him; the frequent discourses of him, and the mercy of God through him to poor sinners, are so luscious, that you begin to taste some sweetness in hearing of them, which stirs up some passionate desires, whereby you are, in hearing the word, often sallying forth in such breathings as these: O, that Christ were mine! Shall I ever be the happy soul whom God will pardon and save! Yea, possibly in the heat of your affections, you are cursing your lusts and Satan who has held you so long from Christ, and sudden purposes are taken up by you, that you will bid adieu to your former ways, and break through all the entreaties of your dearest lust, to come to Christ. O, soul! now the kingdom of God is nigh indeed unto you. You are, as I may say, even upon your quickening: and therefore, above all, beware lest you miscarry; if these sudden desires did but ripen into a deliberate choice of Christ, and these purposes settle into a permanent resolution to renounce sin and self, and so you cast yourself on Christ, I durst be the messenger to congratulate you on the birth of this babe of grace (faith, I mean) in your soul. I confess, affections are up and down; yea, like the wind,—how strongly soever they seem to blow the soul—one way at present, they are often found in quite the contrary point soon after. A man may be drunk with passion and affection, as really as with wine or beer. And as it is ordinary for a man to make a bargain, when he is in beer or wine, which he repents of as soon as he is sober; so it is as ordinary for poor creatures, who make choice of Christ and his ways in a sermon (while their affections have been elevated above their ordinary pitch by some moving discourse), to repent of all they have done soon after, when the

impression of the word (which heated their affections in hearing) is worn off, and then they come to themselves again, and are what they were, as far from any such desires after Christ as ever. Content not, therefore, yourself with some sudden pangs of affection in an ordinance, but labor to preserve those impressions which the Spirit then makes on your soul, that they be not defaced, not rubbed off (like colors newly laid on, before they are dry) by the next temptation that comes. This is the caveat of the apostle, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb 2:1). May be, at present, your heart is melting for your sins, and you think, surely now I shall never give my lust a kind look more: indeed one might wonder, when we see the solemn, mournful countenances under a sermon, which of these could be the man, or woman, that would afterwards be seen walking hand in hand with those sins they now weep to hear mentioned. But, as you love your life, watch your soul, lest this prove but as the early dew, none of which is to be seen at noon. Do you, therefore, betake yourself to your closet, and there labor to take the advantage of your present relenting frame, for the more free pouring out of your soul to God, now the ordinance has thawed the tap, and with all your soul beg of God, that he would not leave you short of faith, and suffer you to miscarry, now he has you upon the wheel, but make you a vessel unto honor.

Doubting God

C.H. Spurgeon

And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul.
—1 Samuel 27:1

The thought of David's heart at this time was a false thought, because he certainly had no ground for thinking that God's anointing him by Samuel was intended to be left as an empty unmeaning act. On no one occasion had the Lord deserted His servant; he had been placed in perilous positions very often, but not one instance had occurred in which divine interposition had not delivered him. The trials to which he had been exposed had been varied; they had not assumed one form only, but many—yet in every case He who sent the trial had also graciously ordained a way of escape. David could not put his finger upon any entry in his diary, and say of it, "Here is evidence that the Lord will forsake me," for the entire tenor of his past life proved the very reverse. He should have argued from what God had done for him, that God would be his defender still. But is it not just in the same way that we doubt God's help? Is it not mistrust without a cause? Have we ever had the shadow of a reason to doubt our Father's goodness? Have not His loving-kindnesses been marvelous? Has He once failed to justify our trust? Ah, no! our God has not left us at any time. We have had dark nights, but the star of love has shone forth amid the blackness; we have been in stern conflicts, but over our head He has held aloft the shield of our defense. We have gone through many trials, but never to our detriment, always to our advantage; and the conclusion from our past experience is, that He who has been with us in six troubles, will not forsake us in the seventh. What we have known of our faithful God, proves that He will keep us to the end. Let us not, then, reason contrary to evidence. How can we ever be so ungenerous as to doubt our God? Lord, throw down the Jezebel of our unbelief, and let the dogs devour it.

A Solemn Impeachment of Unbelievers

C.H. Spurgeon

"He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."—1 John 5:10.

No doubt if our Lord Jesus were on earth he would find many persons for whom he would pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It is no doubt true of many who are living in great sin that they do it ignorantly, not knowing the full measure of their guilt, or its real character in the sight of God. It is the duty of the Christian minister, and indeed of all Christians, to render sins of ignorance impossible by imparting scriptural knowledge; we must let men know what they are doing, and never suffer them to go on in the dark. If they will commit sin, let them at least know what is involved in it, for "that the soul be without knowledge is not good." It is not meet that any man should continue in darkness now that the true light has dawned upon mankind. It is true our testimony will not always be received, for men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil, but our duty remains the same; we are to bear witness of the truth and to be in the hands of God the instruments of convincing the world of the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

The great sin of not believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is often spoken of very lightly and in a very trifling spirit, as though it were scarcely any sin at all; yet, according to my text, and, indeed, according to the whole tenor of the Scriptures, unbelief is the giving of God the lie, and what can be worse? I earnestly desire that every unbeliever may see his unbelief at this time in its true colors, and perhaps, as the Spirit of God enables him to see the evil of his past unbelief, he will be so shocked at himself, and horrified at his crime, that he will continue in it no longer, but yield himself to the faith. My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, that grace may be given to the unbelieving, that they may now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When our race had been lost by sin, it was infinite mercy on God's part to provide a way of salvation, and infinite condescension to make that way of salvation suitable to our lost condition. If it had been a salvation which depended upon works, it would have been impossible to us; it would have mocked our sorrow, but could not have relieved it. In abounding mercy God has set forth Jesus Christ to be a propitiation for sin, and he bids guilty men believe in him as the atoning sacrifice, and see in him the love of God made manifest. He bids sinners lay hold upon eternal life by accepting Jesus Christ by faith as their Savior. Now, had not man been very vile and grossly wicked at heart, he would have leaped for joy at the proclamation of the gospel, and have believed at once the truth to which God bears witness; but being desperately set on mischief, man does not believe in Jesus Christ, and if you preach Christ to him, and set the crucified One before him, yet still, except where the Holy Spirit works effectually, he remains in his unbelief, refuses to receive the witness of God, and rejects the Redeemer. Now, what I desire to do this morning is to bring every man who is in that condition to look at himself as in a glass, and see clearly what he is doing. I wish to make him feel as he hears this discourse, "Yes, I see what I am doing: by not believing Jesus I am despising the blood of atonement, and I am telling God to his face that he is a liar." It is always well for every man to know exactly what he is at. On the sea of life the oftener we take observations as to our longitude and latitude the better. Many bankruptcies arise from careless trading, and in such cases the traders have no mind to consult their account books,

but they go on with their eyes half open, hoping that things will take a turn, which turn is never taken. It is always good for a man to know who he is, what he is, where he is, and whither he is bound. I would plead with the unbeliever, to look well to his position, to see how God regards it, and to judge himself that he be not judged. If I should not seem to speak very tenderly at this time, you must not be astonished. I believe there is such a thing as pitying sinners and comforting them till they consider themselves to be no longer blameworthy, and even regard themselves as unhappy people who deserve sympathy. I talked not; long ago with a troubled one, and after much battling I brought her to this point—"There is the way of salvation. Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners, and whosoever believeth in him is saved." She replied, "I cannot believe in him;" and then I came to push of bayonet and said, "Will you then stand up in the sight of Almighty God, and declare to him that you cannot believe him; which of course is the same thing as saying, in other words, that God is a liar! Rise, then, and let me hear you say what is in your heart." She replied most earnestly, "I could not say anything of the kind." My answer was, "But you did say so just now, and by your unbelief you have been saying so for years, and you are practically saying it every moment that you remain in unbelief." That troubled one said to me as she left, "I thank you for not trying to comfort me. I wanted to be faithfully dealt with, and I bless God that you have done so." Now I wish, out of love to the souls of those who do not believe in Jesus, to deal faithfully with them, giving them no comfort, for comfort there is none for those who believe not; but making them see what their sin is, that they may be ashamed and confounded, and repent of their wicked unbelief. May the Spirit of God make them see that "he that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."

First we shall see *the sinner's inability to believe dissected*; then, *the nature of his sin detected*; then, *the unbeliever's sin execrated*; and fourthly, *his fate predicted*.

I.

First, THE SINNER'S INABILITY TO BELIEVE DISSECTED. He pleads that he cannot believe. He often says this, and quiets his conscience with it. When he is aroused and awakened he declares that he cannot believe in Jesus Christ, and cannot believe God, and goes off to his deadly sleep again. He quotes the Scriptures to back up his excuse, and perhaps reminds us of the words of the Lord Jesus himself—"No man cometh to me except the Father who hath sent me draw him." To which we reply that the words of our Lord are always very weighty with us, and we would not wrest one of them for a moment; but our Lord explains his own words in another place, where he says, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." So then the sinner's inability lies in his will; it is because he will not that he cannot. Let every sinner be assured of this, and let his conscience confirm the truth of the statement. Hearken, O unbeliever, you have said, "I cannot believe," but it would be more honest if you had said, "I *will not* believe." The mischief lies there. Your unbelief is your fault, not your misfortune. It is a disease, but it is also a crime: it is a terrible source of misery to you, but it is justly so, for it is an atrocious offense against the God of truth.

Let me take your unbelief to pieces, and show why it is that you cannot believe. The inability of many of you lies in the fact that *you do not care to think about the matter at all*. A great many of you do not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ because you do not care about your souls, or see the importance of being saved. You give your minds to your business, your pleasure, or your sin: you dream that there is time enough yet to think of heavenly things, and you think them to be of secondary importance. This is the source of a large proportion of ordinary unbelief. Let any man who disbelieves the Bible, for instance, answer this question,—Did you ever candidly read that book with the view of seeing for yourself whether or no it is the book of God? Did you ever sit down seriously to study the evidences of its being the revelation of God? It is very seldom that

any infidel can be found who will say "yes" to that question. They rail at what they do not understand, and condemn off-hand what they have never studied. Is this right?

Many, however, say, "Oh, yes, I believe the Bible, I believe it is God's book, I believe the gospel to be God's gospel." Why, then, do you not believe in Jesus? It must be because you do not think the gospel message important enough to be obeyed; and in so doing you are giving God the lie practically, for you tell him that your soul is not so precious as he says it is, neither is your state so perilous as he declares it to be. You are dying; the doctor says, "Here is a medicine which will cure your disease; it is the only medicine that will save your life, and you will die if you do not take it." Suppose you do not take the medicine, I shall be right in saying that however you may view the matter, you give that physician the lie direct in the most practical manner. You do not say in so many words, "I am not as bad as you say I am." You do not say, "I do not believe in your medicine," but, by refusing to take it, you say so most unmistakeably. The physician will quite understand your action, even if you do not speak a sentence, and, as he sees you die before his eyes, he will feel that your death lies at your own door. In refusing to come to the gospel feast you do as good as tell the Lord that he makes too much of it, that he makes heaven and earth ring with the glory of it, but in your esteem your farm and your merchandise are far more worthy of attention. You by your neglect of the great salvation declare that you are not in any pressing danger, and do not stand in urgent need of a Savior; you also say that the pardon of sin, the favor of God, and a good hope of heaven are not worthy to be sought first and above all other things, neither is Jesus the chief among ten thousand, nor is his love needful to make you truly happy. In all these points and many others your carelessness gives the Lord the lie.

A second reason of the sinner's inability to believe lies in the fact that *the gospel is true*. "No," you reply, "that is precisely why we would believe it." Yes, but what does Jesus say in John 8:45? he says, "Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not." Strange reason for not believing a statement!—because it is true! Yet there are thousands of individuals whose capacity for believing a lie is enormous, but their ability for accepting truth appears to have gone from them. When religious impostures have arisen the very men who have heard the gospel from their youth up, and have not received it because it is true, have become dupes of imposition at once. The truth did not suit their nature, which was under the dominion of the father of lies, but no sooner was a transparent lie brought under their notice than they leaped at it at once like a fish at a fly. The monstrous credulity of unbelief amazes me! I meet with persons who consider themselves to be bold thinkers and philosophers, and they express their astonishment that I can really believe the things which I preach: but no sooner do I learn from them what their positive creed is, than the astonishment comes to be on my side, and is a thousand times greater than theirs could be. The faith which accepts Christ has but a small throat indeed compared with that credulity which believes for instance in the development of man from a protoplasm—that creed requires the swallow of the great fish which swallowed Jonah entire. A lie ye will believe, but because the gospel is true ye do not believe it. "You give us a bad character," says one. It is your true character. Some of you are so in the habit of accepting no teaching but that which chimes in with your depraved tastes and sceptical notions, that because the gospel is true, and therefore comes across your vitiated tastes, you cannot endure it. If we were to trim it a little, and cut it down, and make it suit you, you would accept it; but in the name of the everlasting God we assure you we will not do it: we dare not do it for God's sake, nor even for your sakes, for to preach to you another gospel would only be to deceive you.

There are persons who do not receive the gospel because *it is despised among men*. The gospel is sneered at by the great ones of the earth, and the mass of mankind ridicule it, and therefore cowards turn their backs upon it. If princes and great men followed after the truth then there might be something in it, but are not believers in Jesus generally a poor company? Do you not

virtually say, "I cannot believe God's witness alone, but I would believe it if a learned professor or a great lord would add his testimony." What did they say in Christ's day? "Have any of the rulers believed? "The opinions of the rulers were evidently more considered than the witness of the blessed God. We know a certain class of people who always ask, "Is it fashionable?" And there are others of another class who cautiously inquire, "What do the men in our shop think about it? "They set more store by the judgment of men than by the declarations of God. They will believe their fellow creatures, who are as fallible as themselves, but God they will not believe. Let me tell you that even if you were after a fashion to believe God because his testimony is supported by the great ones of the earth, or by the many around you, it would not be believing God at all, it would at bottom resolve itself into believing the testimony of men. Sinner, this is no small offense, to be ready to accept the verdict of your fellow men, but not ready to accept the declaration of your God.

Many, however, do not receive the gospel because *they are much too proud to believe it*. The gospel is a very humbling thing. It says to the sinner, "Now, sir, you have no merits of your own, and what is more you have no power to obtain merit in the future." The man claims to have been temperate, chaste, honest, and generous, but the gospel says to him, "You have broken God's law, and you are condemned for it." All that you have done was but your duty, and cannot avail to blot out your shortcomings in other respects. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," so says the book which cannot err (James 2:10). If you are to be saved, you must be saved as a sinner, or not at all, for Christ has not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. You must be saved through the merits of another, and washed from sin in the precious blood of Jesus; your own works must not have a finger in it, it must be by grace, and grace alone. Of course the proud man cannot believe that; he turns his back upon it in scorn. Why cannot he believe it? Because he will not believe it, he is so proud that it offends him, it goes against the grain, and he will not endure it. Many of you must confess that you do not like the gospel, because it does not leave you room to stow away your pride. If it said to you, "Attend to the sacraments," why, you would be baptized to-morrow and come to the Lord's Table, if that would save you; and if I were allowed to preach that if any man walked barefooted from his house to the Land's End he would be saved, you would start off this afternoon, wet as it is. If there were any great thing for you to do you would do it, but because there is nothing for you to do but to accept what another has done, you will not have it. Your detestable pride is at the bottom of your rejection of free grace. If this is the secret of your inability, does it excuse you? Does it not make your offense the greater?

Another reason why men cannot believe God's testimony concerning Jesus, lies *in the holiness of the gospel*. If the gospel came to them and said, "You can confess your sins and obtain absolution, and then go and sin again," would not that suit many of you? That is the religion for sinful men! Do you think there ever will be a time when such teaching will cease to be popular? It is a most attractive religion the devil himself could invent, and it shows his genius in lying. Confess your sin to a priest, pay a shilling, get absolved, and go away and live as you like till next time. Rub sin off as you go along with a little penance. Human nature rejoices in that religion. But the gospel says to the man, "You must forsake your evil ways. What is more, the very nature that suggests these sins must be changed. You must be born again." The gospel cries, "Repent." Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him. The gospel proclaims Jesus, who saves men *from* their sins, but you do not want that. The impurity of your hearts is that which makes it hard to believe a pure gospel.

O souls, I pray you, look at this truth. When you say, "I cannot believe," it is either because you are too careless, or else because your nature itself is too deceitful and too impure to accept the

truth. It would be easy enough to believe if these things were gone. Do the angels find it difficult to believe? Would pure spirits find it difficult to believe? No, your sin lies at the foundation of your unbelief; it is the root which beareth this wormwood. We cannot expect a spendthrift to believe in the excellence of economy, or a vicious man to believe in the pleasures of chastity. Loose men even deny that any one is pure. What an opinion bad men have of all mankind! Why think they so ill of others? Because they judge them by themselves. When a dove flies over a landscape it sees the clear streams and the fields of corn; but when a vulture passes over the same landscape what does it see? A dead horse here and there, a carcass, or a piece of carrion. Everybody sees according to his eyes. A graceless, impure minded man cannot see purity. Christ said to the proud Pharisees, "How can ye believe that receive honor one of another?" Their pride stood in the way; and in every case in which a man declares concerning the Lord Jesus, "I cannot believe" the difficulty is in himself, and not in the facts to be believed, nor in the evidence of those facts. There is one excuse for unbelief, and only one. "How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" "That excuse will avail for the heathen, but not for you, for you have heard and read about Jesus, and know the gospel, so that the only excuse that can be accepted is not for you. Of you it must be said, "He that believeth not hath made him a liar."

II.

Secondly, I must now come to closer quarters, and DESCRIBE THE NATURE OF THE SIN OF UNBELIEF, in that it makes God a liar. I will take many forms of it, and show this to be the case.

Those are guilty of this sin who deny that Jesus is the Messiah, the promised Savior, the Son of God. Out of heaven God himself declared, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Peter truly said at Pentecost (Acts 2:22) that Jesus of Nazareth was "a man approved of God by miracles, and signs, and wonders, which God did by him." God says in many ways "he is my beloved Son," and if you say he is not you make God a liar. That is clear enough.

Some there be who deny his deity. Now, over and over in Scripture we are told that Jesus Christ is "God manifest in the flesh." "The Word was God." "By him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible" (Colossians 1:16). He is "called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God." The miracles which Christ wrought, and especially his resurrection from the dead, all prove his deity, the Father bearing witness that he is his equal and his fellow. When a man says that Jesus is not God, and the Father says he is, the lie direct is given; but, as I believe there are very few of that kind of unbelievers here, I will leave such persons and pass on.

A poor trembling, weeping sinner comes to me, and amongst other things he says, "My sins are so great, that I do not believe they can be pardoned." I meet him thus. God says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "But, Sir, my sin is very great indeed." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "But my transgressions have been exceedingly aggravated." "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Sir, I cannot believe it." Stand up, then, and tell the Lord so in the plainest manner,— "O God, thou hast said thou wilt abundantly pardon, but it is a lie." I challenge you to make that avowal outright, for you are making it in your hearts. It is idle to deny it, for it is so. God says, "I will and I can pardon," and you say he cannot—what is that but accusing the Lord of falsehood?

Another will say, "Oh, but my heart is so hard I cannot believe in the power of God to make a new man of me, and deliver me from the love of sin." Yet God declares in his word, "A new heart also will I give them, and a new spirit will I put within them. I will take away the heart of stone out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh." That is what God says. "It cannot be," say

you. Very well, then, do not deny it, you give God the lie. God says, "I can;" you say he cannot. There is your position.

In many there exists a doubt about the willingness of God to save. They say, "I believe that the blood of Jesus Christ does blot out sin, but is he willing to pardon me?" Now, listen to what Jehovah says, for he says it with an oath, and to me it is a very startling thing that God should swear, he swears by himself, because he can swear by no greater. Mark that! "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but had rather that he turn unto me and live." Over and over again, in all sorts of shapes, he gives us assurance that he delighteth in mercy. Now, then, sinner, if you say God is unwilling, and Christ is unwilling, and yet the Lord swears that he is willing, and Christ dies to prove it—what, then, is your unbelief? I hardly like to utter what I feel I must say—you do deliberately charge God with perjury, and what could the greatest blasphemer out of hell, or the blackest devil in hell do more than that? That is exactly what you have done, and are doing now.

"Alas," cries one, "my ground for doubt is deeper, I hear that God can pardon, regenerate, and all that, and I believe it, but then I cannot see that any of this is for me. I do not see that these things are sent for me." Listen, then, to what God says, "**Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, let him come buy wine and milk.**" You adroitly reply, "But I do not thirst." More shame for you then! Listen again— "**Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**" "But I do not labor." Do not labor? How do you get your living? I am sorry for you if you are such a lazy man that you have no labor. That text includes every laboring man and every heavy laden man under heaven. Listen yet again, "**Whosoever will, let him come.**" Does not that invite every living man who is willing to come? If you say, "I am not willing," then I leave you, for you confess that you are unwilling to be saved, unwilling to be reconciled to God, and that is exactly what I am trying to prove—you cannot believe, because you are unwilling to do so. On your own head be your blood. I do not know what more I can say to you; you must be mad to be willing to incur the flames of hell and the wrath of God for ever. It is not for me to comfort you when you are in such a condition as that: if you choose your own destruction, why, so must it be. Yet hear me once again. Jesus has said to his disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Are you a creature? "Yes, I am a creature." Well, man, God has put it as plain as it can be put, that the gospel is to be preached to you, and, therefore, it has a relation to you. Would God send it to you to tantalize you? When you say, "It is not for me," you give God the lie. He says it is for "every creature;" and you know you are a creature, how then dare you say it is not for you? In speaking thus, you accuse the Lord of trifling with you and mocking you.

"Well," says one, "but I cannot see how simply trusting in Christ, and believing God's witness of him, would save my soul." My dear man, are you never to believe anything but what you can see, and how are you to see this thing till you have tried it? A physician says "that medicine will heal you." The patient replies, "I want to see that it does heal me before I take it." The man is a fool, and so are you if that is how you trifle with God. You must believe the gospel on the evidence of God, and not otherwise, or your faith is not faith in God at all. The faith which he commanded in the gospel is faith in the record which God has given concerning his Son, a faith which takes God at his word. Believe then, on the Lord Jesus Christ and you have believed God to be true: refuse to trust in Jesus Christ, unless you get some other evidence beyond the witness of God, and you have practically said that God's testimony is not enough, that is to say, you have made God a liar.

Many a time I have heard men say, "Oh, but I cannot believe it, it seems so wonderful." Is not that why you should believe it? What should come from the glorious Lord but that which is wonderful. He is glorious in holiness, fearful in praise, doing wonders.

Another cries out "that it is too good to be true." Ah, poor soul, but have you never read, "As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts"? A less salvation would not avail for you, nor glorify God. Some feel that the gospel is too simple. They want a more complicated system than— "believe and live." How can it be too simple for finite minds like ours? Then I have heard them turn round and say, "It is too mysterious," and yet after all where is this mystery? "**Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.**" What can be more plain than that? Anyhow, dear friends, let me say to you, whether it is a mystery or not, God bears witness to it, and if you do not believe it you make God a liar. Whether you think it too simple, or too good, or too wonderful, or too anything, you must either believe God or make him a liar, there is no third course; for, be it simple or mysterious, wonderful or commonplace, the Lord asserts it to be true, and if you refuse his witness you make him a liar, and must take the consequences.

III.

And now I pray the Holy Spirit to rest upon my words while I treat for a few minutes upon the third most awful point, namely, THE EXECRATION OF THIS SIN. To disbelieve God is a sin indeed! It was the mother sin of all, the door by which all other evil came into the world. The devil whispered in the ear of mother Eve, "Yea, hath God said?" That insinuated doubt commenced our fall; and when that had tarnished the brightness of her intellect, the fiend added, "Ye shall not surely die"—giving God the lie direct; when she believed him, and her husband joined her in it, our ruin was complete. Unbelief of God turned our race out of Eden, and in consequence we are born in sore travail, and plough the ground with toil. Oh, accursed unbelief! It is time thou wert hung up on a gallows high as that of Haman! Alas, that any man should hug thee to his heart! Thou destroyer of our race, thou art loathsome indeed! When the children of Israel were in the wilderness journeying towards Canaan, how was it that so many graves were dug in the desert, and that out of six hundred thousand footmen who came out of Egypt only two survived to enter the promised land? Who slew all these? The inspired apostle tells us, "They could not enter in because of unbelief." Go ye at this day to Jerusalem, look beneath the buildings of the modern town, and mark the excavations which reveal the utter ruin of the holy city. See how fully the prophecy was fulfilled that not one stone should remain upon another. Stand upon the steepes of Zion and ask, "Who destroyed this fair city? Who burned her holy and beautiful house with fire? She was beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, who cast her down to the dust, and why? The palaces of David and Solomon are overthrown, and the ploughshare has been driven over their foundations—why all this? Why was the siege of Jerusalem the most bloody and horrible in all history? "It was because the Jews rejected the Messiah, and would not believe the testimony of the living God. O, accursed unbelief! It spits its venom against the holy God, and he cannot but abhor it. How can the absolutely true submit to be charged with falsehood? This sin of making God a liar I do pray you look at it very solemnly, for it is a stab at God himself. What is it that would most easily provoke yourself? If a person stole your goods, if he smote you in your person, if he injured you in business, you might bear it patiently, but when a man tells you to your face that he cannot believe you, the insult is acutely felt. You are not truthful if you can be content to be called a liar. Nothing stings like it: it is the unkindest cut of all. Oh, do not tell me that you find it difficult to believe my word, for that will cut me to the quick; yet would I a thousand times rather have you treat me thus than offer the same insult to the Lord my God.

Then, remember, this unbelief insults God on a very tender point. He comes to the guilty sinner and says, "**I am ready to forgive.**" The sinner says, "I do not believe thee." "Hear me," says the Lord, "What proof do you ask? See, I have given my only-begotten Son, he has died upon the tree to save sinners." "Still I do not believe thee," says the unbeliever. Now, what further evidence can

be given? Infinite mercy has gone its utmost length in giving the Savior to bleed and die: God has laid bare his inmost heart in the wounds of his dying Son, and still he is not believed. Surely, man has reached the climax of enmity to God in this: nothing proves the utter baseness of man so much as this refusal to believe his God, and nothing proves so much the greatness of almighty grace as that God should after all this condescend to work faith in a heart so depraved. O miracle of sin! O greater miracle of love!

I would have you recollect that you are not only giving God the lie once or twice, but you deny what he has over and over again declared. To tell a man that he is a liar once is a great insult, but if he continues to asseverate the truth and you still contradict him, the provocation gathers force. If the man be perfectly truthful, it is a piece of wickedness on your part to refuse him credence when he repeats his evidence again and again: but the Lord has gone further than repeating his word, he has sworn it, and yet you will not believe him. I pray you remember that you are in the presence of God at this very moment, and that the Lord is now looking right into your heart, and sees clearly that in your inmost soul your unbelief is saying to him, "O God, the maker of heaven and earth, thou art a liar. O God, who gave thy Son to die, I do believe that fact, but I will not even now trust thee. I do not believe in thy power or willingness to pardon me, though thy word very clearly declares thee to be both able and willing. Thou hast promised to forgive all who in thy Son believe, but I cannot believe. Thou art ready now at once to put away sin from every man that believes thy witness with regard to Christ, but I do not believe thy witness; thou liest." I know you shudder at such sentiments, and there is good need that you should; but why do you continue to act upon them? Did I not hear some one say, "Ah, sir, I have been *trying to believe* for years." Terrible words! They make the case still worse. Imagine that after I had made a statement, a man should declare that he did not believe me, in fact, he could not believe me though he would like to do so. I should feel aggrieved certainly; but it would make matters worse if he added, "In fact, I have been for years trying to believe you, and I cannot do it." What does he mean by that? What can he mean but that I am so incorrigibly false, and such a confirmed liar, that though he would like to give me some credit, he really cannot do it? With all the effort he can make in my favor, he finds it quite beyond his power to believe me? Now, a man who says, "I have been trying to believe in God," in reality says just that with regard to the Most High. How idle is it to talk of trying to believe! If a statement is true, a right judgment believes it, not of choice, but because the evidence commands faith. The *trying* lies in the other direction: men do not want to believe the truth, therefore they are careless and negligent, they raise quibbles and questions, they demand signs and wonders, and feelings, and impressions; they struggle against the evidence, they shut out the light. In you who believe the Bible to be God's word, and yet are unbelievers, it is evidently so; for if Jesus be the Savior why do you not believe him? The talk about trying to believe is a mere pretence. But whether pretence or no, let me remind you that there is no text in the Bible which says, "*Try and believe*," but it says "***Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.***" He is the Son of God, he has proved it by his miracles, he died to save sinners, therefore trust him; he deserves implicit trust and child-like confidence. Will you refuse him these? Then you have maligned his character and given him the lie.

IV.

I shall leave this matter when I have, with a heavy burden on my soul, said a few words upon THE FATE OF THE UNBELIEVER. If this man continues to say he cannot believe God, and that Christ is not to be trusted, what will happen to him? I wonder what the angels think must befall a being who calls God a liar. They see his glory, and as they see it they veil their faces, and cry, "Holy, holy, holy;" what horror would they feel at the idea of making God untrue! The saints in heaven when they see the glory of God fall down on their faces and adore him. Ask them what they think must happen to those who persist in calling God a liar, and a liar in the matter of his mercy to rebels through Jesus Christ. As for me, I cannot conceive any punishment too severe for

final unbelief. Only this I know, it is written, "He that believeth not shall be damned." May you never know what that means, but you will know it as sure as you live if you continue in unbelief. God is not a liar, but if he does not damn the man who dies an unbeliever he will be; and therefore depend upon it he will do it. He has said, "**He that believeth not shall be damned**": if he be false he may let you escape, but if he be true he will cast you into hell. There is nothing else before you. The other day an enquirer said to me, "I cannot believe," and I gave him no answer but this—"then you must be damned." Had I nothing else to say? No, nothing else; I had no comforts to offer, no hopes to present to an unbeliever. "**He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.**" There is an honest intolerance about these words of our Lord; he does not stammer and hesitate and say, "I fear some ill may occur to you;" but he says outright that you will be damned. Nothing on earth or in heaven can save you except you believe in Jesus. You may knock at a thousand doors, and you may cry, and pray, and groan, and agonize, and sweat, ay, even to drops of blood, but there is only one door to heaven, and that door is faith in Jesus Christ. If you will not enter by that door God himself will not open another. God has been pleased to empty out the infinite mercy of his heart into the person of his dear Son, and he cries, "**Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely**": but, if Jesus be rejected by you, and God's witness about him be refused, do not look for any other help. Think you that God has another son who will die for you? You would not believe in him if he had. Do you think he will alter the whole plan of salvation and the covenant of grace, and reverse the purposes of his wisdom to gratify your wicked whims? That were to make him an accomplice in your wickedness and a patron of your insolence. Believe me, he will keep his word, and if you believe not in Christ, you shall be utterly ashamed at the last great day.

The last word I have to say is this, not only will the unbeliever be lost, but he will be lost by his unbelief. Thus saith the Lord, "**He that believeth not is condemned already.**" Why? "**Because he hath not believed on the Son of God.**" Has he not committed a great deal else that will condemn him? Oh, yes, a thousand other sins are upon him, but justice looks for the most flagrant offense, that it may be written as a superscription over his condemned head, and it selects this monster sin and writes "**condemned, because he hath not believed on the Son of God.**" When the Spirit of God came into the world to convince men of sin, he began by convincing them of the greatest of all. Which did he choose as the most glaring? "Of sin because they believed not on me." I am only telling you what I find in the Scriptures. Certain brethren will say, "This sermon is not orthodox." I care nothing for their criticism: what I have advanced is God's word, and God's word against any man's word all the world over. His word is sharper than a two-edged sword, and I pray him to make it cut to your very marrow this morning,—to wound and kill that afterwards Christ may make alive. If any one of you should be finally cast into the prison of despair, to suffer in hell the wrath of God, the accusation which will appear over your condemned cell will run thus, "This man knew the gospel to be true, and yet he would not believe it." That thought will torture you with a vengeance, "**I am condemned because I believed not the truth, because I made my God a liar, because I trusted not in Christ. He told me it would be so, and it is so. This is the sting of it all, that for my unbelief I am justly left to perish.**" Oh, dear hearers, belie the Lord not. By your reason which is yet left to you, by your love to yourselves, by heaven and by hell, by the bleeding wounds of Jesus, and by the truth of God, I entreat you accept Jesus. May the Holy Ghost go with my entreaties that your souls may relent, that your stony hearts may melt before the cross, and you may receive Jesus Christ to be your all in all this day.

Amen and Amen.

(This article available in booklet form.)

Thoughts on Unbelief

Ebenezer Erskine

"He that believeth not, is condemned already."—John 3:18

Faith is a shield that beats back the fiery darts of Satan; so unbelief is a shield that beats back all the good motions of the Spirit of God. Faith is the victory by which we overcome the world; unbelief is the victory by which the world overcomes us.

1. See hence a very relevant reason, why ministers of the gospel harp so much upon the subject of faith or believing. Why, it is for unbelief, that sinners are condemned already; and there is no way to free them from this sentence, but by bringing them to believe in the Son of God. Unbelief is the main pillar of the devil's kingdom; and therefore the main batteries of the gospel must be raised against it. It is but at best a foolish ignorant cavil of some against ministers, Why so much insisting upon faith? are not other things as necessary to be preached? I answer, Other things are necessary in their own place, but faith or believing in the first place: and till we bring you to believe, we do nothing at all, this being the laying of the foundation of all religion; and, you know, it is foolish to think or speak of rearing up a superstructure, till the foundation be once laid. Can we ever make you accepted of God without faith in his Son? No, surely, "Without faith it is impossible to please him:" we are "justified by faith without the works of the law." Can we ever make you the members of Christ without faith? No, this is the very bond of the soul's union with him; "Christ dwells in our hearts by faith." Can we ever make you the children of God who are by nature the children of wrath, without faith? No, "We are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." It is to them who *receive him*, that *he gives power or privilege to become the sons of God* (John 1:12). Let us press and inculcate the duties of holiness with ever such flourishing harangues of rhetoric, we shall never make you holy, till we once land you in Christ by faith, he being the fountain and root of holiness; therefore said to be "made of God unto us sanctification." In one word, whatever duties we inculcate upon you, we only call you to build castles in the air, to build a tower without a bottom, unless we first bring you to Christ by that faith which is of God's operation.

2. See hence the miserable and mournful condition of the generality of gospel-hearers; they are a company of condemned men, under sentence of death. O that God may dart home an arrow of conviction on the hearts of unbelieving sinners, and persuade them of the truth of my doctrine, that every unbeliever is condemned already. I am sure it is true, whether you believe it or not; and you shall find it to be so, sooner or later. O sirs! here is a hand-writing against you, that may make the joints of your loins to loosen, and your knees to smite one against another: **HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT, IS CONDEMNED ALREADY.** And, that I may, if possible, awaken you to some serious thought and concern about this matter, will you consider whose sentence it is? It is none other than God's sentence of condemnation. It is somewhat awful and terrible, to be arraigned and condemned at the bar of man; what then must it be to be condemned at **JEHOVAH'S** bar? The Judge is omniscient; "his eyes are as a flame of fire;" he "setteth our secret sins in the light of his countenance," so that the crime cannot be concealed from him: his justice is unbiassed; his eye cannot be blinded with bribes: the arm of his power cannot be stayed from the execution of the sentence. What a fearful thing is it to fall into the hands of this living God? He is indeed *a consuming fire*. The solemnity of the bench adds terror to the criminal; and you may see with what solemnity the bench is to be reared, before which you and I must stand ere long, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit

upon the throne of his glory" (Matt 25:31). O! whither will the unbeliever fly for help? or where will he leave his glory at that day? If hills and mountains could cover him, he would choose far rather to be buried under them, than appear before the face of the Lamb, when he comes to ride his circuit as the universal Judge of all the earth. You may read your doom, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41). The sentence being passed, there can be no stop in the execution; the Judge will have his officers at hand, an innumerable host of angels, all ready for this service: these reapers shall gather the tares, bind them in bundles, and burn them. The Judge will stand and see the sentence executed before his face, saying, "Those mine enemies which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27). Among all the innumerable multitudes of angels, men, and devils, who shall be spectators of the righteous execution, there shall be no eye to pity; and the reason is, because the sinner willfully, through unbelief, slighted Christ the only Saviour, and refused to accept of pardon and redemption through his blood. Who will pity the traitor, who dies for his treason, rejecting his prince's pardon presented to him to the last? Christ would have gathered you, as the hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not; and therefore ye must die without pity, and without remedy.

3. See hence how fitly the gospel is called a joyful sound, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound" (Psa 89:15). Among other reasons why it gets that denomination this is none of the least; it brings a proclamation of life to the sons of death, a sound of liberty to the captive, and of pardon to the poor sinner condemned already. One, would think that the very hint of a pardon to a condemned criminal, would make his heart to leap within him for joy: but, alas! sad experience tells us, that the gospel, which brings such "glad tidings of great joy" to condemned sinners, meets with a very cool reception from the generality, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isa 53:1).

4. See hence how ill-grounded the joy and triumph of a Christless unbelieving world is. We would think that man, beside himself, who, being under sentence of death, and to be brought forth in a little to the place of execution, would spend any little time he has, in eating, drinking, dancing, and revelling. Yet this is the very case with the generality; they take up the timbrel and harp, rejoice at the sound of the organ; they spend their days in wealth and ease, without ever thinking that they are condemned already by the great God. All I shall say, to stop your career at present, is this: the triumphing of the *unbelieving sinner* is short, and his joy but for a moment. You may, indeed, "kindle a fire, and compass yourselves about with sparks: but this shall ye have of the Lord's hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow" (Isa 50:11).

5. See hence how much we are obliged to Christ, who came to save us from this heavy sentence of death we were under: "he came not into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." He himself was condemned, that we might be acquitted. Judgment passed upon him, that it might not pass against us. He was made a curse, to redeem us from the curse of the law. When Adam had entailed death and condemnation upon us, and all his posterity; Christ comes, and by his obedience to death, cuts off that entail, procuring our justification. "As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom 5:18). O believer, acknowledge thy obligations to the Son of God; for if he, as thy Surety, had not paid thy debt, thou hadst been condemned to the prison of hell for it for ever.

6. See hence that it is every man's duty and interest to examine and try, whether he be under this heavy sentence yea, or not. It is a miserable thing to be under sentence of death, and to know nothing of it. Neither will a man ever seek to be freed from it, till he be convinced that he is

indeed under it. I shall give you the few following characters of such as are under sentence of condemnation.

1st, You who never yet saw yourselves to be condemned in the court of the law and conscience for sin, and particularly for the sin of unbelief, you are surely under sentence of death to this day; for the first work of the Spirit, when he comes to liberate a poor soul from condemnation, is to "convince the world of sin; of sin, because they believe not on him" (John 16:8,9).

2dly, You whose minds are so blinded with ignorance and prejudice against Christ, that you "can see no form or comeliness in him," notwithstanding of the bright displays of his glory that are made to us in the word." If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor 4:3,4).

3rdly, You, who are yet wedded to the law as a covenant, and are seeking life and righteousness by that first husband, you are, to this moment, under the sentence of death; for, "as many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." If you never knew what it is to be dead to the law by the body of Christ, to have as little hope of life and salvation by the law and its works, as though you had never done any one duty commanded by the law in your whole life, you are yet married to the law as a husband, consequently, under the law's sentence. Yea, I will adventure to say, that the legalist, or self-righteous person, is a step farther off from heaven and eternal life, than the grossest of sinners; for "publicans and harlots," says Christ, "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven before you."

4thly, You who cast off the obligation of the law as a rule of obedience, under a pretended hope of being saved by grace, without the works of the law. *All practical Antinomianism, who are following the swing of their own lusts, are under the power of unbelief, and consequently condemned already, away with lying, swearing, drinking, whoring believers. Will you pretend to be the people of a holy God, the members of a holy Jesus, the federates of a holy covenant, the heirs of an undefiled inheritance, and yet wallow in your sins, or yet retain any known iniquity in your hearts? No, no. To such, not I, but God himself saith, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee."* O sirs, they that are dead to the law as a covenant, are so far from casting off its obligations as a rule of duty, that they bind it about them as an ornament, choosing it for a light to their feet, and a lamp to their paths. We are not without law to God, when under the law to Christ. The law is so dear and sweet to a true believer, that it is his meditation day and night. *O how love I thy law!* says David: as if he had said, I love it so well, that I cannot tell how well I love it: "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times" (Psa 119:20).

7. Is it so that every unbeliever is a condemned criminal before God? O, then, be concerned at your hearts to get rid of that dismal sentence you are under. What can be matter of concern, if this be not? I come, in the name of God, to tell you, that this is not impossible; yea, I dare go farther, and tell you, that if you will but *hear, your souls shall live*, and not die under that condemnatory sentence which is gone forth against you. I dare promise you not only a reprieve, but a remission; for thus saith the great Judge, as a reconciled God in Christ, to the poor trembling panel, standing condemned before the bar of his holy law; "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa 43:25). Here is an act of grace passed at a throne of grace, sealed with the blood of the Lamb, published and proclaimed in the tops of the high places, that none may pretend ignorance, and that every condemned sinner may take the

benefit of it, and come in upon the King's royal indemnity, granted upon the satisfaction made to justice by his eternal Son. O, then, sirs, "Hear, and your souls shall live, and he will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isa 55:3), "O earth, earth, earth, hear this word of the Lord."

I come not to tell you how you may be rich, great, and honourable in the world; these things are but trifles to people in your circumstances. Should you come to a condemned man, and talk to him of riches, honours, crowns, robes, sceptres and kingdoms: Alas! would he be ready to say, what is all that to me? I am a poor man going into another world within a few hours; if you can tell me how I may save my life, or how I may get rid of my sentence, chains, prison, you will say something to the purpose. This is the very case with thee, O sinner; for "by the offence of one, judgment is come upon all men to condemnation." And, therefore, O poor criminal, listen, lend me a believing ear for a few moments, and I will tell thee how infallibly thou shalt make thy escape.

Quest. O, may the poor criminal say, how is that? I answer, I have no advice to give thee but one; it is an old advice, a new advice, and the only advice that can be given while the world stands; it is the very same which Paul and Silas gave to a poor panel, trembling at God's bar, crying, "What must I do to be saved?" The plain advice they gave him, I give this day to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31): agreeably to which are the words of Christ himself, in the first part of the verse, where my text lies, "He that believeth on the Son of God is not condemned;" and verse 16: "Whosoever believeth in him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

Quest. You advise us to believe in Christ; but pray tell us what is it to believe in him? You have the answer in your Catechism: To believe, is to "receive Christ, and to rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel;" or, in other words, it is to trust and credit him, as the Saviour of sinners, with the salvation of thy lost soul, upon the warrant of his own call and command in the word. Christ's business and occupation is to save that which was lost. Now, you all know what it is to trust a man in his trade and occupation; you who have some business at law, know what it is to trust your advocates with your most valuable concerns, and the whole management of your cause depending before the judges. Well, in like manner, to believe, is, upon the credit of God's testimony concerning Christ in the word, to trust him, as the Saviour of sinners, with the salvation of thy own soul in particular. This, I say, is the business, the office, and occupation of Christ, to save sinners; and he is so fond of employment in his trade of saving, that he says, "Come to me who will, I will in no wise cast out." And, therefore, trust in him in his occupation; put thy condemned soul in the hands of the sinner's Saviour, for that is to believe in him and on him. O, what a happy suitable meeting is it, when the sinner and the Saviour of sinners thus meet together! Some have a notion, when we bid them believe, we bid them do some great thing as the condition of salvation. But this is a mistake. Believing is a resting from works in point of salvation, and a resting on Christ alone for salvation from sin, and all the effects of it. It is to receive a salvation already completed and prepared to your hand, and brought near to you in the word of grace. But I must not stand farther in describing faith at present.

Quest. What influence (may you say) will our believing have upon our being delivered from this condemnatory sentence we are under? *Answ.* Much every way. For,

1. That moment thou believest, thou becomest a member of Christ, as a new covenant head.

While under the power of unbelief, thou art a member of the lust Adam, and consequently under Adam's covenant, which is a cursing and condemning covenant to all who are under it, "judgment being come upon all men to condemnation," through Adam's breach of it; but in believing, thou

becomest a member of Christ, the second Adam, the head of the new covenant, the covenant of grace and promise, which contains nothing but blessings to the soul that takes hold of it, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). It is not said, there is nothing culpable or condemnable in the believer; but there is no condemnation to him; he is no more liable to the penalties of Adam's covenant, Christ, his glorious Surety, having endured these in his room and stead; and it were inconsistent with justice, to demand payment of the same debt, both from the cautioner and principal debtor.

2. To clear this yet farther, the poor soul, in believing, is married to a new husband, even Christ; and being under his roof, the covert of his blood and righteousness, the condemning law call have no action against it, this new and better husband having made his spouse free indeed, by the imputation of his law-magnifying righteousness "Ye are dead to the law by the body of Christ (or, by the offering of his body on the cross,) that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." (Rom 7:4) He does that for us, which the law could not do, through the corruption of nature; particularly, "condemns sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." And if the law have its end, and be fulfilled as the believer, by virtue of his union and marriage with the Son of God, how can he be liable to condemnation, or any law penalties?

3. That moment the condemned sinner believes in Christ, he is entered heir of a new family, a member of a new corporation: he is come, not to Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion; not to the earthy Jerusalem, which is in bondage, but to the heavenly Jerusalem, which is free. He is "no more a stranger and foreigner, but a fellow-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God." He comes in among the general assembly, and church of the first-born. He becomes an "heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ;" and the inheritance is settled upon him by a charter, which contains no irritant clauses. No, no: having *taken hold of God's covenant* by faith, he hath *a name and a place within the walls of God's house, even an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off*; and therefore must needs be free from the condemnatory sentence he lay under before he believed.

4. That moment you believe, your cause is carried into a new court; I mean, from a tribunal of justice to a mercy-seat, where all the acts and interlocutors that pass are acts of grace and mercy, acts of pardon and acceptance in the beloved. No sentences of condemnation pass in the court of grace: no; this is inconsistent with the nature of the court. O let every guilty sinner, who finds himself condemned in the court of the law, and of conscience, carry his cause, by a solemn appeal, to this court; for the court is open to all comers, and the Lord merciful and gracious, who sits upon this throne of grace, receives all appeals that are made to him, and will in no wise cast out the sinner, or cast his appeal over bar. O, therefore, "let us come with boldness unto a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in time of need."

Quest. But (may you say) if matters stand thus with a believer, that he cannot fall under the sentence of the law, cannot come into condemnation, then he may live as he lists. Does not this doctrine open a wide door for licentiousness and profanity? for if once a man be a believer, according to this doctrine, he has nothing to fear, and so may do what he will. Were it not better for ministers to forbear doctrines that are liable to such abuse? I answer,

1. The whole counsel of God must be revealed, and not one hoof of divine truth must be suppressed, though a whole reprobate world should break their necks on it, by wresting it to their own destruction. The gospel will be the savour of death unto some; Christ crucified will be a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. But shall we because of this, forbear to preach Christ,

and his gospel? God forbid; we must not starve God's children, out of fear lest dogs snatch at it to their own perdition.

2. I own, that a carnal gospeller, who has some swimming notions of the grace of God in his head, may abuse the doctrine of the believer's freedom from condemnation by virtue of his union with Christ: but the grace of God in the heart teaches the very reverse of this, namely, to "deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

3. Though the believer be delivered from the law as a covenant, and its condemnatory sentence, through Christ, yet it does not in the least pave a way to licentiousness; because at the same time that he is absolved and acquitted from his obligation to the law as a covenant, he comes under stronger and more powerful ties than ever to yield obedience to it as a rule of duty.

I shall conclude by naming a few of these bonds of obedience the believer remains under, even when delivered from condemnation.

1st, He is still under the bond of the royal authority of the great God, both as a Creator and Redeemer. The authority and obligation of the divine law can never be dissolved, while God is God, and the creature a creature.

2ndly, He is under the bond of interest, to obey the divine law. It is true, his obedience does not give him the title-to the reward of glory; it is only his union with Christ, the heir of all things, that gives him this; but yet his own personal obedience is evidential and declarative of his title through Christ. And is it not much for the believer's interest, to have his claim to glory and everlasting life cleared up and made evident to his own soul? In this sense I understand that word, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gate into the city" (Rev 22:14).

3rdly, He is still under the bond of fear "I will put my fear in their hearts that they shall not depart from me" (Jer 32:40). This is not a slavish fear of hell and vindictive wrath, for that is inconsistent with his freedom from condemnation: but is a filial fear of God as a Father, flowing from an affectionate regard to his authority, interposed in the commands of the law. Though they be not afraid of being cast into hell; yet they "fear him who is able to cast soul and body into hell." Though they have no reason to fear him as an avenging and condemning Judge; yet they have much reason to fear him as a fatherly Judge, lest he "visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes;" for, pass who will unpunished, they shall not pass: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

4thly, He is under the bond of love. He studies to love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, strength, and mind; and this love of God in Christ, like a strong cord, draws him on in the way of obedience, "I drew them with the cords of love:" "The love of Christ constraineth us," says Paul. This love laid in the believer's heart has such a force and power with it, "that many waters cannot quench it, neither are all floods able to drown it" (Song 8:7; Rom 8:35, 39).

5thly, He is under the bond of gratitude; being bought with a price, he studies to glorify God in soul and body, which are his. Christ leaving delivered him from the hand of his enemies, he serves the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of his life. The believer, when delivered from the hand of the condemning law, says to Christ, as the men of Israel did to Gideon, "Rule thou over us; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of our enemies"(Judg 8:22). Suppose a king should not only pardon a rebel, but restore him his forfeited inheritance, advance him to the highest places of honour about the throne; yea, make him his son, his heir, and set him

upon the throne with himself: would not that man be under a far greater obligation to serve and obey the king, than if he had never received such singular favours at his hand? There is no bond of obedience like the bond of gratitude to an ingenuous spirit.

6thly, He is under the bond of a renewed nature. The man is made a partaker of the divine nature, by which the life of God, the love of God, and the law of God, is laid in his very heart; and this is a mighty bond to obedience "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts" (Heb 8:10). It is engraved there with the finger of the holy Ghost: his heart is cast into a divine mould, moulded into the will of God, his will of brace, his will of precept, and his will of providence; so that he "delights in the law of God, after the inward man. The law of his God is in his heart," and therefore "none of his steps shall slide."

Lastly, The inhabitation of the Holy Ghost is another efficacious bond to obedience: "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." (Eze 36:27) This law of the Spirit of life, which is in Christ Jesus, makes them "free from the law of sin and death." And being *led by the Spirit*, they do not *fulfil the lusts of the flesh*. To conclude, that very grace of God which frees them from the law as a covenant, binds them to it as a rule. (Tit 2:11, 12).

These are some gospel bonds of obedience: and you who never knew what it is to have your souls under the sweet influence of these, but only obey the law with a view to purchase a title to heaven, or to redeem your souls from hell and wrath, I, in the name of God, pronounce the heavy doom of my text against you, he that believeth not, is condemned already.

(This article take from the sermon "*Unbelief Arraigned and Condemned at the Bar of God*" by Ebenezer Erskine.)

Giant Despair

Alexander Whyte

"A wounded spirit who can bear?" —*Solomon*

Every schoolboy has the story of Giant Despair memorized. The rough road after the meadow of lilies, the stile into By-Path-Meadow, the night coming on, the thunder and the lightning and the waters rising amain, Giant Despair's apprehension of Christian and Hopeful, their dreadful bed in his dungeon from Wednesday morning till Saturday night, how they were famished with hunger and beaten with a grievous crab-tree cudgel till they were not able to turn, with many other sufferings too many and too terrible to be told which they endured till Saturday about midnight, when they began to pray, and continued in prayer till almost break of day;—John Bunyan is surely the best story-teller in all the world. And, then, over and above that, as often as a boy reads Giant Despair and his dungeon to his father and mother, the two hearers are like Christian and Hopeful when the Delectable shepherds showed them what had happened to some who once went in at By-Path stile: the two pilgrims looked one upon another with tears gushing out, but yet said nothing to the shepherds.

John Bunyan's own experience enters deeply into these terrible pages. In composing these terrible pages, Bunyan writes straight and bold out of his own heart and conscience. The black and bitter essence of a whole black and bitter volume is crushed into these four or five bitter pages. Last week I went over *Grace Abounding* again, and marked the passages in which its author describes his own experiences of doubt, diffidence, and despair, till I gave over counting the passages, they are so many. I had intended to illustrate the passage before us to-night out of the kindred materials that I knew were so abundant in Bunyan's terrible autobiography, but I had to give up that idea. It would have taken two or three lectures to itself to tell all that Bunyan suffered all his life long from an easily-wounded spirit. The whole book is just Giant Despair and his dungeon, with a gleam here and there of that sunshiny weather that threw the giant into one of his fits, in which he always lost for the time the use of his limbs. Return often, my brethren, to that masterpiece, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. I have read it a hundred times, but last week it was as fresh and powerful and consoling as ever to my sin-wounded spirit.

Let me select some of the incidents that offer occasion for a comment or two.

1. And, in the first place, take notice, and lay well to heart, how sudden, and almost instantaneous, is the fall of Christian and Hopeful from the very gate of heaven to the very gate of hell. All the Sunday and the Monday and the Tuesday before that fatal Wednesday, the two pilgrims had walked with great delight on the banks of a very pleasant river; that river, in fact, which David the King called the river of God, and John, the river of the water of life. They drank also of the water of the river, which was pleasant and enlivening to their weary spirits. On either side of the river was there a meadow curiously beautified with lilies, and it was green all the year long. In this meadow they lay down and slept, for here they might lie down and sleep safely. When they awoke they gathered again of the fruits of the trees, and drank again of the water of the river, and then lay down again to sleep. Thus they did several days and nights. Now, could you have believed it that two such men as our pilgrims were could be in the enjoyment of all that the first half of the week, and then by their own doing should be in Giant Despair's deepest dungeon before the end of the same week? And yet so it was. And all that is written for the solemn warning of those who are at any time in great enlargement and refreshment and joy in their spiritual life. It is intended for all those who are at any time revelling in a season of revival: those, for example, who are just come home from Keswick or Dunblane, as well as for all those who at home have just made the discovery of some great master of the spiritual life, and who are almost beside themselves with their delight in their divine author. If they are new beginners they will not take this warning well, nor will even all old pilgrims lay it aright to heart; but there it is as plain as the plainest, simplest, and most practical writer in our language could put it.

Behold ye how these crystal streams do glide
To comfort pilgrims by the highway side;
The meadows green, besides their fragrant smell,
Yield dainties for them: And he that can tell
What pleasant fruits, yea leaves, these trees do yield,
Will soon sell all that he may buy this field.

Thus the two pilgrims sang: only, adds our author in a parenthesis, they were not, as yet, at their journey's end.

2. Now, I beheld in my dream that they had not journeyed far when the river and the way for a time parted. At which the two pilgrims were not a little sorry.' The two pilgrims could not perhaps be expected to break forth into dancing and singing at the parting of the river and the way, even though they had recollected at that moment what the brother of the Lord says about our

counting it all joy when we fall into divers temptations. But it would not have been too much to expect from such experienced pilgrims as they by this time were, that they should have suspected and checked and commanded their sorrow. They should have said something like this to one another: Well, it would have been very pleasant had it been our King's will and way with us that we should have finished the rest of our pilgrimage among the apples and the lilies and on the soft and fragrant bank of the river; but we believe that it must in some as yet hidden way be better for us that the river and our road should part from one another at least for a season. Come, brother, and let us go on till we find out our Master's deep and loving mind. But, instead of saying that, Christian and Hopeful soon became like the children of Israel as they journeyed from Mount Hor, their soul was much discouraged because of the way. And always as they went on they wished for a softer and a better way. And it was so that they very soon came to the very thing they so much wished for. For, what is that on the left hand of the hard road but a stile, and over the stile a meadow as soft to the feet as the meadow of lilies itself? 'Tis just according to my wish,' said Christian; 'here is the easiest going. Come, good Hopeful, and let us go over.' Hopeful: 'But how if the path should lead us out of the way?' 'That's not like,' said the other; 'look, doth it not go along by the wayside?' So Hopeful, being persuaded by his fellow, went after him over the stile.

Call to mind, all you who are delivered and restored pilgrims, that same stile that once seduced you. To keep that stile ever before you is at once a safe and a seemly occupation of mind for any one who has made your mistakes and come through your chastisements. Christian's eyes all his after-days filled with tears, and he turned away his face and blushed scarlet, as often as he suddenly came upon any opening in a wall at all like that opening he here persuaded Hopeful to climb through. It is too much to expect that those who are just mounting the stile, and have just caught sight of the smooth path beyond it, will let themselves be pulled back into the hard and narrow way by any persuasion of ours. Christian put down Hopeful's objection till Hopeful broke out bitterly when the thunder was roaring over his head and he was wading about among the dark waters: 'Oh that I had kept myself in my way!' Are you a little sorry to-night that the river and the way are parting in your life? Is your soul discouraged in you because of the soreness of the way? And as you go do you still wish for some better way than the strait way? And have you just espied a stile on the left hand of your narrow and flinty path, and on looking over it is there a pleasant meadow? And does your companion point out to your satisfaction, and, almost to your good conscience, that the soft road runs right along the hard road, only over the stile and outside the fence? Then, good-bye. For it is all over with you. We shall meet you again, please God; but when we meet you again, your mind and memory will be full of shame and remorse and suffering enough to keep you in songs of repentance for all the rest of your life on earth. Farewell!

The Pilgrims now, to gratify the flesh,
Will seek its ease; but oh! how they afresh
Do thereby plunge themselves new grieves into:
Who seek to please the flesh themselves undo.

3. The two transgressors had not gone far on their own way when night came on and with the night a very great darkness. But what soon added to the horror of their condition was that they heard a man fall into a deep pit right before them, and it sounded to them as if he was dashed to pieces by his fall. So they called to know the matter, but there was none to answer, only they heard a groaning. Then said Hopeful: Where are we now? Then was his fellow silent, as mistrusting that he had led Hopeful out of the way. Now, all that also is true to the very life, and has been taken down by Bunyan from the very life. We have all heard men falling and heard them groaning just a little before us after we had left the strait road. They had just gone a little farther wrong than we had as yet gone,—just a very little farther; in some cases, indeed, not so far, when they fell and were dashed to pieces with their fall. It was well for us at that dreadful moment that

we heard the same voice saying to us for our encouragement as said to the two trembling transgressors: 'Let thine heart be toward the highway, even the way that thou wentest; turn again.' Now, what is it in which you are at this moment going off the right road? What is that life of disobedience or self-indulgence that you are just entering on? Keep your ears open and you will hear hundreds of men and women falling and being dashed to pieces before you and all around you. Are you falling of late too much under the power of your bodily appetites? It is not one man, nor two, well known to you, who have fallen never to rise again out of that horrible pit. Are you well enough aware that you are being led into bad company? Or, is your companion, who is not a bad man in anything else, leading you, in this and in that, into what at any rate is bad for you? You will soon, unless you cut off your companion like a right hand, be found saying with misguided and overruled Hopeful: Oh that I had kept me to my right way! And so on in all manner of sin and trespass. Those who have ears to hear such things hear every day one man after another falling through lust or pride or malice or idleness or infidelity, till there is none to answer.

4. 'All hope abandon' was the writing that Dante read over the door of hell. And the two prisoners all but abandoned all hope when they found themselves in Giant Despair's dungeon. Only, Christian, the elder man, had the most distress because their being where they now were lay mostly at his door. All this part of the history also is written in Bunyan's very heart's blood. 'I found it hard work,' he tells us of himself, 'to pray to God because despair was swallowing me up. I thought I was as with a tempest driven away from God. About this time I did light on that dreadful story of that miserable mortal, Francis Spira, a book that was to my troubled spirit as salt when rubbed into a fresh wound; every groan of that man with all the rest of his actions in his dolours, as his tears, his prayers, his gnashing of teeth, his wringing of hands, was as knives and daggers in my soul, especially that sentence of his was frightful to me: "Man knows the beginning of sin, but who bounds the issues thereof?"' We never read anything like Spira's experience and Grace Abounding and Giant Despair's dungeon in the books of our day. And why not, do you think? Is there less sin among us modern men, or did such writers as John Bunyan overdraw and exaggerate the sinfulness of sin? Were they wrong in holding so fast as they did hold that death and hell are the sure wages of sin? Has divine justice become less fearful than it used to be to those who rush against it, or is it that we are so much better men? Is our faith stronger and more victorious over doubt and fear? Is it that our hope is better anchored? Whatever the reason is, there can be no question but that we walk in a liberty that our fathers did not always walk in. Whether or no our liberty is not recklessness and licentiousness is another matter. Whether or no it would be a better sign of us if we were better acquainted with doubt and dejection and diffidence, and even despair, is a question it would only do us good to put to ourselves. When we properly attend to these matters we shall find out that, the holier a man is, the more liable he is to the assaults of doubt and fear and even despair. We have whole psalms of despair, so deep was David's sense of sin, so high were his views of God's holiness and justice, and so full of diffidence was his wounded heart. And David's Son, when our sin was laid upon Him, felt the curse and the horror of His state so much that His sweat was in drops of blood, and His cry in the darkness was that His God had forsaken Him. And when our spirits are wounded with our sins, as the spirits of all God's great saints have always been wounded, we too shall feel ourselves more at home with David and with Asaph, with Spira even, and with Bunyan. Despair is not good, but it is infinitely better than indifference. 'It is a common saying,' says South, 'and an observation in divinity, that where despair has slain its thousands, presumption has slain its ten thousands. The agonies of the former are indeed more terrible, but the securities of the latter are far more fatal.'

5. 'I will,' says Paul to Timothy, 'that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands without doubting.' And, just as Paul would have it, Christian and Hopeful began to lift up their hands even in the dungeon of Doubting Castle. 'Well,' we read, 'on Saturday night about

midnight they began to pray, and continued in prayer till almost break of day. Now, before it was day, good Christian, as one half amazed, broke out in this passionate speech: "What a fool," quoth he, "am I thus to lie in a stinking dungeon when I may as well walk at liberty; I have a key in my bosom, called *Promise*, that will, I am persuaded, open *any* lock in all Doubting Castle." Then said Hopeful: "That's good news, good brother; pluck it out of thy bosom and try.'" Then Christian pulled the key out of his bosom and the bolt gave back, and Christian and Hopeful both came out, and you may be sure they were soon out of the giant's jurisdiction.

Now, I do not know that I can do better at this point, and in closing, than just to tell you about some of that bunch of keys that John Bunyan found from time to time in his own bosom, and which made all his prison doors one after another fly open at their touch. 'About ten o'clock one day, as I was walking under a hedge, full of sorrow and guilt, God knows, and bemoaning myself for my hard hap, suddenly this sentence bolted in upon me: The blood of Christ remits all guilt. Again, when I was fleeing from the face of God, for I did flee from His face, that is, my mind and spirit fled before Him; for by reason of His highness I could not endure; then would the text cry: Return unto Me; it would cry with a very great voice: ***Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.*** And this would make me look over my shoulder behind me to see if I could discern that this God of grace did follow me with a pardon in His hand. Again, the next day, at evening, being under many fears, I went to seek the Lord, and as I prayed, I cried, with strong cries: O Lord, I beseech Thee, show me that Thou hast loved me with an everlasting love. I had no sooner said it but, with sweetness, this returned upon me as an echo or sounding-again, ***I have loved thee with an everlasting love.*** Now, I went to bed at quiet; also, when I awaked the next morning it was fresh upon my soul and I believed it . . . Again, as I was then before the Lord, that Scripture fastened on my heart: O man, great is thy faith, even as if one had clapped me on the back as I was on my knees before God . . . At another time I remember I was again much under this question: Whether the blood of Christ was sufficient to save my soul? In which doubt I continued from morning till about seven or eight at night, and at last, when I was, as it were, quite worn out with fear, these words did sound suddenly within my heart: ***He is able.*** Methought this word ABLE was spoke so loud unto me and gave such a justle to my fear and doubt as I never had all my life either before that or after . . . Again, one morning, when I was at prayer and trembling under fear, that piece of a sentence dashed in upon me: ***My grace is sufficient.*** At this, methought: Oh, how good a thing it is for God to send His word! . . . Again, one day as I was in a meeting of God's people, full of sadness and terror, for my fears were again strong upon me, and as I was thinking that my soul was never the better, these words did with great power suddenly break in upon me: My grace is sufficient for thee, My grace is sufficient for thee, three times together; and, oh! methought that every word was a mighty word unto me; as MY, and GRACE, and SUFFICIENT, and FOR THEE. These words were then, and sometimes still are, far bigger words than others are. Again, one day as I was passing in the field, and that, too, with some dashes in my conscience, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul: ***Thy righteousness is in heaven.*** And methought withal I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand. I saw also, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor my bad frame that made my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever . . . Again, oh, what did I see in that blessed sixth of John: ***Him that cometh to Me I will in nowise cast out.*** I should in those days often flounce toward that promise as horses do toward sound ground that yet stick in the mire. Oh! many a pull hath my heart had with Satan for this blessed sixth of John . . . And, again, as I was thus in a muse, that Scripture also came with great power upon my spirit: ***Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.*** Now was I got on high: I saw my self within the arms of Grace and Mercy, and though I was before afraid to think of a dying hour, yet now I cried: Let me die. Now death was lovely and beautiful in my sight; for I saw that we shall never live indeed till we be

gone to the other world. Heirs of God, methought, heirs of God! God himself is the portion of His saints. This did sweetly revive my spirit, and help me to hope in God; which when I had with comfort mused on a while, that word fell with great weight upon my mind: ***Oh Death, where is thy sting? Oh Grave, where is thy victory?*** At this I became both well in body and mind at once, for my sickness did presently vanish, and I walked comfortably in my work for God again.'

Such were some of the many keys by the use of which God let John Bunyan so often out of despair into full assurance and out of darkness into light. Which of the promises have been of such help to you? Over what Scriptures have you ever cried out: Oh, how good a thing it is for God to send me His word! Which are the biggest words in all the Bible to you? To what promise did you ever flounce as a horse flounces when he is sticking in the mire? And has any word of God so made God your God that even death itself, since it alone separates you from His presence, is lovely and beautiful in your eyes? Have you a cluster of such keys in your bosom? If you have, take them all out to-night and go over them again with thanksgiving before you sleep.

(This article taken from Alexander Whyte's book "*Characters from Pilgrim's Progress.*")