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ALIVE OR DEAD?

"You hath he quickened who were dead."—Ephesians 2:1

This question deserves a thousand thoughts. Look at it carefully, and ponder it well. Search your own heart, and do not lay down this booklet without solemn self-inquiry. Are you among the living or the dead?¹

Listen to me while I try to help you to an answer, and show you what God has said about it in the Scriptures.

1. All Are Spiritually Dead

First then let me tell you that we are all by nature spiritually dead.

"Dead" is a strong word, but it is not my own coining and invention. I did not choose it. The Holy Ghost taught Paul to write it down about the Ephesians: "You hath he quickened who were dead" (Eph 2:1). The Lord Jesus Christ made use of it in the parable of the prodigal son: "This my son was dead and is alive again" (Luk 15:24, 32). You will read it also in the First Epistle to Timothy: "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1Ti 5:6). Shall a mortal man be wise above that which is written? Must I not take heed to speak that which I find in the Bible, and neither less nor more?

"Dead" is an awful idea, and one that man is most unwilling to receive. He does not like to admit the whole extent of his soul's disease; he shuts his eyes to the real amount of his danger. Many will allow us to say that naturally most people "are not quite what they ought to be: they are thoughtless, they are unsteady, they are gay, they are wild, they are not serious enough." But dead? Oh no! We must not mention it. It is going too far to say that. The idea is a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.

But what we like in religion is of very little consequence. The only question is, What is written? What saith the Lord? God's thoughts are not man's thoughts, and God's words are not man's words. God says of every living person who is not a real, thorough, genuine Christian, be he high or low, rich or poor, old or young—he is spiritually dead.

In this, as in everything else, God's words are right. Nothing could be said more correct, nothing more faithful, nothing more true. Let me reason this out with you.

What would you have said if you had seen Joseph weeping over his father Jacob? "He fell upon his face, and wept upon him, and kissed him" (Gen 50:1). But there was no reply to his affection. All about that aged countenance was unmoved, silent, and still. Doubtless you would have guessed the reason—Jacob was dead.

What would you have thought if you had met the widow's son in the gate of Nain, lying on a bier, wrapped about with grave-clothes, followed by his weeping mother, carried slowly towards the tomb? (Luk 7:12). No doubt it would have been all clear to you. It would have needed no explanation—the young man was dead.

Now I say this is just the condition of every man by nature in the matter of his soul. I say this is just the state of the vast majority of people around us in spiritual things. God calls to them continually—by mercies, by afflictions, by ministers, by His word—but they do not hear His voice. The Lord Jesus Christ mourns over them, pleads with them, sends them gracious invitations, knocks at the door of their hearts—but they do not regard it. The crown and glory of their being, that precious jewel, their immor-

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tal soul, is being seized, plundered, and taken away—and they are utterly unconcerned. The devil is carrying them away, day after day, along the broad road that leads to destruction—and they allow him to make them his captives without a struggle. And this is going on everywhere, all around us, among all classes, throughout the length and breadth of the land. You know it in your conscience while you read these words. You cannot deny it. And what then, I ask, can be said more perfectly true than that which God says: we are all by nature spiritually dead?

When a man's heart is cold and unconcerned about religion, when his hands are never employed in doing God's work, when his feet are not familiar with God's ways, when his tongue is seldom or never used in prayer and praise, when his ears are deaf to the voice of Christ in the Gospel, when his eyes are blind to the beauty of the kingdom of heaven, when his mind is full of the world, and has no room for spiritual things—when these marks are to be found in a man, the right word to use about him is the word "Dead."

We may not like this perhaps. We may shut our eyes to facts in the world and to texts in the Word. But God's truth must be spoken, and to keep it back does positive harm. Truth must be spoken, however condemning it may be. So long as a man does not serve God with body, soul, and spirit, he is not really alive. So long as he puts the first things last and the last first, buries his talent like an unprofitable servant, and brings the Lord no revenue of honour, in God's sight he is dead. He is not filling the place in creation for which he was intended; he is not using his powers and faculties as God meant them to be used. The poet's words are strictly true—

*"He only lives who lives to God,
And all are dead beside."*

This is the true explanation of sin not felt, and sermons not believed, and good advice not followed, and the Gospel not embraced, and the world not forsaken, and the cross not taken up, and self-will not mortified, and evil habits not laid aside, and the Bible seldom read, and the knees never bent in prayer. Why is all this on every side? The answer is simple—Men are dead.

This is the true account of that host of excuses, which so many make with one consent. Some have no learning, and some have no time. Some are oppressed with business and the care of money, and some with poverty. Some have difficulties in their own families, and some in their own health. Some have peculiar obstacles in their calling, which others, we are told, cannot understand; and others have peculiar drawbacks at home, and they wait to have them removed. But God has a shorter word in the Bible, which describes all these people. He says, They are dead. If spiritual life began in these people's hearts their excuses would soon vanish away.

This is the true explanation of many things which wring a faithful minister's heart. Many around him never attend a place of worship at all. Many attend so irregularly that it is clear they think it of no importance. Many attend once a Sunday who might just as easily attend twice. Many never come to the Lord's table, and never appear at a week-day means of grace of any kind. And why is all this? Often, far too often, there can be only one reply about these people—They are dead.

See now how all professing Christians should examine themselves and try their own state. It is not in churchyards alone that the dead are to be found; there are only too many inside our churches, and close to our pulpits, too many on the benches, and too many in the pews. The land is like the valley in Ezekiel's vision, "full of bones, very many, and very dry" (Eze 37:2). There are dead souls in all our parishes, and dead souls in all our streets. There is hardly a family in which all live to God; there is hardly a house in which there is not someone dead. Let us all search and look at home! Let us prove our own selves. Are we alive or dead?

How sad is the condition of all who have gone through no spiritual change, whose hearts are still the same as in the day they were born. There is a mountain of division between them and heaven. They have yet to "pass from death to life" (1Jo 3:14). Oh, that they did but see and know their danger! It is one fearful mark of spiritual death that, like natural death, it is not felt! We lay our beloved ones tenderly and gently in their narrow beds, but they feel nothing of what we do. "The dead," says the wise man, "know not anything" (Ecc 9:5). And this is just the case with dead souls.

See, too, what reason ministers have to be anxious about their congregations. We feel that time is short, and life uncertain. We know that death spiritual is the high road that leads to death eternal. We fear lest any of our hearers should die in their sins, unprepared, unrenewed, impenitent, unchanged. Marvel not if we often speak strongly and plead with you warmly! We dare not give you flattering titles, amuse you with trifles, say smooth things, and cry "Peace, peace," when life and death are at stake, and nothing less. The plague is among you. We feel that we stand between the living and the dead. We must and will "use great plainness of speech." "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?" (2Co 3:12; 1Co 14:8).

2. All Need to Be Made Alive

Let me tell you, in the second place, that every man needs to be quickened and made spiritually alive.

Life is the mightiest of all possessions. From death to life is the mightiest of all changes. And no change short of this will ever avail to fit man's soul for heaven.

It is not a little mending and alteration, a little cleansing and purifying, a little painting and patching, a little turning over a new leaf and putting on a new outside that is wanted. It is the bringing in of something altogether new, the planting within us of a

new nature, a new being, a new principle, a new mind; this alone, and nothing less than this, will ever meet the necessities of man's soul. We need not merely a new skin, but a new heart.

To hew a block of marble from the quarry and carve it into a noble statue, to break up a waste wilderness and turn it into a garden of flowers, to melt a lump of ironstone and forge it into watch-springs—all these are mighty changes. Yet they all come short of the change which every child of Adam requires, for they are merely the same thing in a new form, and the same substance in a new shape. But man requires the grafting in of that which he had not before. He needs a change as great as a resurrection from the dead; he must become a new creature. Old things must pass away, and all things must become new. He must be “born again”—born from above, born of God. The natural birth is no more necessary to the life of the body, than is the spiritual birth to the life of the soul (2Co 5:17; Joh 3:3).

I know well this is a hard saying. I know the children of this world dislike to hear that they must be born again. It pricks their consciences: it makes them feel they are further off from heaven than they are willing to admit. It seems like a narrow door which they have not yet stooped to enter, and they would gladly make the door wider, or climb in some other way. But I dare not give way in this matter. I will not foster a delusion and tell people they only need repent a little, and stir up a gift they have within them, in order to become real Christians. I dare not use any other language than that of the Bible; and I say, in the words which are written for our learning, “We all need to be born again; we are all naturally dead, and must be made alive.”

If we had seen Manasseh, King, of Judah, at one time filling Jerusalem with idols, and murdering his children in honour of false gods, at another purifying the temple, putting down idolatry, and living a godly life; if we had seen Zacchaeus, the publican of Jericho, at one time cheating, plundering, and covetous, at another following Christ, and giving half his goods to the poor; if we had seen the servants of Nero's household, at one time conforming to their master's profligate ways, at another of one heart and mind with the apostle Paul; if we had seen the ancient father Augustine, at one time living in fornication, at another walking closely with God; if we had seen our own reformer Latimer, at one time preaching earnestly against the truth as it is in Jesus, at another spending and being spent even to death in Christ's cause—if we had seen any of these wonderful changes, I ask any sensible Christian what we should have said. Should we have been content to call them nothing more than amendments and alterations? Should we have been satisfied with saying that Augustine had “reformed his ways,” and that Latimer had “turned over a new leaf”? If we said no more than this, the very stones would cry out. I say in all these cases there was nothing less than a new birth, a resurrection of human nature, a quickening of the dead. These are the right words to use. All other language is weak, poor, beggarly, unscriptural, and short of the truth.

Now I will not shrink from saying plainly, we all need the same kind of change, if we are to be saved. The difference between us and any of those I have just named is far less than it appears. Take off the outward crust, and you will find the same nature beneath, in us and them an evil nature, requiring a complete change. The face of the earth is very different in different climates, but the heart of the earth, I believe, is everywhere the same. Go where you will, from one end to the other, you would always find the granite, or other primitive rocks, beneath your feet, if you only bored down deep enough. And it is just the same with men's hearts. Their customs and their colours, their ways and their laws, may all be utterly unlike; but the inner man is always the same. Their hearts are all alike at the bottom—all stony, all hard, all ungodly, all needing to be thoroughly renewed. The Englishman and the heathen stand on the same level in this matter. Both are naturally dead, and both need to be made alive. Both are children of the same father Adam who fell by sin, and both need to be “born again,” and made children of God.

Whatever part of the globe we live in, our eyes need to be opened; naturally we never see our sinfulness, guilt, and danger. Whatever nation we belong to our understandings need to be enlightened; naturally we know little or nothing of the plan of salvation; like the Babel-builders, we plan to get to heaven our own way. Whatever church we may belong to, our wills need to be bent in the right direction; naturally we should never choose the things that are for our peace, we should never come to Christ. Whatever be our rank in life, our affections need to be turned to things above; naturally we only set them on things below, earthly, sensual, short-lived, and vain. Pride must give place to humility, self-righteousness to self-abasement, carelessness to seriousness, worldliness to holiness, unbelief to faith. Satan's dominion must be put down within us, and the kingdom of God set up. Self must be crucified, and Christ must reign. Till these things come to pass, we are dead as stones. When these things begin to take place, and not till then, we are alive.

I dare say this sounds like foolishness to some. But many a living man could stand up this day and testify that it is true. Many a man could tell us that he knows it all by experience, and that he does indeed feel himself a new man. He loves the things that once he hated, and hates the things that once he loved. He has new habits, new companions, new ways, new tastes, new feelings, new opinions, new sorrows, new joys, new anxieties, new pleasures, new hopes, and new fears. In short, the whole bias and current of his being is changed. Ask his nearest relations and friends, and they would bear witness to it. Whether they liked it or not, they would be obliged to confess he was no longer the same.

Many a person could tell you that once he did not think himself such a very great transgressor. At any rate he fancied he was no worse than others. Now he would say with the apostle Paul that he feels himself the “chief of sinners” (1Ti 1:15).

Once he did not consider he had a bad heart. He might have his faults, and be led away by bad company and temptations, but he had a good heart at the bottom. Now he would tell you, he knows no heart so bad as his own. He finds it “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9).

Once he did not purpose it was a very hard matter to get to heaven. He thought he had only to repent, and say a few prayers, and do what he could, and Christ would make up what was wanting. Now he believes the way is narrow, and few find it. He is convinced he could never have made his own peace with God. He is persuaded that nothing but the blood of Christ could wash away his sins. His only hope is to be “justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28).

Once he could see no beauty and excellence in the Lord Jesus Christ. He could not understand some ministers speaking so much about Him. Now he would tell you He is the pearl of great price, the chiefest among ten thousand, his Redeemer, his Advocate, his Priest, his King, his Physician, his Shepherd, his Friend, his All.

Once he thought lightly about sin. He could not see the necessity of being so particular about it. He could not think a man’s words, and thoughts, and actions, were of such importance, and required such watchfulness. Now he would tell you that sin is the abominable thing which he hates, the sorrow and burden of his life. He longs to be more holy. He can enter thoroughly into Whitefield’s desire, “I want to go where I shall neither sin myself, nor see others sin any more.”

Once he found no pleasure in the means of grace. The Bible was neglected. His prayers, if he had any, were a mere form. Sunday was a tiresome day. Sermons were a weariness, and often sent him to sleep. Now all is altered. These things are the food, the comfort, the delight of his soul.

Once he disliked earnest-minded Christians. He shunned them as melancholy, low-spirited, weak people. Now they are the excellent of the earth, of whom he cannot see too much. He is never so happy as he is in their company. He feels that if all men and women were saints, it would be heaven upon earth.

Once he cared only for this world, its pleasures, its business, its occupations, its rewards. Now he looks upon it as an empty, unsatisfying place, an inn, a lodging, a training-school for the life to come. His treasure is in heaven. His home is beyond the grave.

I ask once more, What is all this but new life? Such a change as I have described is no vision and fancy. It is a real, actual thing, which not a few in this world have known or felt. It is not a picture of my own imagining. It is a true thing which some of us could find at this moment near at hand. But wherever such a change does take place, there you see the thing of which I am now speaking—you see the dead made alive, a new creature, a soul born again.

I would to God that changes such as this were more common! I would to God there were not such multitudes, of whom we must say even weeping, that they know nothing about the matter at all. But, common or not, one thing I say plainly, this is the kind of change we all need. I do not hold that all must have exactly the same experience. I allow most fully that the change is different, in degree, extent, and intensity, in different persons. Grace may be weak, and yet true; life may be feeble, and yet real. But I do confidently affirm we must all go through something of this kind, if ever we are to be saved. Till this sort of change has taken place, there is no life in us at all. We may be living churchmen, but we are not Christians.

Some time or other, between the cradle and the grave, all who would be saved must be made alive. The words which good old Berridge had engraven on his tombstone are faithful and true “Reader! art thou born again? Remember! no salvation without a new birth.”

See what an amazing gulf there is between the man who is a Christian in name and form, and the one who is a Christian in deed and truth. It is not the difference of one being a little better, and the other a little worse than his neighbour; it is the difference between a state of life and a state of death. The meanest blade of grass that grows upon a highland mountain is a more noble object than the fairest wax flower that was ever formed, for it has that which no science of man can impart—it has life. The most splendid marble statue in Greece or Italy is nothing by the side of the poor sickly child that crawls over the cottage floor, for with all its beauty it is dead. And the weakest member of the family of Christ is far higher and more precious in God’s eyes than the most gifted man of the world. The one lives unto God, and shall live for ever; the other, with all his intellect, is still dead in sins.

You that have passed from death to life, you have reason indeed to be thankful! Remember what you once were by nature. Think what you are now by grace. Look at the dry bones thrown up from the graves. Such were you; and who has made you differ? Go and fall low before the footstool of your God. Bless Him for His grace, His free distinguishing grace. Say to Him often, “Who am I, Lord, that thou hast brought me hitherto? Why me? Why hast thou been merciful unto me?”

3. How a Dead Soul Is Made Alive

Let me tell you, in the third place, by what means a dead soul can be made spiritually alive.

Surely, if I did not tell you this, it would be cruelty to write what I have written. Surely, it would be leading you into a dreary wilderness, and then leaving you without bread and water. It would be commanding you to make bricks and yet refusing to provide you with straw. I will not do so. I will not leave you, till I have pointed out the wicket-gate towards which you must run. By God’s help, I will set before you the full provision there is made for dead souls.

One thing is very clear; we cannot work this mighty change ourselves. It is not in us. We have no strength or power to do it. We may change our sins, but we cannot change our hearts. We may take up a new way, but not a new nature. We may make considerable reforms and alterations. We may lay aside many outward bad habits, and begin to do many outward duties. But we cannot create a new principle within us. We cannot bring something out of nothing. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots. No more can we put life into our own souls (Jer 13:23).

Another thing is equally clear; no man can do it for us. Ministers may preach to us, and pray with us, receive us at the front in baptism, admit us to the Lord's table, and give us the bread and wine, but they cannot bestow spiritual life. They may bring in regularity in the place of disorder, and outward decency in the place of open sin, but they cannot go below the surface. They cannot reach our hearts. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase (1Co 3:6).

Who then can make a dead soul alive? No one can do it but God. He only who formed the world out of nothing in the day of creation, can make a new creature. He only who formed man out of the dust and gave life to his body can ever give life to his soul. His is the special office to do it by His Holy Spirit, and His also is the power.

The glorious Gospel makes provision for this. The Lord Jesus is a complete Saviour. That mighty living Head has no dead members. His people are not only justified and pardoned, but quickened together with Him, and made partakers of His resurrection. To Him the Spirit joins the sinner, and raises him by that union from death, to life. In Him the sinner lives after he has believed. The spring of all his vitality is the union between Christ and his soul, which the Spirit begins and keeps up. Christ is the appointed fountain of all spiritual life, and the Holy Ghost the appointed agent who conveys that life to our souls.

Come to the Lord Jesus Christ, if you would have life. He will not cast you out. The moment the dead man touched the body of Elisha, he revived and stood upon his feet (2Ki 13:21). The moment you touch the Lord Jesus with the hand of faith, you are alive unto God, as well as forgiven all your trespasses. Come, and your soul shall live.

I never despair of any one becoming a Christian, whatever he may have been in days gone by. I know how great the change is from death to life. I know the mountains of division that seem to stand between some of us and heaven. I know the hardness, the prejudices, the desperate sinfulness of the natural heart. But I remember that God the Father made this beautiful and well ordered world out of nothing. I remember the voice of the Lord Jesus could reach Lazarus when four days dead, and recall him even from the grave. I remember the amazing victories the Spirit of God has won in every nation under heaven. I remember all this, and feel that I never need despair. Those among us who now seem most utterly dead in sins, may yet be raised, and walk before God in newness of life.

The Holy Spirit is a merciful and loving Spirit. He turns away from no man because of his vileness. He passes by no one because her sins are black and scarlet.

There was nothing in the Corinthians that He should come down and quicken them. Paul says of them that they were "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners." "Such," he says, "were some of you." Yet even them the Spirit made alive. "Ye are washed," he writes, "ye are sanctified, ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God" (1Co 6:9-11).

There was nothing in the Colossians that He should visit their hearts. Paul tells us that "they walked in fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Yet them also the Spirit quickened. He made them "put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col 3:5-10).

There was nothing in Mary Magdalene that the Spirit should make her soul alive. Once she had been "possessed with seven devils." Yet even her the Spirit made a new creature, separated her from her sins, brought her to Christ, made her "last at the cross, and first at the tomb."

Never, never will the Spirit turn away from a soul because of its corruption. He never has done so and He never will. It is His glory that He has purified the minds of the most impure, and made them temples for His own abode. He may yet take the worst of men, and make him a vessel of grace.

The Spirit is an almighty Spirit. He can change the stony heart into a heart of flesh. He can break up and destroy the strongest bad habits, like tow in the fire. He can make the most difficult things seem easy, and the mightiest objections melt away like snow in spring. He can cut the bars of brass, and throw the gates of prejudice wide open. He can fill up every valley, and make every rough place smooth. He has done it often, and He can do it again.

The Spirit can take a Jew, the bitterest enemy of Christianity, the fiercest persecutor of true believers, the strongest stickler for Pharisaical notions, the most prejudiced opposer of gospel doctrine, and turn that man into an earnest preacher of the very faith he once destroyed. He has done so already. He did it with the apostle Paul.

The Spirit can take a Roman Catholic monk, brought up in the midst of Romish superstition, trained from his infancy to believe false doctrine and obey the Pope, steeped to the eyes in error, and make that man the clearest upholder of justification by faith the world ever saw. He has done so already. He did it with Martin Luther.

The Spirit can take an English tinker, without learning, patronage, or money, a man at one time notorious for nothing so much as blasphemy and swearing, and make that man write a religious book, which shall stand unrivalled and unequalled by any book since the time of the apostles. He has done so already. He did it with John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*.²

² *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress* – the Christian allegory has been in print continuously since its first printing in 1678, and is the best selling book of all time after the Bible. Available from Chapel Library.

The Spirit can take a sailor drenched in worldliness and sin, a profligate captain of a slave ship, and make that man a most successful minister of the gospel, a writer of letters, which are a storehouse of experimental religion, and of hymns which are known and sung wherever English is spoken. He has done it already. He did it with John Newton.

All this the Spirit has done, and much more, of which I cannot speak particularly. And the arm of the Spirit is not shortened. His power is not decayed. He is like the Lord Jesus, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever” (Heb 13:8). He is still doing wonders, and will do to the very end.

Once more, I say, I never despair of any man’s soul being made alive. I should if it depended on man himself. Some seem so hardened, I should have no hope. I should despair if it depended on the work of ministers. The very best of us are poor, weak creatures! But I cannot despair when I remember that God the Spirit is the agent who conveys life to the soul, for I know and am persuaded that with Him nothing is impossible..

I should not be surprised to hear, even in this life, that the hardest man in the list of my acquaintances has become softened, and the proudest has taken his place at the feet of Jesus as a weaned child.

I shall not be surprised to meet many on the right hand, in the day of judgment, whom I shall leave, when I die, travelling in the broad way. I shall not start, and say, “What! you here!” I shall only remind them, “Was not this my word, when I was yet among you? Nothing is impossible with Him that quickens the dead.”

Does any of us desire to help the Church of Christ? Then let him pray for a great outpouring of the Spirit. He alone can give edge to sermons, and point to advice, and power to rebukes, and can cast down the high walls of sinful hearts. It is not better preaching and finer writing that is wanted in this day, but more of the presence of the Holy Ghost.

Does any one feel the slightest drawing towards God, the smallest concern about his immortal soul? Then flee to that open fountain of living waters, the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall receive the Holy Ghost (Joh 7:39). Begin at once to pray for the Holy Spirit. Do not think that you are shut up and cut off from hope. The Holy Ghost is promised to “them that ask Him” (Luk 11:13). His very name is the Spirit of promise and the Spirit of life. Give Him no rest till He comes down and makes you a new heart. Cry mightily unto the Lord, say unto Him, “Bless me, even me also, quicken me, and make me alive.”

4. Are You Alive?

And now let me wind up all I have said with a few words of application.

A. First let me put this question to every reader: “Are you dead, or are you alive?”

Permit me, as an ambassador for Christ, to press the inquiry on every conscience. There are only two ways to walk in—the narrow and the broad; two companions in the day of judgment—those on the right hand, and those on the left; two classes of people in the professing church of Christ, and to one of them you must belong. Where are you? Are you among the living, or among the dead?

I speak to you yourself, and to none else, not to your neighbour, but to you, not to Africans or New Zealanders, but to you. I do not ask whether you are an angel, or whether you have the mind of David or Paul, but I do ask whether you have a well-founded hope that you are a new creature in Christ Jesus. I do ask whether you have reason to believe you have put off the old man and put on the new, whether you are conscious of ever having gone through a real spiritual change of heart, whether, in one word, you are dead or alive.

1). Do not put me off by saying that you were admitted into the Church by baptism, you received grace and the spirit in that sacrament—you must be alive. It shall not avail you. Paul himself says of the baptised widow who lives in pleasure, “She is dead while she liveth” (1 Tim. 5:6). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself tells the chief officer of the church in Sardis, “Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (Rev. 3:1). The life you talk of is nothing if it cannot be seen. Show it to me, if I am to believe its existence. Grace is light, and light will always be discerned. Grace is salt, and salt will always be tasted. An indwelling of the Spirit which does not show itself by outward fruits, and a grace which men’s eyes cannot discover, are both to be viewed with the utmost suspicion. Believe me, if you have no other proof of spiritual life but your baptism, you are yet a dead soul.

2). Do not tell me that it is a question that cannot be decided, and that you call it presumptuous to give an opinion in such a matter. This is vain refuge, and a false humility. Spiritual life is no such dim and doubtful thing as you seem to fancy. There are marks and evidences by which its presence may be discerned by those who know the Bible. “We know,” says John, “that we have passed from death unto life” (1 John 3:14). The exact time and season of that passage may often be hidden from a man. The fact and reality of it will seldom be entirely an uncertain thing. It was a true and beautiful saying of a Scottish girl to Whitefield, when asked if her heart was changed: she knew something was changed, it might be the world, it might be her own heart, but there was a great change somewhere, she was quite sure, for every thing seemed different from what it once did. Oh, cease to evade the inquiry! Are you dead or alive?

3). Do not reply that you do not know. You agree it is a matter of importance; you hope to know some time before you die; you mean to give your mind to it when you have a convenient season; but at present you do not know.

You do not know! Yet heaven or hell is wrapped up in this question. An eternity of happiness or misery hinges upon your answer. You do not leave your worldly affairs so unsettled. You do not manage your earthly business so loosely. You look far forward. You provide against every possible contingency. You insure life and property. Why not deal in the same way with your immortal soul?

You do not know! Yet all around you is uncertainty. You are a poor frail worm, your body fearfully and wonderfully made, your health liable to be put out of order in a thousand ways. The next time the daisies bloom, it may be over your grave. All before you is dark. You know not what a day may bring forth, much less a year. Why not bring your soul's business to a point without delay?

Let every reader begin the great business of self-examination. Rest not till you know the length and breadth of your own state in God's sight. Backwardness in this matter is an evil sign. It springs from an uneasy conscience. It shows that a man thinks ill of his own cause. He feels, like a dishonest tradesman, that his accounts will not bear inquiry. He dreads the light.

In spiritual things, as in everything else, it is the highest wisdom to make sure. Take nothing for granted. Do not measure your condition by that of others. Bring everything to the measure of God's Word. A mistake about your soul is a mistake for eternity. "Surely," says Leighton, "they that are not born again, shall one day wish they had never been born."

Sit down this day and think. Commune with your own heart and be still. Go to your own room and consider. Contrive to be alone with God. Look the question fairly, fully, honestly in the face. How does it touch you? Are you among the living or among the dead?

B. In the second place, let me speak in all affection to those who are dead.

What shall I say to you? What can I say? What words of mine are likely to have any effect on your hearts?

This I will say, I mourn over your souls. I do most unfeignedly mourn. You may be thoughtless and unconcerned. You may care little for what I am saying. You most scarcely run your eye over my words, and after reading them you may despise them and return to the world; but you cannot prevent my feeling for you, however little you may feel for yourselves.

Do I mourn when I see a young man sapping the foundations of his bodily health by indulging his lusts and passions, sowing bitterness for himself in his old age? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

Do I mourn when I see men squandering away their inheritance, and wasting their property on trifles and follies? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

Do I mourn when I hear of one drinking slow poisons, because they are pleasant, as the Chinese take opium, putting the clock of his life on, as if it did not go fast enough, and inch by inch digging his own grave? Much more then will I mourn over your souls.

I mourn to think of golden opportunities thrown away, of Christ rejected, of the blood of atonement trampled under foot, of the Spirit resisted, the Bible neglected, heaven despised, and the world put in the place of God. I mourn to think of the present happiness you are missing, the peace and consolation you are thrusting from you, the misery you are laying up in store for yourselves, and the bitter waking up which is yet to come.

I must mourn. I cannot help it. Others may think it enough to mourn over dead bodies. For my part, I think there is far more cause to mourn over dead souls. The children of this world find fault with us sometimes for being so serious and grave. Truly, when I look at the world, I marvel we can ever smile at all.

To every one who is dead in sins I say this day, Why will you die? Are the wages of sin so sweet and good that you cannot give them up? Is the world so satisfying that you cannot forsake it? Is the service of Satan so pleasant that you and he are never to be parted? Is heaven so poor a thing that it is not worth seeking? Is your soul of so little consequence that it is not worth a struggle to have it saved? Oh, turn! turn before it is too late! God is not willing that you should perish. "As I live," He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." Jesus loves you, and grieves to see your folly. He wept over wicked Jerusalem, saying, "I would have gathered thee, but thou wouldst not be gathered." Surely, if lost, your blood will be upon your own head. "Awake and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light" (Eze 18:32; Mat 23:37; Eph 5:14).

Believe me, true repentance is that one step that no man ever regretted. Thousands have said at their latter end, they had "served God too little". No child of Adam ever said, as he left this world, that he had cared for his soul too much. The way of life is a narrow path, but the footsteps in it are all in one direction: not one child of Adam has ever come back and said it was a delusion. The way of the world is a broad way, but millions have forsaken it, and borne their testimony that it was a way of sorrow and disappointment.

C. Let me, in the third place, speak to those who are living.

Are you indeed alive unto God? Can you say with truth, "I was dead, and am alive again; I was blind, but now I see"? Then see that you prove it by your actions. Be a consistent witness. Let your words, and works, and ways, and tempers all tell the same story. Let not your life be a poor torpid³ life, like that of a tortoise or a sloth; let it rather be an energetic stirring life, like that of a deer or bird. Let your graces shine forth that those who live near you may see that the Spirit is abiding in your hearts. Let your light not be a dim, flickering, uncertain flame; let it burn steadily, like the eternal fire on the altar, and never become low. Let your Christianity

³ torpid – deprived of the power of motion or feeling; benumbed.

be so unmistakable, your eye so single, your heart so whole, your walk so straightforward that all who see you may have no doubt whose you are, and whom you serve. If we are quickened by the Spirit, no one ought to be able to doubt it. It ought not to be necessary to tell people, as in the case of a badly painted picture, "This is a Christian." We ought not to be so sluggish and still that men shall be obliged to come close and look hard and say, "Is he dead or alive?"

Are you alive? Then see that you prove it by your growth. Let the great change within become more evident. Let your light be an increasing light, not like Joshua's sun in the valley of Aijalon, standing still (Jos 10:12), nor like Hezekiah's sun, going back (2Ki 20:9-11), but ever shining more and more to the very end of your days. Let the image of your Lord, wherein you are renewed, grow clearer and sharper every month. Let it not be like the image and superscription on a coin, more indistinct and defaced the longer it is used. Let it rather become more plain the older it is, and let the likeness of your King stand out more fully and sharply.

I have no confidence in a standing-still religion. I do not think a Christian was meant to be like an animal, to grow to a certain age, and then stop growing. I believe rather he was meant to be like a tree, and to increase more and more in strength and vigour all his days. Remember the words of the apostle Peter: "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity" (2Pe 1:5-7). This is the way to be a useful Christian. Men will believe you are in earnest when they see constant improvement, and perhaps be drawn to go with you. This is one way to obtain comfortable assurance. "So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly" (2Pe 1:11). If ever you would be useful and happy in your religion, let your motto be, "Forward, forward!" to your very last day.

