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## THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

#212

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## THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

**Archibald Alexander (1772-1851)**

**I**T is a matter of serious regret that young people<sup>1</sup> are commonly so little disposed to listen to the advice of the aged...But it is greatly to be desired that the lessons of wisdom taught by the experience of one set of men should be made available for the instruction of those who come after them. We have therefore determined to address a few short hints of advice to the rising generation on subjects of deep and acknowledged importance to all. But previously to commencing, we would assure them that it is no part of our object to interfere with their innocent enjoyments or to deprive them of one pleasure that cannot be shown to be injurious to their best interests. We wish to approach you, dear youth, in the character of affectionate friends, rather than in that of dogmatical<sup>2</sup> teachers or stern reprovers. We would therefore solicit<sup>3</sup> your patient, candid, and impartial attention to the following counsels:

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<sup>1</sup> **EDITOR'S NOTE:** Several articles in this issue of the FGB originally addressed young men, young women, or children. To render the articles more useful for all readers, the term *young people* often appears instead of those three designations. Similarly, *person* sometimes replaces *man, woman, boy, and girl*. This is no surrender to feminism: the Biblical counsel found in all the articles of this issue is profitable for either sex.

<sup>2</sup> **dogmatical** – overbearing; dictatorial.

<sup>3</sup> **solicit** – earnestly ask.

**AIM AT CONSISTENCY IN YOUR CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.** There is a beauty in moral consistency that resembles the symmetry of a well-proportioned building, where nothing is deficient, nothing redundant.<sup>4</sup> Consistency can only be acquired and maintained by cultivating every part of the Christian character...We are not very frequently permitted to witness a character well-proportioned and nicely balanced in all its parts: while in one branch, there is vigor and even exuberance,<sup>5</sup> in another there may be the appearance of feebleness and sterility.<sup>6</sup> The man who is distinguished for virtues of a particular class is apt to be deficient in those that belong to a different class...Men are frequently found whose zeal blazes out ardently and conspicuously, so as to leave most others far back in the shade, while they are totally destitute of that humility, meekness, and brotherly kindness that form an essential part of the Christian character. Some people are conscientious and punctilious<sup>7</sup> in the performance of all the rites and external duties connected with the worship of God. [Yet they] are inattentive to the obligations of strict justice and veracity<sup>8</sup> in their [dealings] with others. On the other hand, many boast of their morality and yet are notoriously inattentive to the duties of the Christian faith.<sup>9</sup>

Real Christians, too, are often chargeable with inconsistency. [This] arises from a lack of clear discernment of the rule of moral conduct in its application to particular cases. While the general principles of duty are plain and easily understood by all, the ability to discriminate between right and wrong in many complicated cases is extremely rare. This delicate and correct perception of moral relations can only be acquired by the divine blessing...It is too commonly taken for granted that Christian morals are a subject so easy that all close study of it is unnecessary. *This is an injurious mistake!* Many of the deficiencies and inconsistencies of Christians are owing to a lack of clear and correct knowledge of the exact rule of moral conduct. On no subject will you find a greater diversity of opinion than concerning the lawfulness or unlawfulness of particular practices. Even good men are often thrown into difficulty and doubt respecting the proper course to be pursued.

But while many cases of inconsistency arise from ignorance of the exact standard of rectitude,<sup>10</sup> more must be attributed to heedlessness and forgetfulness. Men do not act sufficiently from principle, but too much from custom, from fashion, and from habit. Thus, many actions are performed without any inquiry into their moral character...

Another cause of the inconsistency so commonly observed is the prevalence<sup>11</sup> that certain passions or appetites may obtain in the time of temptation. The force of the internal principles of evil is not perceived when the objects and circumstances favorable to their exercise are absent. As the venomous adder seems to be harmless while chilled with cold, but soon manifests his malignity when brought near the fire, so sin often lies hid in the bosom as though it were dead until some exciting cause draws it forth into exercise. Then the person is surprised to find the strength of his own passions above anything that he had before conceived. Thus, in certain circumstances, people often act in a way altogether contrary to the general tenor of their conduct. It is by no means a fair inference from a single act of irregularity that the person who is guilty of it has acted hypocritically in all the apparent good actions of his former life. The true explanation is that principles of action that he has commonly been able to govern and restrain acquire—in some unguarded moment or under the power of some strong temptation—a force that his good principles are not at that moment strong enough to oppose. The person who is usually correct and orderly may thus be overtaken in a fault. As all are liable to the same frailties, there should exist a disposition to receive and restore offending Christians when they give sufficient evidence of penitence.<sup>12</sup>

Man at his best estate in this world is an inconsistent creature. The only persons in whom this defect is not observed are the people who by grace live near to God and exercise a constant jealousy and vigilance over themselves. But when faith is weak and inconstant, great inconsistencies will mar the beauty of Christian character. Young people ought, therefore, to begin early to exercise this vigilance and to keep their hearts with all diligence, lest they be ensnared by their own passions and overcome by the power of temptation.

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<sup>4</sup> **redundant** – exceeding what is necessary.

<sup>5</sup> **exuberance** – abundant productiveness.

<sup>6</sup> **sterility** – barrenness; unproductiveness.

<sup>7</sup> **punctilious** – showing great attention to detail or correct behavior.

<sup>8</sup> **veracity** – truthfulness.

<sup>9</sup> **EDITOR'S NOTE:** The author's original word here is *religion*. In light of the broad and often confusing uses of *religion* in the present day, the terms *Christian faith*, *Christianity*, and *faith in Christ* usually replace *religion* and *religious* in this issue.

<sup>10</sup> **rectitude** – morally correct behavior; righteousness.

<sup>11</sup> **prevalence** – effective power; influence.

<sup>12</sup> **penitence** – repentance.

I counsel you then, my young friends, to aim at consistency. Cultivate assiduously<sup>13</sup> every part of the Christian character, so that there may appear a beautiful proportion in your virtue...To preserve consistency, it is necessary to be well acquainted with the weak points in our own character, to know something of the strength of our own passions, and to guard beforehand against the occasions and temptations that would be likely to cause us to act inconsistently with our Christian profession...According to that of the wise man, “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Pro 16:32)...Learn then, my young friends, to bridle your passions and govern your temper from your earliest days...

**LET YOUR [RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS] BE MARKED BY A STRICT AND CONSCIENTIOUS REGARD TO TRUTH, HONOR, JUSTICE, KINDNESS, AND COURTESY...** Be honest, be upright, sincere, people of your word, faithful to every trust, kind to everybody, respectful where respect is due, generous according to your ability, grateful for benefits received, and delicate in the mode of conferring favors...Let your conduct and conversation be characterized by frankness and candor, by forbearance, and a spirit of indulgence and forgiveness. In short, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Mat 7:12)...

**GOVERN YOUR TONGUE.** It is probable [that] more sin is committed and more mischief done by this small member than in all other ways. The faculty of speech is one of our most useful endowments, but it is exceedingly liable to abuse. He who knows how to bridle his tongue is, therefore, in Scripture denominated “a perfect man” (Jam 3:2). Again, of him who seemeth “to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue,” it is declared, “This man’s religion is vain” (Jam 1:26). The words that we utter are a fair index of the moral state of the mind. “For by thy words,” says our Lord, “thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Mat 12:37). Not only are sins of the tongue more *numerous* than others, but some of them are the most heinous of which man can be guilty—even that one sin that has no forgiveness is a sin of the tongue (Mat 12:32).

Not only should all profaneness, obscenity, and falsehood be put far away, but also you should continually endeavor to render your conversation useful. Be ever ready to communicate knowledge, to suggest profitable ideas, to recommend virtue and religion, to rebuke sin, and to give glory to God. Beware of evil speaking. A habit of detraction<sup>14</sup> is one of the worst that you can contract and is always indicative of an envious and malignant heart. Instead of prostituting this active and useful member to the purposes of slander, employ it in defending the innocent and the injured.

Permit me to suggest the following brief rules for the government of the tongue. Avoid [talking too much]: “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin” (Pro 10:19). If you have nothing to communicate that can be useful, be silent. Think before you speak ...Especially, be cautious about uttering anything in the form of a promise without consideration. Be conscientiously regardful of truth...Never speak what will be likely to excite bad feelings of any kind in the minds of others. Be ready on all suitable occasions to give utterance to good sentiments, especially such as may be useful to the young. Listen respectfully to the opinions of others, but never fail to give your testimony—modestly but firmly—against error. “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt...Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Col 4:6; Eph 4:29).

**KEEP A GOOD CONSCIENCE.** If wickedness had no other punishment than the stings of conscience that follow evil actions, it would be reason enough to induce every considerate person to avoid that which is productive of so much pain. No misery of which the human mind is susceptible is so intolerable and so irremediable<sup>15</sup> as remorse of conscience. And it is liable to be renewed as often as the guilty action is distinctly [remembered]. It is true [that] the conscience, by means of error and repeated resistance to its dictates, may become callous—“seared as with a hot iron” (1Ti 4:2). But this apparent death of moral sensibility is no more than a *sleep*. At an unexpected time and in the most inconvenient circumstances, conscience may be aroused and may exert a more tremendous power than was ever before experienced...Joseph’s brethren seemed to have almost forgotten their unnatural and cruel conduct in selling him as a slave into a foreign country. But when many years had elapsed and they found themselves environed with difficulties and dangers in that very land, the remembrance of their crime painfully rushed upon their minds. [It] extorted mutual confessions of their guilt from them. “God,” said they, “hath found out the iniquity of thy servants...And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that

<sup>13</sup> **assiduously** – with care and persistence; diligently.

<sup>14</sup> **detraction** – making comments that damage someone’s reputation.

<sup>15</sup> **irremediable** – impossible to cure or put right.

we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us” (Gen 44:16; 42:21).

Men often endeavor to escape from the stings of a guilty conscience by a change of place, but the remedy is ineffectual. The transgressor may traverse the widest ocean, transcend the loftiest mountains, and bury himself in the dark recesses of the desert, but he cannot fly so far nor conceal himself so effectually as to escape from his tormentor. In some cases, the agonies of remorse have been so intolerable that the guilty perpetrator of great wickedness has preferred “strangling and death” (Job 7:15) to a miserable life and has rushed uncalled into the presence of his Judge...But what man is there who has not committed sins, the recollection of which gives him sensible pain? And such acts often stand out in strong relief in the retrospect of the past. No effort can obliterate such things from the memory. We may turn away our eyes from the disagreeable object, but the painful idea will return!...

When I counsel you, my young friends, to keep a good conscience, I mean that you should...endeavor to obtain this inestimable blessing by an application to “the blood of sprinkling” (Heb 12:24). Until the soul is justified<sup>16</sup> and sin pardoned, there can be no true peace of conscience. While the Law remains unsatisfied for us and denounces vengeance against us for our sins, what in the universe can give us peace? But when by faith, the soul apprehends the atonement<sup>17</sup> and sees that it is commensurate<sup>18</sup> to all the demands of the Law and that in the cross, justice is not only satisfied but also gloriously illustrated, it is at once relieved from the agony of guilt. [Then] “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” pervades the soul (Phi 4:7). The great secret of genuine peace is, therefore, living faith in the blood of Christ...

**LEARN TO BEAR AFFLICTION WITH FORTITUDE AND RESIGNATION ...**Christ Himself suffered while in the world and has left His followers a perfect example of holy fortitude and filial submission to the will of God. When sorely pressed with the inconceivable load of our sins, so that His human soul could not have sustained it unless supported by the divine nature, His language was, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luk 22:42). Those afflictions allotted to the people of God are necessary parts of salutary<sup>19</sup> discipline, intended to purify them from the dross of sin and to prepare them for the service of God here and the enjoyment of God in the world to come. They are to them, therefore, not penal judgments, but Fatherly chastisement. Though not “joyous, but grievous” for the present, “it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11)...That to which I would bring my youthful readers is a state of mind prepared for adversity, whatever kind it may be that they may not be taken by surprise when calamity falls upon them. When the dark day of adversity arrives, be not dismayed; but put your trust in the Lord and look to Him for strength to endure whatever may be laid upon you. Never permit yourselves to entertain hard thoughts of God because of any of His dispensations.<sup>20</sup> They may be dark and mysterious, but they are all wise and good. What we cannot understand now, we shall be privileged to know hereafter. Exercise an uncomplaining submission to the will of God as developed in the events of Providence. Believe steadfastly that all things are under the government of wisdom and goodness. Remember that whatever sufferings you may be called to endure, *they are always less than your sins deserve*. Consider that these afflictive dispensations are fraught with rich, spiritual blessings. They are not only useful but also *necessary*. We should perish with a wicked world if a kind Father did not make use of the rod to reclaim us from our wanderings. Besides, there is no situation in which we can more glorify God than when in the furnace of affliction...And when schooled in adversity, you will be better qualified to sympathize with the children of sorrow and better skilled in affording them comfort...

**CHERISH AND DILIGENTLY CULTIVATE GENUINE PIETY.**<sup>21</sup> “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Psa 111:10; Pro 9:10). Early piety is the most beautiful spectacle in the world. Without piety, all your morality, however useful to men, is but a shadow. It is a branch without a root. Religion, above every other acquisition, enriches and adorns the mind of man. It is especially congenial with the natural susceptibilities<sup>22</sup> of the youthful mind. The vivacity<sup>23</sup> and versatility of youth, the tenderness and ardor of the affections in this age exhibit piety to

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<sup>16</sup> **justified** – declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ.

<sup>17</sup> **atonement** – reconciliation with God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

<sup>18</sup> **commensurate** – in proportion; corresponding in extent.

<sup>19</sup> **salutary** – calculated to bring remedy; producing good effects.

<sup>20</sup> **dispensations** – acts of divine ordering and arrangements of events.

<sup>21</sup> **piety** – habitual reverence and obedience to God; godliness.

<sup>22</sup> **susceptibilities** – tendencies to be easily influenced; impressionable.

<sup>23</sup> **vivacity** – liveliness.

the best advantage. How delightful it is to see the bosoms of the young swelling with the lively emotions of pure devotion! How beautiful is the [repentant tear] or of holy joy that glistens in the eye of tender youth! Think not, dear young people, that true religion will *detract* from your happiness. It is a reproach cast upon your Maker to indulge such a thought. It cannot be. A God of goodness never required anything of His creatures that did not tend to their true felicity.<sup>24</sup> Piety may indeed lead you to exchange the pleasures of the theater and ballroom for the purer joys of the Church and prayer meeting. It may turn your attention from books of mere idle fancy and fiction to the Word of God, which to a regenerated soul is found to be sweeter than honey and more excellent than the choicest gold; but this will add to your happiness rather than diminish it. We would then affectionately and earnestly exhort and entreat you, “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth” (Ecc 12:1). This will be your best security against all the dangers and temptations to which you are exposed...Dear youth, be wise, and secure an inheritance among the saints in light. God [calls] you to be reconciled. Christ [calls] you (Mat 11:28)...The doors of the church will be opened to receive you. The ministers of the Gospel and all the company of believers will hail your entrance and will welcome you to the precious ordinances of God’s house. Finally, remember that “now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2Co 6:2).

**SEEK DIVINE DIRECTION AND AID BY INCESSANT FERVENT PRAYER.** You need grace to help you every day. Your own wisdom is folly, your own strength weakness, and your own righteousness altogether insufficient. “It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). But if you lack wisdom, you are permitted to ask; and you have a gracious promise that you shall receive. Whatever we need will be granted if we humbly and believingly ask for it. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Mat 7:7)...

Faith and prayer are our chief resources under all the various and heavy afflictions of this life. When all other refuges fail, God will hide His people who seek Him in His secret pavilion and shelter them under the shadow of His wings. Prayer is essential to the existence and growth of the spiritual life. It is the breath of the new man. By this means, he obtains quick relief from innumerable evils and draws down from heaven blessings of the richest and sweetest kind. Possess your minds fully of the persuasion that prayer is efficacious,<sup>25</sup> when offered in faith and with importunity,<sup>26</sup> to obtain the blessings that we need. God has made Himself known as a Hearer of prayer: yea, He has promised that we shall have, as far as may be for His glory and our good, whatever we ask...That man who has access to a throne of grace will never lack anything that is really needful. “The LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psa 84:11)...I need not be afraid, therefore, to counsel the young to cultivate the spirit of prayer and to be constant in its exercise. “Pray without ceasing...[continue] instant in<sup>27</sup> prayer” (1Th 5:17; Rom 12:12). Often, too, in the performance of this duty, a taste of heaven is brought down to earth; and the pious worshipper anticipates in some degree those joys that are ineffable<sup>28</sup> and eternal. Moreover, prayer will be your most effectual guard against sin and the power of temptation: “And Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.”<sup>29</sup>

**I CONCLUDE MY COUNSELS TO THE YOUNG BY A SERIOUS AND AFFECTIONATE RECOMMENDATION TO EVERYONE WHO READS THESE PAGES: MAKE IMMEDIATE PREPARATION FOR DEATH.** I know that light-hearted youth are unwilling to hear this subject mentioned. There is nothing that casts a greater damp upon their spirits than the solemn fact that death must be encountered and that no earthly possessions or circumstances can secure us from becoming his victims on any day. But if it is acknowledged that this formidable evil is inevitable and that the tenure by which we hold our grasp of life is very fragile, why should we act so unreasonably and—*I may say*—[so] madly as to shut our eyes against the danger?...Do you ask what preparation is necessary? I answer, reconciliation with God and a [fitness] for the employments and enjoyments of the heavenly state. Preparation for death includes repentance towards God for all our sins, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and reliance on His atoning sacrifice, regeneration of heart, and reformation of life; and finally, a lively exercise of piety, accompanied with a comfortable assurance of the divine favor. In short, genuine and lively piety forms the essence of the needed preparation. With this, your death will be safe and your happiness after death secure. But to render a deathbed not only safe but also comfortable, you must have a strong faith and clear evidence that your sins are forgiven and that

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<sup>24</sup> **felicity** – happiness.

<sup>25</sup> **efficacious** – able to produce the intended result.

<sup>26</sup> **importunity** – insistence.

<sup>27</sup> **continue instant in** – be devoted to; persist in.

<sup>28</sup> **ineffable** – incapable of being expressed; too great to be described in words.

<sup>29</sup> From the hymn “Exhortation to Prayer” by William Cowper (1731-1800).

you have passed from death unto life. Be persuaded then, before you give sleep to your eyes, to commence your return unto God, from Whom like lost sheep you have strayed. “Prepare to meet thy God” (Amo 4:12). “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Mat 24:44).

Seek deliverance from the fear of death by a believing application to Him Who came on purpose to deliver from this bondage. With His presence and guidance, we need fear no evil, even while passing through the gloomy valley and shadow of death. He is able by His rod and His staff to comfort us and to make us conquerors over this last enemy.

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**Archibald Alexander (1772-1851):** American Presbyterian theologian, first professor of Princeton Seminary; born in Augusta County, VA.

## GENERAL COUNSELS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

**F**OR ONE THING, TRY TO GET A CLEAR VIEW OF THE EVIL OF SIN. Young people, if you did but know what sin is and what sin has done, you would not think it strange that I exhort you as I do. You do not see it in its true colors. Your eyes are naturally blind to its guilt and danger, and hence you cannot understand what makes me so anxious about you. Oh, let not the devil succeed in persuading you that sin is a small matter!

Think for a moment *what the Bible says about sin*—how it dwells naturally in the heart of every man and woman alive (Ecc 7:20; Rom 3:23)—how it defiles our thoughts, words, and actions, and that continually (Gen 6:5; Mat 15:19)—how it renders us all guilty and abominable in the sight of a holy God (Isa 64:6; Hab 1:13)—how it leaves us utterly without hope of salvation if we look to ourselves (Psa 143:2; Rom 3:20)—how its fruit in this world is shame and its wages in the world to come, death (Rom 6:21-23). Think calmly of all this...

Think *what an awful change sin has worked* on all our natures. Man is no longer what he was when God formed him out of the dust of the ground. He came out of God’s hand upright and sinless (Ecc 7:29). In the day of his creation he was, like everything else, “very good” (Gen 1:31). And what is man now? A fallen creature, a ruin, a being that shows the marks of corruption all over: his heart like Nebuchadnezzar, degraded and earthly, looking down and not up; his affections like a household in disorder, calling no man master, all extravagance and confusion; his understanding like a lamp flickering in the socket, impotent to guide him, not knowing good from evil; his will like a rudderless ship, tossed to and fro by every desire and constant only in choosing any way rather than God’s. Alas, what a wreck is man compared to what he might have been! Well may we understand such figures being used as blindness, deafness, disease, sleep, death, when the Spirit has to give us a picture of man as he is. And man as he is, remember, was so made by sin.

Think too *what it has cost to make atonement for sin* and to provide a pardon and forgiveness for sinners. God’s own Son must come into the world and take upon Him our nature in order to pay the price of our redemption and deliver us from the curse of a broken Law. He, Who was in the beginning with the Father and by Whom all things were made, must suffer for sin—the just for the unjust—must die the death of a malefactor<sup>30</sup> before the way to heaven can be laid open to any soul. See the Lord Jesus Christ despised and rejected of men, scourged, mocked, and insulted; behold Him bleeding on the cross of Calvary; hear Him crying in agony, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46); mark how the sun was darkened and the rocks rent at the sight; *the n* consider, young people, what the evil and guilt of sin must be.

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<sup>30</sup> malefactor – criminal.

Think, also, *what sin has done already upon the earth*. Think how it cast Adam and Eve out of Eden, brought the flood upon the old world, caused fire to come down on Sodom and Gomorrah, drowned Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, destroyed the seven wicked nations of Canaan, scattered the twelve tribes of Israel over the face of the globe. Sin alone did all this.

Think, moreover, of *all the misery and sorrow that sin has caused* and is causing at this very day. Pain, disease, and death—strife, quarrels, and divisions—envy, jealousy, and malice—deceit, fraud, and cheating—violence, oppression, and robbery—selfishness, unkindness, and ingratitude—all these are the fruits of sin. Sin is the parent of them all. Sin has so marred and spoiled the face of God’s creation.

Young people, consider these things, and you will not wonder that we preach as we do. Surely, if you did but think of them, you would break with sin forever. Will you play with poison? Will you sport with hell?<sup>31</sup> Will you take fire in your hand? Will you harbor your deadliest enemy in your bosom? Will you go on living as if it mattered nothing whether your own sins were forgiven or not—whether sin had dominion over you or you over sin? Oh, awake to a sense of sin’s sinfulness and danger! Remember the words of Solomon: “Fools,” none but fools, “make a mock at sin” (Pro 14:9).

Hear, then, the request that I make of you this day: pray that God would teach you the real evil of sin. As you would have your soul saved, arise and pray.

**FOR ANOTHER THING, SEEK TO BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.** This is indeed the principal thing in religion. This is the corner stone of Christianity. Until you know this, my warnings and advice will be useless; and your endeavors, whatever they may be, will be in vain. A watch without a mainspring is not more unserviceable than is religion without Christ.

But let me not be misunderstood. It is not the mere *knowing* Christ’s name that I mean: it is knowing His mercy, grace, and power—the knowing Him not by the hearing of the ear, but by the experience of your hearts. I want you to know Him by *faith*. I want you, as Paul says, to know “the power of his resurrection...being made conformable unto his death” (Phi 3:10). I want you to be able to say of Him, “He is my peace and my strength, my life and my consolation, my Physician and my Shepherd, my Savior and my God.”

Why do I make such a point of this? I do it because in Christ alone “all fulness dwells” (Col 1:19), because in Him alone there is full supply of all that we require for the necessities of our souls. Of ourselves, we are all poor, empty creatures—empty of righteousness and peace, empty of strength and comfort, empty of courage and patience, empty of power to stand or go on or make progress in this evil world. It is in Christ alone that all these things are to be found—grace, peace, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. It is just in proportion as we live upon Him that we are strong Christians. It is only when self is nothing and Christ is all our confidence, it is then only that we shall do great exploits. Then only are we armed for the battle of life and shall overcome. Then only are we prepared for the journey of life and shall get forward. To live on Christ, to draw all from Christ, to do all in the strength of Christ, to be ever looking unto Christ—this is the true secret of spiritual prosperity. “I can do all things,” says Paul, “through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phi 4:13).

Young people, I set before you Jesus Christ this day *as the treasury of your souls*. I invite you to begin by going to Him if you would so run as to obtain. Let this be your first step: *go to Christ*. Do you want to consult friends? He is the best friend: “A friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Pro 18:24). Do you feel unworthy because of your sins? Fear not: His blood cleanseth from all sin. He 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” (Isa 1:18). Do you feel weak and unable to follow Him? Fear not: He will give you power to become sons of God. He will give you the Holy Ghost to dwell in you and seal you for His own: a new heart will He give you, and a new spirit will He put within you. Are you troubled or beset with peculiar infirmities? Fear not: there is no evil spirit that Jesus cannot cast out; there is no disease of soul that He cannot heal. Do you feel doubts and fears? Cast them aside: “Come unto me,” He says (Mat 11:28). “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Joh 6:37). He knows well the heart of a young person. He knows your trials and your temptations, your difficulties and your foes...He can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities (Heb 4:15); for He suffered Himself, being tempted. Surely, you will be without excuse if you turn away from such a Savior and Friend as this.

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<sup>31</sup> See FGB 211 *Hell*, available from Chapel Library.

Hear the request I make of you this day: if you love life, seek to become acquainted with Jesus Christ.

**FOR ANOTHER THING, NEVER FORGET THAT NOTHING IS AS IMPORTANT AS YOUR SOUL.** Your soul is eternal. It will live forever. The world and all that it contains shall pass away—firm, solid, beautiful, well-ordered as it is, the world shall come to an end. “The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2Pe 3:10). The works of statesmen, writers, painters, architects, are all short-lived: your soul will outlive them all. The angel’s voice shall proclaim one day, “Time shall be no longer” (Rev 10:6). But that shall never be said of your souls.

Try, I beseech you, to realize the fact that your soul is the one thing worth living for. It is the part of you that ought always to be first considered. No place, no employment that injures your soul is good for you. No friend, no companion who makes light of your soul’s concerns deserves your confidence. The man who hurts your person, your property, your character does you but temporary harm. He is the true enemy who contrives to damage your soul.

Think for a moment what you were sent into the world for. Not merely to eat, drink, and indulge the desires of the flesh—not merely to dress out your body and follow its lusts whithersoever they may lead you—not merely to work, sleep, laugh, talk, enjoy yourselves, and think of nothing but time. No! You were meant for something higher and better than this. You were placed here to train for eternity. Your body was only intended to be a house for your immortal spirit. It is flying in the face of God’s purposes to do as many do—to make the soul a servant to the body, and not the body a servant to the soul.

Young people, God is no respecter of persons (Act 10:34). He regards no man’s coat, purse, rank, or position. He sees not with man’s eyes. The poorest saint that ever died in a workhouse is nobler in His sight than the richest sinner that ever died in a palace. God does not look at riches, titles, learning, beauty, or anything of the kind. One thing only God does look at, and that is the immortal soul. He measures all men by one standard, one measure, one test, one criterion, and that is *the state of their souls*.

Do not forget this. Keep the interests of your soul in view—morning, noon, and night. Rise up each day desiring that it may prosper. Lie down each evening inquiring of yourself whether it has really got on...Set your immortal soul before your mind’s eye; and when men ask you why you live as you do, answer them in this spirit, “I live for my soul.” Believe me, the day is fast coming when the soul will be the one thing men will think of, and the only question of importance will be this: “Is my soul lost or saved?”

**FOR ANOTHER THING, DETERMINE AS LONG AS YOU LIVE TO MAKE THE BIBLE YOUR GUIDE AND ADVISER.** The Bible is God’s merciful provision for sinful man’s soul, the map by which he must steer his course if he would attain eternal life. All that we need to know in order to make us peaceful, holy, or happy is there richly contained. If young people would know how to begin life well, let them hear what David says: “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psa 119:9).

Young people, I charge you to make a habit of reading the Bible and not to let the habit be broken. Let not the laughter of companions, let not the bad customs of the family you may live in, let *none* of these things prevent your doing it. Determine that you will not only have a Bible, but also make time to read it too...It is the book from which King David got wisdom and understanding. It is the book that young Timothy knew from his childhood. Never be ashamed of reading it. Do not despise the Word (Pro 13:13).

Read it with *prayer* for the Spirit’s grace to make you understand it...Read it *reverently*, as the Word of God, not of man, believing implicitly that what it approves is right and what it condemns is wrong. Be very sure that every doctrine that will not stand the test of Scripture is false. This will keep you from being tossed to and fro and carried about by the dangerous opinions of these latter days. Be very sure that every practice in your life that is contrary to Scripture is sinful and must be given up. This will settle many a question of conscience and cut the knot of many a doubt. Remember how differently two kings of Judah read the Word of God: Jehoiakim read it, at once cut the writing to pieces, and burned it on the fire (Jer 36:23). Why? Because his heart rebelled against it, and he was resolved not to obey. Josiah read it, at once rent his clothes, and cried mightily to the Lord (2Ch 34:19). And why? Because his heart was tender and obedient. He was ready to do anything that Scripture showed him was his duty. O that you may follow the last of these two and not the first!

And read it *regularly*. This is the only way to become “mighty in the scriptures” (Act 18:24). A hasty glance at the Bible now and then does little good. At that rate, you will never become familiar with its treasures or feel the sword



of the Spirit fitted to your hand in the hour of conflict. But get your mind stored with Scripture by diligent reading, and you will soon discover its value and power. Texts will rise up in your hearts in the moment of temptation. Commands will suggest themselves in seasons of doubt. Promises will come across your thoughts in the time of discouragement. Thus you will experience the truth of David's words, "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psa 119:11); and of Solomon's words, "When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee" (Pro 6:22).

I dwell on these things more because this is an age of reading. Of making many books there seems no end, though few of them are really profitable. There seems a rage for cheap printing and publishing. Newspapers of every sort abound; the tone of some that have the widest circulation tells badly for the taste of the age. Amidst the flood of dangerous reading, I plead for my Master's book—I call upon you not to forget the book of the soul. Let not newspapers, novels, and romances be read while the prophets and Apostles lie despised. Let not the exciting and licentious swallow up your attention, while the edifying and the sanctifying can find no place in your mind.

Young people, give the Bible the honor due to it every day you live. Whatever you read, read that first. And beware of bad books: there are plenty in this day. Take heed what you read. I suspect there is more harm done to souls in this way than most people have an idea is possible. Value all books in proportion as they are agreeable to Scripture. Those that are nearest to it are the best, and those that are farthest from it and most contrary to it, the worst.

**FOR ANOTHER THING, NEVER MAKE AN INTIMATE FRIEND OF ANYONE WHO IS NOT A FRIEND OF GOD.** Understand me—I do not speak of acquaintances. I do not mean that you ought to have nothing to do with any but true Christians. To take such a line is neither possible nor desirable in this world. Christianity requires no man to be discourteous. But I do advise you to be very careful *in your choice of friends*...Never be satisfied with the friendship of anyone who will not be useful to your soul.

Believe me: *the importance of this advice cannot be overrated*. There is no telling the harm that is done by associating with godless companions and friends. The devil has few better helps in ruining a person's soul. Grant him this help, and he cares little for all the armor with which you may be armed against him. Good education, early habits of morality, sermons, books, regular homes, letters of parents—all, he knows well, will avail you little if you will only cling to ungodly friends. You may resist many open temptations, refuse many plain snares; but once take up a bad companion, and he is content. The awful chapter that describes Amnon's wicked conduct about Tamar almost begins with these words, "But Amnon had a friend, a very subtle man" (2Sa 13:3).

You must recollect [that] we are all creatures of imitation: precept may teach us, but it is example that draws us. There is that in us all that we are always disposed to catch the ways of those with whom we live. The more we like them, the stronger does the disposition grow. Without our being aware of it, they influence our tastes and opinions: we gradually give up what they dislike and take up what they like, in order to become more close friends with them. And, worst of all, we catch their ways in things that are wrong far quicker than in things that are right. Health, unhappily, is not contagious, but disease is. It is far easier to catch a chill than to impart a glow—to make each other's religion dwindle away than grow and prosper.

Young people, I ask you to lay these things to heart. Before you let anyone become your constant companion, before you get into the habit of telling him everything, and going to him in all your troubles and all your pleasures—before you do this, just think of what I have been saying. Ask yourself, "Will this be a useful friendship to me or not?"

"Evil communications" do indeed "corrupt good manners" (1Co 15:33). I wish that text were written in hearts as often as it is in copybooks.<sup>32</sup> Good friends are among our greatest blessings: they may keep us back from much evil, quicken us in our course, speak a word in season, draw us upward, and draw us on. But a bad friend is a positive misfortune, a weight continually dragging us down and chaining us to earth. Keep company with an irreligious man, and it is more than probable you will in the end become like him. That is the general consequence of all such friendships. The good go down to the bad, and the bad do not come up to the good...

I dwell the more upon this point because it has more to do with your prospects in life than at first sight appears. If ever you marry, it is more than probable you will choose a wife among the connections of your friends. If

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<sup>32</sup> **copybooks** – books containing models of good penmanship; used in teaching penmanship.

Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had not formed a friendship with Ahab's family, he would most likely not have married Ahab's daughter. And who can estimate the importance of a right choice in marriage? It is a step that, according to the old saying, "either makes a man or mars him." Your happiness in both lives may depend on it. Your wife must either help your soul or harm it: there is no medium. She will either fan the flame of religion in your heart or throw cold water upon it and make it burn low...He that findeth a good wife indeed "findeth a good thing" (Pro 18:22). But if you have the least wish to find one, be very careful how you choose your friends.

Do you ask me what kind of friends you shall choose? Choose friends who will benefit your soul: friends whom you can really respect; friends whom you would like to have near you on your death-bed; friends who love the Bible and are not afraid to speak to you about it; friends such as you will not be ashamed of owning at the coming of Christ and the Day of Judgment.<sup>33</sup> Follow the example that David sets you: he says, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Psa 119:63). Remember the words of Solomon: "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Pro 13:20). But depend on it: bad company in the life that now is, is the sure way to procure worse company in the life to come.

From *Thoughts for Young Men*, available from Chapel Library.

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**J. C. Ryle (1816-1900):** Bishop of the Anglican Church; author of *Holiness, Knots Untied, Old Paths, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, and many others; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

As a general rule, young men and women who have the high privilege of Christian parentage and training do not see the love of God in it. They often kick against it and wish they did not have to endure what they regard as a great hardship. That is the way we used to think of it in the days of our ignorance. But, now that God has opened our eyes, we can see the love of God in it all. We see how He has orchestrated things for our benefit.—*Charles Spurgeon*

## YOUTH WARNED AGAINST SIN

**John Angell James (1785-1859)**

*"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."*—*Ecclesiastes 11:9*

**W**ITHOUT pretending to say that the youth of this generation are more corrupt than those of former times were, I will assert that their moral interests are now exposed from various causes to imminent<sup>34</sup> peril. The improvement and diffusion<sup>35</sup> of modern education have produced a bold and independent mode of thinking, which, though it be in itself a benefit, requires a proportionate degree of Christian restraint to prevent it from degenerating into lawless licentiousness.<sup>36</sup> It is also probable that of late years, parents have relaxed the salutary rigor of domestic discipline in compliment to the improved understanding of their children. Trade and commerce are now so widely extended that our youth are more from beneath their parents' inspection than formerly and consequently more exposed to the contaminating influence of evil company. The habits of society in general are becoming more expensive and luxurious. In addition to all this, the secret but zealous efforts of

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<sup>33</sup> See FGB 210 *Day of Judgment*, available from Chapel Library.

<sup>34</sup> **imminent** – about to happen; approaching.

<sup>35</sup> **diffusion** – spreading abroad.

<sup>36</sup> **licentiousness** – disregard for morality; preoccupation with lustful desires.

infidelity<sup>37</sup> to circulate works, which by attempting to undermine revealed religion aim to subvert the whole fabric of morals, have most alarmingly increased irreligion and immorality. But whatever be the causes, the fact to me is indubitable<sup>38</sup> that multitudes of the young people of the present day are exceedingly corrupt and profane. Such a state of things rouses and interests all my feelings as a father, a minister, and a patriot. I am anxious for my own children, as well as for the youth of my flock, my town, and my country.

You are to be the fathers, young men, of the next generation. Most solicitous<sup>39</sup> do I feel that you should transmit the Christian faith and not vice to posterity. Listen then with seriousness to what I shall this evening advance from motives of pure and faithful affection.

I shall direct your attention to that solemn portion of sacred Scripture that you will find in Ecclesiastes 11:9...No one was more capable of forming a correct opinion on this subject than Solomon, since no man ever commanded more resources of earthly delight than he did or ever more eagerly availed himself of the opportunities that he possessed...His testimony, therefore, is to be considered not as the cynical declamation of an ascetic,<sup>40</sup> who had never tasted sensual indulgence, but as that of a man who had drunk the cup to its dregs and who found those dregs to be wormwood, gall, and poison...

**THE TEXT PROPERLY EXPLAINED CONSISTS OF AN IRONICAL<sup>41</sup> ADDRESS.** Under a seeming permission, this language contains a very strong and pointed prohibition. It is as if the writer had said, “Thoughtless and sensual young person, who hast no idea of happiness but as arising from animal indulgence, and who art drinking continually the intoxicating cup of worldly pleasure, pursue thy course if thou art determined on this mode of life. Gratify thy appetites. Indulge all thy passions. Deny thyself nothing—eat, drink, and be merry. Disregard the admonitions of conscience. Trample underfoot the authority of revelation, but think not that thou shalt always prosper in the ways of sin or carry forever that air of jollity<sup>42</sup> and triumph. The day of reckoning is at hand, when for all these things thou wilt be called into judgment. God now witnesses and takes account of all thy ways and will one day call thee to His bar and reward thee according to thy doings.”

It is implied in this address that young people are much addicted to sensual pleasure. This has been the case with every generation and in every country. It is too common not only for the young themselves, but even for their seniors and their sires to justify or palliate<sup>43</sup> their vicious excesses. We [do] not infrequently hear the abominable adage,<sup>44</sup> “Youth for pleasure, age for business, and old age for religion.” It is not possible for language to utter or mind to conceive a more gross or shocking insult to God than this. [It] is saying in effect, “When I can no longer enjoy my lusts or pursue my gains, then I will carry to God a body and soul worn out in the service of sin, Satan, and the world.” The monstrous wickedness and horrid impiety of this idea is enough, one should think, to shock and terrify the most confirmed and careless sinner in existence when put clearly to him.

Many things tend to cherish in the youthful breast and to justify in the estimation of young people the love of sensual pleasure. At their age, care sits lightly on the heart, the passions are strong, the imagination is lively, the health is good, and the social impulse is felt in all its energy. The attractions of company are powerful. This, they imagine, is the halcyon<sup>45</sup> time for them to take their fill of pleasure. They think that they shall be steady enough by and by when the season of youth is past and that sobriety, morality, and religion will all come in the proper order of nature. Worldly pleasure, decked in the voluptuous<sup>46</sup> attire and the meretricious<sup>47</sup> ornaments of a harlot, appears to their heated imagination with all the attractive charms of a most bewitching beauty. They yield themselves at once to her influence and consider her as abundantly able to afford them all the happiness they desire. Their great concern is to gratify their senses. The soul and all her vast concerns is neglected for the pleasures of fleshly appetites and is condemned to the degradation of acting as a mere waiting maid to minister to the enjoyment of the body.

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<sup>37</sup> **infidelity** – atheism.

<sup>38</sup> **indubitable** – too obvious to be doubted.

<sup>39</sup> **solicitous** – eager; desirous.

<sup>40</sup> **cynical...ascetic** – bitter, emotional speech of one that practices extreme self-denial.

<sup>41</sup> **ironical** – meaning the opposite of what is expressed.

<sup>42</sup> **jollity** – merrymaking; cheerfulness.

<sup>43</sup> **palliate** – partially excuse.

<sup>44</sup> **adage** – old saying.

<sup>45</sup> **halcyon** – happy and carefree.

<sup>46</sup> **voluptuous** – sensuous; suggestive of unrestrained pleasure of the senses.

<sup>47</sup> **meretricious** – gaudy; befitting a prostitute.

Young people, can you justify, either at the bar of reason or revelation, such an appropriation of the morning of your existence, of the best and loveliest portion of your life? If there is indeed a God who made and preserves you, is it reasonable that the season of youth should be passed in a manner hateful in His sight? Is this the way to ensure His blessing on your future days?...Where is it said that young people may innocently walk in all kinds of sensual indulgences? On what page of the book of God's truth do you find these allowances for the excesses of youth, which you make for yourselves and ill-judging friends make for you? "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the LORD, neither consider the operation of his hands" (Isa 5:11-12). This is the testimony of the Lord, delivered as much against the sins of youth as those of riper years. And is it not mentioned amongst other vices by St. Paul that men should be "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2Ti 3:4)?...There is not one duty of true godliness binding upon you in future years that does not rest with all its authority upon you [now]. Is youth the season for sinful pleasure then? Is this best and most influential portion of your existence to be deliberately given up to vice? That is a dreadful idea, repugnant alike to reason and revelation.

**If sensual pleasure be pursued as the object of youthful years, see how it will influence all your pursuits.** Where young people live in this way, it directs their reading, which is not pious or improving, but light, trifling, and polluting. Inflammatory novels, stimulating romances, lewd poetry, immoral songs, satires against religious characters, and arguments against revelation are in general the works consulted by corrupt and vicious youth. By these, they become still more vicious. Never did the press send forth streams of greater pollution than at this time. Authors are to be found, of no mean talents, who pander to every corruption of the youthful bosom. Almost every vice has its high priest to burn incense on its altar and to lead its victims, decked with the garlands of poetry or fiction, to their ruin.

**The recreations and amusements of young people who live in sinful pursuits are of the same nature as their reading, conversation, and company—polluted and polluting.** They generally frequent the theater. The theater—that corrupter of public morals, that school where nothing good and everything bad is learned, that resort of the vicious and seminary of vice, that broad and flowery avenue to the bottomless pit. Here young people find no hindrances to sin, no warnings against irreligion, no mementos of judgment to come. On the contrary, [they find] everything to inflame their passions, to excite their criminal desires, and to gratify their appetites for vice. The language, the music, and the company are all adapted to a sensual taste and calculated to demoralize the mind.<sup>48</sup> Multitudes of once comparatively innocent and happy youths have to date their ruin for both worlds from the hour when their feet first trod within the polluted precincts of a theater. Until then they were ignorant of many of the ways of vice...When, therefore, a young person acquires and gratifies a taste for theatrical representations, I consider his moral character in imminent peril...

Who shall depict, in proper colors, the crime of seducing and then abandoning an innocent female? Yet how common it is! She—poor, wretched victim—[is] the dupe of promises never intended to be fulfilled, and at length deserted as a worthless, ruined thing...[if] her betrayer feels a pang of remorse, his pity comes too late for her. It cannot restore the peace that with felon hand he stole from a bosom that was serene until he invaded its tranquility. It cannot repair the virtue he corrupted. It cannot build up the character he demolished...The seducer, I admit, is less guilty than the murderer, but how much less? The latter extinguishes life at once, the former causes it to waste away by slow degrees...The latter hazards his own life in the commission of the crime, the former exposes himself to no personal risk. The latter is visited with the heaviest sentence that the justice of the country can inflict, but the seducer can revel in impunity and can go on from conquering to conquer in his desolating career. [He can] defy all justice but that of heaven. Yes, the guilty and polluted wretch will be greeted in fashionable and moral society with the same welcome as before, though he comes to it with the guilt of female ruin

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<sup>48</sup> It is by no means the author's intention to affirm that all who frequent the theater are vicious [*depraved, evil*] persons. Far be it from him to prefer an accusation as extensive and unfounded as this. No doubt, many amiable and moral persons are among the admirers of dramatic representation. That they receive no contamination from the scenes they witness or the language they hear is no stronger proof that the stage is not immoral in its tendency and effects than that there is no contagion in the plague because some constitutions resist the infection. That persons fenced in by every conceivable moral defense and restraint should escape uninjured is saying little. But even in their case, I will contend that the mind is not altogether uninjured. Is it possible for an imperfect moral creature (and such are the best of us), to hear the irreverent appeals to heaven, the filthy allusions, the anti-Christian sentiments that are uttered during the representation of even our purest plays and hear these for amusement without some deterioration of mental purity?...If it were admitted that occasionally some one person had been improved by theatrical satires on vice (though, by the way, to laugh at vice is not the best way of becoming virtuous), will they not confess that for this one case of improvement, a thousand cases of ruin could be found? (J. A. James, *Youth Warned*)

fresh upon his soul...If any individual shall glance on these passages who is guilty of this great transgression, let him ponder on his guilt, and never cease through life to weep for his sin, looking for pardon through the blood of Christ...Pause, young man! Oh! Pause before you resolve to ruin two souls at once and produce an entanglement of sin and misery that eternity itself shall never unravel.<sup>49</sup>

Amidst all your sinful jollity, are you happy, young people, in your sins?...Add up, young people, all the pains of vice—the anxiety that precedes and the remorse that follows it, the stings of conscience and the reproaches of friends, the fear of being detected, and the shame of detection when it has taken place—and say if they do not far overbalance the pleasures of sin...What you need, young people, is regeneration of heart by the Holy Ghost. You must be born again of the Spirit and be renewed in the spirit of your mind. You must have a new heart, a holy bias, a spiritual disposition...You must be brought to fear God as your habitual principle of action and to love Him supremely as the master passion of your soul. Under a deep conviction of sin, you must have “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Act 20:21). You must be justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You must be sanctified by the truth and Spirit of God. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). The grace of God that brings salvation must teach you not only to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, but to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present evil world (Ti 2:12). Morality alone will not do...It will improve your temporal interests as people; it will lessen your condemnation as sinners, but it will not entitle you to the character of Christians here, nor will it be followed by glory, honor, immortality, and eternal life hereafter. It is extremely probable that if you are satisfied with being moral, to the neglect of piety, you may not long retain even your virtue. Temptations may assail you, too powerful for anything short of that faith in Christ that engages Omnipotence for our defense. In one unguarded moment, you may become the victims of those spiritual enemies that lie in wait to deceive you. God alone can preserve you...

Sin is deceitful, young people...Vice first is pleasing, then it grows easy, then delightful, then frequent, then habitual, then confirmed; then the man is impenitent, then he is obstinate, then he resolves never to repent, and then he is damned.

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: (and for his encouragement I would add,) and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7). With the Lord, there is mercy that He may be feared and plenteous redemption that He may be sought unto. Even yet, God waiteth to be gracious. Jesus Christ is “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25). Pause, consider, repent, believe, and be holy.

From a sermon preached in Carrs Lane Meeting House, on Sunday Evening, January 4, 1824.

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**John Angell James (1785-1859):** English Congregationalist preacher and author; born at Blandford, Dorsetshire, England.

## PERSUASIONS TO SOBER-MINDEDNESS

**Matthew Henry (1622-1714)**

*“Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.”—Titus 2:6*

**D**OCTRINE: IT IS THE GREAT DUTY OF ALL YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE SOBER-MINDED. I shall endeavor to show you...what it is that we press upon you when we exhort you to be sober-minded. I shall keep to the original word used in my text and the various significations of it. It is the same word that is used to set forth the

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<sup>49</sup> I would not throw the blame of seduction entirely on my own sex. There are not a few to whom Solomon’s description of the female tempter will apply in this age. (J. A. James, *Youth Warned*)

third part of our Christian duty and is put first of the three lessons that the grace of God teacheth us: “to live soberly” (2:12). In another place, it is put last of three excellent Christian graces: God hath given us the spirit “of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2Ti 1:7)...Give this exhortation its full latitude, and it speaks to you that are young these [following] things:

**You must be considerate and thoughtful, not rash and heedless.**<sup>50</sup> To be sober-minded is to make use of our reason in reasoning with ourselves and in communing with our own hearts. [It means] to employ those noble powers and capacities by which we are distinguished from and dignified above the beasts for those great ends for which we were endued with them. [This is so] that we may not receive the grace of God in them in vain (2Co 6:1), but being rational creatures may act rationally...as becomes us. You learned to talk when you were children: when will you learn to think—to *think seriously*?...When once you come to see the greatness of that God with Whom you have to do and the weight of that eternity you are standing upon the brink of, you will see it is time to think!

[It is] high time to look about you! Learn to think not only of what is just before you, which strikes the senses and affects the imagination, but also of the causes, consequences, and reasons of things. [Learn] to discover truths—to compare them with one another, to argue upon them and apply them to yourselves, and to bring them to a head. [Do not] fasten upon that which doth come first into your minds, but upon that which *should* come first and that deserves to be first considered. Multitudes are undone because they are *unthinking*. Inconsideration<sup>51</sup> is the ruin of thousands, and many a precious soul perisheth through mere carelessness. “Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways” (Hag 1:5). Retire into your own souls: begin an acquaintance with them. It will be the most profitable acquaintance you can fall into and will turn to the best account...Take time to think, desire to be alone now and then, and let not solitude and retirement be uneasiness to you. For you have a heart of your own that you may talk with, and a God nigh unto you with Whom you may have a pleasing communion.

*Learn to think freely.* God invites you to do so. “Come now, and let us reason together” (Isa 1:18). We desire not [that] you should take things upon trust, but inquire impartially into them as the noble Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so that the Apostles told them (Act 17:11). Pure Christianity and serious godliness [do not] fear the scrutiny of a free thought, but despise the impotent malice of a prejudiced one...

*Learn to think for yourselves*—to think of yourselves, to think with application. Think what you are and of what you are capable. Think Who made you, what you were made for, [and] for what end you were endowed with the powers of reason...[Think] therefore whether it be not time—*high time*—for the youngest of you to begin to have faith in Christ and to enter in at the strait gate (Mat 7:13-14).

[As for] your particular actions...consider what you do *before* you do it that you may not have occasion to repent of it afterwards. Do nothing rashly...Ponder the path of your feet that it may be a straight path. Some people take pride in being careless. Tell them of such and such a thing that they were warned about, [and] they turn it off with this excuse: for their part, they never heed. They mind not what is said to them, nor [have they] thought of it since. So they glory in their shame. But [do not be] thus negligent...There begins to be hope for young people when they begin to set their hearts to all those things that are testified unto them and to think of them with the reason of men and the concern they deserve.

**You must be cautious and prudent, not willful and heady.**<sup>52</sup> The word in the text is the same that is rendered “to be discreet” (2:5). You must not only think rationally; but when you have done so, you must act wisely...Walk circumspectly:<sup>53</sup> look before you, look about you, look under your feet, and pick your way—“not as fools, but as wise” (Eph 5:15). When he set out in the world, David’s purpose was, “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way,” and his prayer was, “[Lord,] when wilt thou come unto me?” (Psa 101:2). Accordingly, we find his purpose performed and his prayer answered: “David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him” (1Sa 18:14)...

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<sup>50</sup> **rash and heedless** – reckless and paying no attention.

<sup>51</sup> **inconsideration** – thoughtlessness; failing to be considerate of others.

<sup>52</sup> **willful and heady** – determined to have one’s own way; headstrong.

<sup>53</sup> **circumspectly** – cautiously; carefully.

Put away childish follies with other childish things, and do not think and speak as children all your days...It is the wisdom of the prudent to understand his own way, his own business, [and] not to censure<sup>54</sup> other people's. This wisdom will in all cases be profitable to direct what measures, what steps to take...“My son, be wise—Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Pro 27:11; 4:7)...Say not, “I will do so and so. I am resolved...whatever may be said to the contrary! I will walk in the way of *my* heart and in the sight of *my* eyes, whatever it cost me.” Never have any will but what is guided by wisdom ...Consult with those that are wise and good. Ask them what they would do if they were in your case, and you will find that “in the multitude of counsellors there is safety” (Pro 11:14)...

But would you be wise?—not only to be thought so, but really *be* so? *Study the Scriptures*. By them, you will get more understanding than the ancients will, than all your teachers will (Psa 119:99-100). Make your observations upon the carriage and miscarriage<sup>55</sup> of others that you may take a pattern by those that do well and take warning by those that do ill. Look upon both and receive instruction.

But especially be earnest with God in prayer for wisdom as Solomon was. The prayer was both pleasing and prevailing in heaven. If any person, if any young person, “lack wisdom” and is sensible that he lacks it, he is directed what to do—his way is plain. “Let him ask of God” (Jam 1:5). He is encouraged to do it, “For the Lord giveth wisdom.” He has it to give (Pro 2:6). He delights to give it! He gives liberally. He has a particular eye to young people in the dispensing of this gift, for His Word was written to give to the young man “knowledge and discretion<sup>56</sup>” (Pro 1:4)...There is an express promise to everyone that seeks aright that he shall not seek in vain. It is not a promise with a “peradventure,<sup>57</sup>” but with the greatest assurance: “It shall be given him” (Jam 1:5). To all true believers, Christ Himself is and shall be made of God wisdom (1Co 1:30).

**You must be humble and modest,<sup>58</sup> not proud and conceited...**It is an observation I have made upon what little acquaintance I have had with the world: I have seen more young people ruined by *pride* than perhaps by any one lust whatsoever. Therefore, let me press this upon you with all earnestness: it is a caution introduced with more than ordinary solemnity. “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you.” What is the word that is thus declared to be of divine original and universal concern? It is this: that no man “think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly” (Rom 12:3).

Keep up low thoughts of yourselves, of your endowments both outward and inward, of your attainments and improvements, and all your performances—all the things you call merits and excellencies ...Let not the handsome glory in their beauty, nor the ingenious<sup>59</sup> in their wit. For there cannot be a greater allay<sup>60</sup> to their glory than to have it said, such and such are comely and witty, but they *know* it ...Delight more to say and do what is praiseworthy than to be praised for it. For “what hast thou that thou didst not receive” (1Co 4:7)? And what hast thou received that thou hast not abused? Why then dost thou boast?

Keep up a quick and constant sense of your own manifold defects and infirmities. [Consider] how much there is in you, how much is said and done by you every day that you have reason to be ashamed of and humbled for...Dwell much upon humbling considerations and those that tend to take down your high opinion of yourselves. Keep up a humble sense of your necessary and constant dependence upon Christ and His grace, without which you are nothing and will soon be worse than nothing.

Think not yourselves too wise, too good, too old to be reprov'd for what is amiss, and to be taught to do better. When you are double and treble<sup>61</sup> the age you are, yet you will not be too old to learn and increase in learning. “If any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know” (1Co 8:2). Therefore, he that seems to be wise—seems so to himself, seems so to others, “let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (1Co 3:18)...Be not confident of your own judgment, nor opinionated, nor look upon those with contempt that do not think as you do...Be ashamed of *nothing but sin*...There cannot be a greater disgrace to you than loose walking. Nor

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<sup>54</sup> **censure** – harshly criticize.

<sup>55</sup> **carriage and miscarriage** – behavior and misbehavior.

<sup>56</sup> **discretion** – wisdom coupled with a sense of caution.

<sup>57</sup> **peradventure** – perhaps; maybe.

<sup>58</sup> **modest** – having a moderate estimate of oneself.

<sup>59</sup> **ingenious** – clever.

<sup>60</sup> **allay** – diminishing.

<sup>61</sup> **treble** – triple.

above the exercises of religion, as if it were a thing below you to pray, hear the Word, and join in acts of devotion. For it is really the greatest honor you can do yourselves thus to honor God...

**You must be temperate and self-denying, not indulgent of your appetites.** It is the same word in the text that is translated “temperate” in verse 2 and is one of the lessons that the aged men must learn. Some think it properly signifies “a moderate use of meat and drink”...Let me therefore warn young men to dread the sin of *drunkenness*. Keep at a distance from it. Avoid all appearances of it and approaches towards it. It has slain its thousands, its ten thousands of young people. [It] has ruined their health, brought diseases upon them, and cut them off in the flower of their days. How many fall unpitied sacrifices to this base lust!...You should tremble to think how fatal the consequences of it are—how unfit it renders you for the service of God at night, yea, and for your own business the next morning...and yet that is not the worst: it extinguishes convictions and sparks of devotion and provokes the Spirit of grace to withdraw. It will be the sinner’s eternal ruin if it be not repented of and forsaken in time. The Word of God hath said it, and it shall not be unsaid; it cannot be gainsaid<sup>62</sup> that drunkards “shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (1Co 6:9)...If you saw the devil putting the cup of drunkenness into your hand, I dare say, *you would not take it out of his*. You may be sure the temptation to it comes from him. Therefore, [you] ought to dread it as much as if you saw it. If you saw poison put into the glass, *you would not drink it*. And if it be provoking to God and ruining to your souls, it is worse than poison. There is worse than death: there is hell in the cup. Will you not then refuse it?...Perhaps you have given up your names to the Lord Jesus at His table: dare you partake of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils? Let Christians that are made to our God kings and priests take to themselves the lesson that Solomon’s mother taught him: “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings” (Pro 31:4). So it is not for Christians to drink wine but with great moderation, “lest they drink, and forget the law”—forget the Gospel (Pro 31:4, 5)...Learn betimes<sup>63</sup> to relish the delights that are rational and spiritual, and then your mouths will be out of taste to those pleasures that are brutal and belong only to the animal life. Be afraid, lest by indulging the body and the lusts of it, you come by degrees to the black character of those that were “lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God” (2Ti 3:4). The body is made to be a servant to the soul, and it must be treated accordingly. We must give it, as we must to our servants, that which is just and equal. Let it have what is fitting, but let it not be suffered to domineer...deny yourselves. So you will make it easy to yourselves and will the better bear the common calamities of human life, as well as sufferings for righteousness’ sake. Those that would approve themselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ must endure hardness, must inure<sup>64</sup> themselves to it (2Ti 2:3).

**You must be mild and gentle, not indulgent of your passions.**<sup>65</sup> The word here used signifies moderation, such a soundness of mind as is opposed to frenzy and violence...Young people are especially apt to be hot and furious, to resent injuries, and to study revenge...Therefore, the passion is ungoverned because the pride is unmortified. They are fond of liberty, and therefore cannot bear control. [They are] wedded to their own opinion, and therefore cannot bear contradiction. [Yet they] are all in a flame presently if anyone cross *them*...Learn betimes to bridle your anger, to guard against the sparks of provocation that they may not fall into the tinder. If the fire be kindled, put it out presently by commanding the peace in your own souls and setting a watch before the door of your lips. And when at any time you are affronted—or think yourselves so—aim not at the wit of a sharp answer that will stir up anger, but at the wisdom and grace of a soft answer that will turn away wrath (Pro 15:1)...To all the arguments that reason suggests for meekness, Christianity adds (1) the authority of the God that made us, forbidding rash anger as heart murder; (2) the example of the Lord Jesus Christ that bought us and bids us learn of Him to be meek and lowly in heart; (3) the consolations of the Spirit that have a direct tendency to make us pleasant to ourselves and others; and (4) our experiences of God’s mercy and grace in forbearing and forgiving us. Shall this divine and heavenly institution come short of their instructions in plucking up this root of bitterness that bears gall and wormwood? [Shall it not make] us peaceful, gentle, and easy to be entreated, which are the bright and blessed characters of the wisdom from above? (Jam 3:17).

If you suffer your passions to [gain power] now [while] you are young, they will be in danger of growing more and more headstrong and of making you perpetually uneasy. But if you get dominion over them now, you will easily keep dominion and so keep the peace in your hearts and houses. Through the grace of God, it will not be in the power even of sickness or old age to make you peevish, to sour your temper, or embitter your spirits. Put on

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<sup>62</sup> **gainsaid** – contradicted.

<sup>63</sup> **betimes** – early.

<sup>64</sup> **inure** – become hardened; become accustomed.

<sup>65</sup> **passions** – overpowering emotions, such as love, joy, hatred, anger, revenge, etc.



therefore among the ornaments of your youth, “as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Col 3:12). Your age is made for love: let *holy* love therefore be a law to you.

**You must be chaste and reserved,<sup>66</sup> not wanton and impure.<sup>67</sup>** Both the Greek fathers and philosophers use the word for *chastity*. When it is here made the particular duty of young men, this signification of the word must certainly be taken for the “lusts of the flesh which are manifest, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness” (Gal 5:19). [They] are particularly called “youthful lusts” (2Ti 2:22). And against those, in Christ’s name, I am here to warn all you that are young. For God’s sake and for your own precious soul’s sake, *flee these youthful lusts!* Dread them as you would a devouring fire or a destroying plague and keep at a distance from them. Abstain from all appearances of these sins: hating even the garment spotted with the flesh, even “the attire of an harlot” (Pro 7:10). Covet not to know these depths of Satan, but take pride in being ignorant of the way of the adulterous woman. See all temptations to uncleanness coming from the unclean spirit, that roaring lion who goes about continually, thus seeking to devour young people (1Pe 5:8). O that you would betimes conceive a detestation and abhorrence of this sin...Put on a firm and steady resolution in the strength of the grace of Jesus Christ never to defile yourselves with it. [Remember] what the Apostle prescribes as that which ought to be the constant care of the unmarried—to be holy both in body and spirit and so to please the Lord (1Co 7:34).

Take heed of the beginnings of this sin, lest Satan in anything get advantage against you...How earnestly doth Solomon warn his young man to take heed of the baits, lest he be taken in the snares of the evil woman! “Remove thy way far from her,” saith he. For he that would be kept from harm must keep out of harm’s way! “Come not nigh the door of her house” (Pro 5:8). Go on the other side of the street as thou wouldst if it were a house infected, lest “thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof” (Pro 5:11-12). Pray earnestly to God for His grace to keep you from this sin and that it may be sufficient for you...Get your hearts purified by the Word of God and sanctified by divine love! For how else shall young people cleanse their way, but by “taking heed thereto according to [the] word” (Psa 119:9)?

Make a covenant with your eyes that they may not be the inlets of any impure thoughts or the outlet of any impure desires (Job 31:1). Pray David’s prayer, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity” (Psa 119:37) that you may never look and lust.

Modesty<sup>68</sup> is the hedge of chastity, and it is the ornament of your age. Therefore, be sure to keep that up. Let your dress and carriage be very modest, such as speaks [of] “your chaste conversation<sup>69</sup> coupled with fear” (1Pe 3:2). Make it to appear that you know how to be pleasant and cheerful without transgressing even the strictest rules of modesty...

**You must be content and easy, not ambitious and aspiring...**A sober mind is that which accommodates itself to every estate of life and every event of providence, so that whatever changes happen, it preserves the possession and enjoyment of itself. You that are young must learn betimes to reconcile yourselves to your lot. Make the best of that which is because it is the will of God [that] it should be as it is. What pleaseth Him ought to please us. He knows what is fit to be done and [what is] fit for us better than we do. Let this check all disquieting, discontented thoughts. Should it be according to thy mind? Shalt thou who art but of yesterday control Him, quarrel with Him, or prescribe to Him, Whose counsels were of old from everlasting? It is folly to direct the divine disposals, but wisdom to acquiesce<sup>70</sup> in them.

He Who “determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of [men’s] habitation” (Act 17:26) ordered what our rank and station should be in the world, what parents we should be born of, what lot we should be born to, and what our make and capacity of mind and body should be...Some are born to wealth and honor, others to poverty and obscurity. Some seem made and marked by...the God of nature to be great and considerable, while others seem doomed to be little and low all their days...fret [not] at the place God’s providence has put you in. Make yourselves easy in it and make the best of it, as those who are satisfied that all is well that God doth—not only in general, but also in particular: *all is well that He doth with you*. Now you are young: possess your minds with

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<sup>66</sup> **chaste and reserved** – sexually pure and marked by self-restraint.

<sup>67</sup> **wanton and impure** – sexually immoral and defiled by sin.

<sup>68</sup> See *Christian Modesty and the Public Undressing of America*, available from Chapel Library.

<sup>69</sup> **chaste conversation** – pure and respectful behavior.

<sup>70</sup> **acquiesce** – to remain in quiet submission.

a reverence for the divine providence—its sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness...Reckon your lot best made when you have the Lord to be the portion of your inheritance and your cup (Psa 16:5). Then say, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places” (Psa 16:6). That is best for you, which is best for your souls. In that, you must soberly rest satisfied...Let young people be modest,<sup>71</sup> moderate, and sober-minded in their desires and expectations of temporal good things, as becomes those who see through them and look above and beyond them to the things not seen that are eternal (2Co 4:18).

**You must be grave and serious, and not frothy and vain**<sup>72</sup>...I put this last of the ingredients of this sober-mindedness because it will have a very great influence upon all the rest. We should gain our point entirely with young people *if we could but prevail with them to be serious*. It is serious piety we would bring them to...Not that we would oblige young people never to be merry or [that we] had any ill-natured design upon them to make them melancholy. No, religion allows them to be cheerful! It is your time: make your best of it. Evil days will come, of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them” (Ecc 12:1). When the cares and sorrows of this world increase upon you, and we would not have you to anticipate those evil days...God expects to be served by us with joyfulness and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things (Deu 28:47). It is certain that none have such good reason to be cheerful as godly people have! None can be so upon better grounds or with a better grace, so justly or so safely. I have often said—and I must take all occasions to repeat it—that a holy, heavenly life, spent in the service of God and in communion with Him, is without doubt the most pleasant, comfortable life anyone can live in this world.

But that which I would caution you against under this head is vain and carnal mirth—that mirth, that laughter of the fool—of which Solomon saith, “It is mad...what doeth it?” (Ecc 2:2). Innocent mirth is of good use in its time and place. It will revive the spirit and fit you for business. “A merry heart doth good like a medicine” (Pro 17:22), but then it must be *used* like a medicine. [It] must be taken physically only when there is occasion for it and not constantly like our daily bread...Allow yourselves in mirth as far as will consist with sober-mindedness and no further. Be merry and wise: never let your mirth transgress the laws of piety, charity, or modesty, nor entrench upon your time for devotion and the service of God...

When Christ was here upon earth, healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease, there was no one sort of patients that He had greater numbers of than such as were lunatic. Their lunacy was the effect of their being possessed with the devil. It was the miserable case of many young people. We find parents making complaints of this kind concerning their children: one has a daughter, another has a son, grievously vexed with a devil. But Christ healed them all, dispossessed Satan, and so restored them to the possession of their own souls. It is said of some whom He thus relieved that they then sat at the feet of Jesus “clothed, and in their right mind” (Luk 8:35). [*In...right mind*] is the word used in [Titus 2:6 for “sober-minded”]. As far as sin reigns in you, Satan reigns; and your souls are in his possession. By casting out devils, Christ gave a specimen and indication of the great design of His Gospel and grace, which was to cure men of their spiritual frenzy by breaking the power of Satan in them. O that you would therefore apply yourselves to Him, submit to the Word of His grace, pray for the Spirit of His grace. By this it will appear that both these have had their due influence upon you, if you sit at the feet of Jesus in your right mind—in *a sober mind*. And indeed, you never come to your right mind until you do sit down at the feet of Jesus to learn of Him and be ruled by Him. You are never truly *rational* creatures until in Christ you become *new* creatures.

From “Sober Mindedness Recommended to the Young” in *The Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry*, Vol. 1, published by Robert Carter and Brothers, 1855.

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**Matthew Henry (1662-1714):** Presbyterian preacher, author, and commentator; born at Broad Oak, on the borders of Flintshire and Shropshire, England.

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<sup>71</sup> **modest** – humble.

<sup>72</sup> **frothy and vain** – having no depth of character and silly.

# BROTHERS AND SISTERS

John Angell James (1785-1859)

**N**O family can be happy where a right feeling is lacking on the part of brothers and sisters. Nothing can be a substitute for this defect, and it is of great importance that all young people should have this set in a proper light before them. Many households are a constant scene of confusion, a perpetual field of strife, and an affecting spectacle of misery, through the quarrels and ill will of those, who as flesh of each other's flesh and blood of each other's blood ought to have towards each other no feeling but that of love. [They ought] to use no words but those of kindness...

The general principles that are to regulate the discharge of these duties and on which indeed they rest are the same in reference to all seasons of life. Love, for instance, is equally necessary whether brothers and sisters are sporting<sup>73</sup> together in the nursery, dwelling together as young men and women beneath the parental roof, or descending the hill of life at the head of separate establishments and families of their own...Children of the same parents who are lacking in love are lacking in the first virtue of a brother and a sister as such...

**Brothers and sisters should make it a study to promote each other's happiness.** They should take pleasure in pleasing each other, instead of each being selfishly taken up in promoting his own separate enjoyment...Envy in children is likely to grow into a most baleful and malignant disposition.<sup>74</sup> They should never take each other's possessions away. [They should] always be willing to lend what cannot be divided and to share what [can be] divided. Each must do all he can to promote the happiness of the whole. They should never be indifferent to each other's sorrows, much less laugh at and sport with each other's tears and griefs. It is a lovely sight to see one sibling weeping because another is in distress...

**Brothers and sisters should never accuse each other to their parents nor like to see each other punished.** An informer is a hateful and detestable character. But an informer against his brother or sister is the most detestable of all spies. If, however, one should see another doing that which is wrong and which is known to be contrary to the will of their parents, he should first in a kind and gentle manner point out the wrong and give an intimation<sup>75</sup> that if it be not discontinued, he shall be obliged to mention it. If the warning be not taken, it is then manifestly his duty to acquaint their parents with the fact.

**Brothers and sisters must not tease or torment one another.** How much domestic uneasiness sometimes arises from this source! One of the siblings, perhaps, has an infirmity, weakness of temper, awkwardness of manner, or personal deformity; the rest—*instead of pitying*—tease and torment the unhappy individual...Is this promoting their mutual comfort? As to fighting, quarrelling, or calling ill names—this is so *utterly disgraceful* that it is a deep shame upon those siblings who live in such practices...

**A family of grown-up siblings should be the constant scene of uninterrupted harmony.** Love guided by ingenuity [should put] forth all its power to please by those mutual good offices and minor acts of beneficence<sup>76</sup> of which every day furnishes the opportunity. While they cost little in the way of either money or labor, [they] contribute so much to the happiness of the household. One of the most delightful sights in our world...is a domestic circle where the parents are surrounded by their children—the daughters being employed in elegant or useful work and the elder brother reading some instructive and improving volume for the benefit or entertainment<sup>77</sup> of the whole.

**Brothers and sisters, seek your happiness in each other's society.** What can the brother find in the circle of dissipation<sup>78</sup> or amongst the votaries of intemperance<sup>79</sup> to compare with this? What can the sister find amidst the concert of sweet sounds that has music for the soul compared with this domestic harmony? Or in the glitter and

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<sup>73</sup> **sporting** – playing.

<sup>74</sup> **baleful and malignant disposition** – harmful and evil character.

<sup>75</sup> **intimation** – an act of making something known in an indirect way; a hint.

<sup>76</sup> **beneficence** – doing good.

<sup>77</sup> **entertainment** – holding a person's attention agreeably.

<sup>78</sup> **circle of dissipation** – those who waste money and energy indulging in sensual pleasure.

<sup>79</sup> **votaries of intemperance** – those who enthusiastically pursue excessive use of alcohol.

fashionable confusion and mazy dance of the ballroom, compared with these pure, calm, [private] joys, which are to be found at the fireside of a happy family? What can the theater yield that is comparable with this?...

**It is of great importance to the pleasant [relationship] of brothers and sisters that each should pay particular attention to the cultivation<sup>80</sup> of the temper.** I have known all the comfort of a family destroyed by the influence of one passionate or sullen<sup>81</sup> disposition. Where such a disposition unhappily exists, the subject of it should take pains to improve it. The other branches of the family, instead of teasing, irritating, or provoking it, should exercise all possible forbearance.<sup>82</sup> With ingenious<sup>83</sup> kindness, [they should] help their unfortunate relative in the difficult business of self-control.

**Mutual respect should be shown by brothers and sisters.** All coarse, vulgar, degrading terms, and modes of address should be avoided. Nothing but what is courteous [should be] either done or said. The [relationship] of such relatives should be marked...by the politeness of good manners, blended with all the tenderness of love. It is peculiarly requisite also, that while this is maintained at home, there should not be disrespectful neglect in company. It is painful for a sister to find herself more neglected than [a total] stranger and thus exposed to others as one in whom her brother feels no interest.

**Brothers ought not to be tyrants over their sisters, even in lesser matters.** [They ought not to] expect from them the [cringing submissiveness] of slaves. The poor girls are sometimes sadly treated and rendered miserable by the caprice,<sup>84</sup> freaks,<sup>85</sup> and iron yoke of some insolent and lordly boy. Where the parents are living, they ought not to suffer such oppression. Let all young women beware of such a despot: he that is a tyrant to his sister is sure to be a tyrant also to a wife...

**The responsibility of elder brothers and sisters, especially that of the first-born, is great indeed.** The younger branches of the family look up to them as examples, and their example has great influence—in some cases greater than that of the parent. It is the example of one [who is] more upon a level with themselves, more near to them, more constantly before them than that of the parent. On these accounts, [it is] more influential. It is, therefore, of immense consequence to their juniors how these conduct themselves. If they are bad, they are likely to lead all the rest astray. If good, they may have great power in leading them aright. They bring companions, books, recreations before the rest that are proper or improper according as their own taste is.

It is a most distressing spectacle to see an elder brother or sister training up younger ones by his own conduct and precept in the ways of wickedness. *Such a youth is an awful character.* Like Satan, he goeth about seeking whom by his temptations he may destroy (1Pe 5:8). But worse, in some respects, [he is] more wicked and more cruel than his prototype:<sup>86</sup> he marks out his own brother as the victim of his cruelty and the dupe of his wiles.<sup>87</sup> Whole families have in some cases been schooled in iniquity by one unprincipled elder son. What will such a brother have to answer for in the Day of Judgment! What will be his torment in hell, when the souls of those whom he has ruined shall be near him and by their ceaseless reproaches become his eternal tormentors!

In other cases, what a blessing to a family a steady, virtuous, and pious<sup>88</sup> elder brother or sister has been! Many a weak and sickly mother has given daily thanks to God for a daughter, who by her attentions was a kind of second mother to the younger members of the family, for whom she did her uttermost to train them up in her own useful and holy habits. Many a father has felt with equal gratitude the blessing of having in his firstborn son not only a help to himself in the cares of business, but in the work of education—a son who lent all the power of an amiable<sup>89</sup> and religious example to form the characters of his younger brothers.

Let such young persons consider their responsibility. At the same time, let those who are their juniors in the family consider their duty. If they have a good example in their elder brothers and sisters, they should make it not only the object of attention and admiration, but also of imitation. On the other hand, if, unhappily, the conduct of

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<sup>80</sup> **cultivation** – improvement.

<sup>81</sup> **passionate or sullen** – hot-tempered or showing hostility by refusal to talk.

<sup>82</sup> **forbearance** – patient self-control.

<sup>83</sup> **ingenious or ingenuous** – noble; honorably straightforward.

<sup>84</sup> **caprice** – a sudden change of mind without apparent motive; a whim.

<sup>85</sup> **freaks** – unpredictable or unaccountable changes of mind or behavior.

<sup>86</sup> **prototype** – the original person of which another is a copy; in this context, Satan.

<sup>87</sup> **dupe...wiles** – victim of his tricks or deceit.

<sup>88</sup> **pious** – godly.

<sup>89</sup> **amiable** – friendly; kind.

their seniors be bad, let them not follow them in their evil course. Let no threats, no bribes, no persuasions induce them to comply with the temptation to do what is wrong.

**I will now suppose the case of one or more branches of the family who are brought by divine grace to be partakers of true religion.** [I will] point out what their duty is to the rest and what the duty [is] of the rest to them. In reference to the former, it is manifestly their solemn and irrevocable<sup>90</sup> obligation to seek by every affectionate, Scriptural, and judicious effort the real conversion of those of the family who are yet living without heartfelt religion. O how often has the leaven of piety, when by divine mercy and power it has been laid in the heart of one of the family, spread through nearly the whole household. How often has fraternal love, when it has soared to its sublimest<sup>91</sup> height—with a heaven-kindled ambition aimed at the loftiest object that benevolence can possibly pursue by seeking the salvation of a brother's soul—secured its prize and received its rich reward.

Young people, whose hearts are under the influence of piety, but whose hearts also bleed for those who, though they are the children of the same earthly parent, are not yet the children of your Father in heaven, I call upon you by all the love you bear your brothers and sisters—by all the affection you bear for your parents—by all the higher love you bear to God and Christ—seek by every proper means the conversion of those who, though bound to you by the ties of nature, are not yet united by the bond of grace. *Make it an object with you to win their souls.* Pray for it constantly. Put forth in your own example all the beauties of holiness. Seek for the most undeviating consistency, since a single [lack] of this would only strengthen the prejudice you are anxious to subdue. Let them see your faith in Christ in your conscientiousness, your joy, your humility, your meekness, your love.

In all the general duties of life, be more than ordinarily exact. Win their affections by the kindest and most conciliating<sup>92</sup> conduct. Avoid all consciousness of superiority. Attempt not to scold them out of their sins. Avoid the language of reproach. Draw them with the cords of love, for they are the bands of a man. Now and then, recommend to their perusal a valuable book. When they are absent, write to them on the subject of faith in Christ; but at the same time, do not disgust them by boring them with [it]. Seize favorable opportunities, and wisely improve them. Point them to eminently happy, consistent, and useful Christians. Comply with all their wishes that are lawful, but give not up one atom of your consistency. Pliancy<sup>93</sup> on your part to meet their tastes and pursuits, if they are contrary to God's Word, will only disgust them: mild firmness will secure their respect. And crown all with earnest prayer for that grace without which no means can be successful. How knowest thou but thou shalt gain thy brother? And O what a conquest!

From *A Help to Domestic Happiness*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a ministry of Reformation Heritage Books, [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

Salvation is priceless, let it come when it may; but oh! an early salvation has a double value in it.—*Charles Spurgeon*

## STANDING FAST OR FALLING AWAY?

Thomas Vincent (1634-1678)

*“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”—Philippians 1:6*

**Y**OU have heard that the good work that God has begun in the day of grace He will perform until the day of Christ. Yet, lest any should abuse this doctrine and turn the grace of God into wantonness—lest any should, by presuming that the good work has begun in them and thence concluding that they shall never fall away,

<sup>90</sup> **irrevocable** – not able to be changed or reversed.

<sup>91</sup> **sublimest** – highest; noblest.

<sup>92</sup> **conciliating** – regaining by pleasant behavior.

<sup>93</sup> **pliancy** – being easily persuaded.

presume also to indulge themselves in sin and hence take occasion to give way unto licentiousness—I shall add a serious caution unto all, especially to young professors...

**MOTIVES TO KEEP FROM APOSTASY<sup>94</sup> AND BACKSLIDING:<sup>95</sup>** *Some have and [some] may fall and apostatize from the ways of God, who have made a high profession of faith in Christ [and have] attained great illumination, gifts, and tastes of spiritual things.* These may have been thought—by others and themselves too—to have stood as surely as any. Therefore, all who think they stand, especially you who are young professors, should take heed lest you fall. The Apostle tells Timothy that Demas had forsaken him, having loved this present world (2Ti 4:10). Before that, he tells of Hymenaeus and Alexander, who had put away a good conscience, [had] made shipwreck of the faith, and had learned to blaspheme (1Ti 1:19-20). The Apostle Peter speaks in 2 Peter 2:20-22 of some who had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ, who now were entangled again and overcome. [He says] this was according to the old proverb: “The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” Our Savior tells us in His explication<sup>96</sup> of the Parable of the Sower (Mat 13:20-21) that he who received the Word in stony places is he who hears the Word and receives it with joy. Yet not having any root in himself, he only endures for a while: when tribulation arises because of the Word, by and by he is offended. Indeed, such as have true grace can never totally fall...but many may have that which is *like* true grace and may fall totally from it. They may lose that which they seem to have...

*Besides the sin of apostasy itself, which is so heinous, such as are guilty of it usually grow worse than they were before in all kinds of licentious conduct.* “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, and returneth again, he taketh seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last estate of that man is worse than the first” (Matthew 12:43-45). Apostates are the firstborn children of the devil, and the lusts of their father they will do. He dwells in them and rules over them, and they are ready at his motion for any wickedness. Besides uncleanness,<sup>97</sup> debauchery,<sup>98</sup> mischief, villainy,<sup>99</sup> oaths, and blasphemy, such persons usually have the most desperate enmity against God and godliness. Of all others, [they] prove the greatest persecutors of the saints...I do not remember ever hearing or reading of an apostate who has been converted...

*Though God will not allow you totally to fall from grace if the good work is in truth begun in you, yet, without great heed, you may fall into great decay of grace...* You may, instead of the sweet meltings for sin that you have, grow insensible and contract a great stupidity and hardness of heart. Instead of your pliability and readiness to spiritual duties, you may contract listlessness and indisposition<sup>100</sup>...Instead of your meek and gentle temper, you may grow peevish and passionate.<sup>101</sup> Instead of your uprightness of heart and your single eye to God’s glory, you may spoil most of your duties with hypocrisy. Instead of self-denial and temperance, you may indulge yourself and grow licentious in a great measure. You may lose much of your contentment, patience, and fear of God that you now have. Your hungering desire after Christ may be abated.<sup>102</sup> Your now strong faith may become feeble. Your flames of love may be quenched, the flame quite gone; and only some coals or sparks remain imperceptible under the ashes. Your hopes of heaven may be lost, as to the liveliness and delightful working of them. Therefore, beware lest you fall...You may be kept from falling if you look well to your standing. Whatever your danger is, God can keep you and hold up your goings in His paths so that your footsteps do not slip. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24)...And I shall add that it is more easy (besides the honor brought hereby unto God, and the inexpressible benefit and comfort to yourselves) to stand, not to fall and then to arise and get up when you are fallen. It is no easy thing to recover out of a backsliding state. Such as backslide very much do not usually, easily, or presently recover themselves.

**DIRECTIONS TO KEEP FROM APOSTASY AND BACKSLIDING:** *Look to it that the good work is indeed begun in your hearts*—that you have grace of the right kind. If you should prove unsound in the main points, rotten at the core, false-hearted hypocrites—notwithstanding all your profession—you are in great danger of total apostasy...It is

<sup>94</sup> See FGB 205 *Apostasy*, available from Chapel Library.

<sup>95</sup> See FGB 197 *Backsliding*, available from Chapel Library.

<sup>96</sup> **explication** – a detailed explanation.

<sup>97</sup> **uncleanness** – moral impurity.

<sup>98</sup> **debauchery** – excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures.

<sup>99</sup> **villainy** – evil or wrongdoing of a foul, infamous, or shameful nature.

<sup>100</sup> **listlessness and indisposition** – lack of interest and unwillingness.

<sup>101</sup> **peevish and passionate** – irritable and hot-tempered.

<sup>102</sup> **abated** – reduced in intensity.

only true grace that is of an establishing nature. “It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace” (Heb 13:9). Only the truly gracious are built upon the Rock of Ages where they are safe. However they may be shaken by troubles and temptations, yet they shall never be utterly cast down and quite overturned...

*Stand not in your own strength.* None have fallen more foully than the presumptuous self-confident...Let your confidence and strength be in the Lord. “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2Ti 2:1). Have recourse to Him for grace to help in every need and under every assault and temptation that you have to sin. Christ is able to give aid. It is His office to give aid, and He is ready to do so. He pities you when you are tempted and is touched “with the feeling of [your] infirmities” (Heb 4:15). He has [called] you to come unto Him and has promised that He will bruise Satan under your feet shortly (Rom 16:20). In the meantime, His grace shall be sufficient for you (2Co 12:9).

*Beware of worldly-mindedness, so that you are not swallowed up with worldly business and encumbered with the affairs of this life.* I am sure this will cause a great decay in the power of godliness. If the world, because of your callings, has most of your time, take heed that it has not all. Reserve some time every day for exercises of faith, and let them have most of your hearts...Endeavor to get the world crucified to you, and your hearts crucified to it. Make use of the cross of Christ in order hereunto, and take frequent view of the transcendent glory and happiness of the other world, which will disgrace the world in your esteem.

*Stand continually upon your watch.* Beware of sin in the beginning of it. Do not so much as entertain sin in your minds with any pleasing, delightful thoughts. Refrain from secret sins,<sup>103</sup> otherwise, your feet will slide up before you are aware. Take heed of the least degree of apostasy: observe your hearts when they begin to go off from God, and endeavor with all speed to recover and rise again when you feel yourselves beginning to fall...

*Set God always before your eyes as David did...*[He] tells us that because God was at his right hand, he should not be moved (Psa 16:8). Temptations to sin will little move you when you actually look to and consider God’s eye upon you...“How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9).

*Labor for a strong and fervent love to God.* Many waters cannot quench the fire of this love. While your hearts are mounting upwards in this flame unto God, you are not in such danger of falling down and giving ear unto temptations that would draw you into sin. Labor to dwell in the love of God and the love of one another. Hereby you will dwell in God and God in you (1Jo 4:16). And while you dwell in God, you cannot fall from Him.

*Be much in secret conversation with God in meditation, contemplation, short and secret prayers.* Go often to your knees when you are alone: there bewail<sup>104</sup> sin and pray for the mortification of your special corruptions. Secret duties seriously, diligently, and constantly performed are both an evidence of sincerity and a great preservative against apostasy.

*Lastly, and chiefly, labor for much of the grace of faith and put it forth into daily exercise.* “By faith ye stand” (2Co 1:24). If you would resist the devil, you must be steadfast in faith (1Pe 5:8-9). If you would quench his fiery darts you must get on and hold up the shield of faith (Eph 6:16). If you would be kept by the power of God, it must be through faith unto salvation (1Pe 1:5). Such as draw back unto perdition, [do so] through unbelief. Such as hold out, it is through faith to the saving of their souls (Heb 10:39).

From “Cautionary Motives and Directions unto Youths Professing Religion to Keep Them from Apostasy and Backsliding” in *The Good Work Begun*, reprinted by Soli Deo Gloria, a ministry of Reformation Heritage Books, [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org).

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**Thomas Vincent (1634–1678):** English Puritan minister and author; born in Hertford, Hertfordshire, England.

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<sup>103</sup> See FGB 209 *Secret Sins*, available from Chapel Library.

<sup>104</sup> **bewail** – express great sorrow for.

# NO EXCUSES: BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*“Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.”—Ezekiel 12:27*

**M**EN display great ingenuity in making excuses for rejecting the message of God’s love. They display marvelous skill, not in seeking salvation, but in fashioning reasons for refusing it. They are dexterous<sup>105</sup> in avoiding grace and in securing their own ruin. They hold up first this shield and then the other to ward off the gracious arrows of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which are only meant to slay the deadly sins that lurk in their bosoms.

The evil argument that is mentioned in the text has been used from Ezekiel’s day right down to the present moment. It has served Satan’s turn in ten thousand cases. By its means, men have delayed themselves into hell. The sons of men, when they hear of the great atonement made upon the cross by the Lord Jesus and are bidden to lay hold upon eternal life in Him still say concerning the Gospel, “The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of times that are far off.” That is to say, they pretend that the matters whereof we speak are not of immediate importance and may safely be postponed. They imagine that religion is for the weakness of the dying and the infirmity of the aged, but not for healthy men and women. They meet our pressing [call], “All things are now ready, come ye to the supper,” with the reply, “Religion is meant to prepare us for eternity, but *we are far off from it as yet*. [We] are still in the heyday<sup>106</sup> of our being. There is plenty of time for those dreary preparations for death. Your religion smells of the vault and the worm. Let us be merry while we may! There will be room for more serious considerations when we have enjoyed life a little or have become established in business or can retire to live upon our savings...You prophesy of things that are for many days to come and of times that are far off.” Very few young people may have *said*...this, but *that is the secret thought of many*. With this, they resist the admonition of the Holy Ghost, Who saith, “To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 3:14; 4:7). They put off the day of conversion as if it were a day of tempest and terror and not as it really is—a day most calm, most bright—the bridal of the soul with heaven.

Let every unconverted person recollect that God knows what his excuse is for turning a deaf ear to the voice of a dying Savior’s love. You may not have spoken it to yourself as to put it into words: you might not even dare to do so, lest your conscience should be too much startled—but *God knows it all*. He sees the hollowness, the folly, and the wickedness of your excuses. He is not deceived by your vain words, but makes short work with your apologies for delay...God knows the frivolity of your plea for delay. He knows that you yourself are doubtful about it and dare not stand to it to give it anything like a solemn consideration. Very hard do you try to deceive yourself into an easy state of conscience concerning it. But in your inmost soul, you are ashamed of your own falsehoods. By the aid of the Holy Spirit, my business at this time is to deal with your consciences and to convince you yet more thoroughly that delay is unjustifiable. For the Gospel has present demands upon you, and you must not say, “The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.”

Granted for a moment that the message we bring to you has most to do with the future state, yet even then, the day is not far off. Neither is there so great a distance between now and then that you can afford to wait. Suppose that you are spared for threescore years and ten. Young man, suppose that God spares you in your sins until the snows of many winters shall whiten your head. Young woman, suppose that your now youthful countenance shall still escape the grave until wrinkles are upon your brow—still, *how short your life will be!* You, perhaps, think seventy years a long period. But those who are seventy, in looking back, will tell you that their age is an hand’s breadth. I, who am but forty, feel at this time that every year flies more swiftly than the last; months and weeks are contracted into twinklings of the eye. The older one grows, the shorter one’s life appears. I do not wonder that Jacob said, “Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been” (Gen 47:9), for he spake as an extremely old

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<sup>105</sup> **dexterous** – skillful.

<sup>106</sup> **heyday** – the period when excited feeling is at its height.



man. Man is short-lived compared with his surroundings; he comes into the world and goes out of it as a meteor flashes through yonder skies that have remained the same for ages...Stand by some giant rock that has confronted the tempests of the ages, and you feel like the insect of an hour...Therefore do not say, "These things are for a far-off time." For even if we could guarantee to you the whole length of human existence, it is but a span...

You, young men and women, cannot be certain that you shall reach middle life. Let me check myself! What am I talking of? *You cannot be certain that you will see this year out and hear the bells ring in a new year!* Yea, close upon you as tomorrow is, boast not yourselves of it. It may never come! Should it come, you know not what it may bring forth to you—perhaps a coffin or a shroud. Ay, and this very night, when you close your eyes and rest your head upon your pillow, reckon not too surely that you shall ever again look on that familiar chamber or go forth from it to the pursuits of life. It is clear, then, that the things that make for your peace are not matters for a far-off time. The frailty of life makes them necessities of this very hour. You are not far from your grave! You are nearer to it than when this discourse began: some of you are far nearer than you think you are.

To some this rejection comes with remarkable emphasis, for your occupation has enough of danger about it every day to furnish death with a hundred roads to convey you to his prison-house in the sepulcher. Can you look through a newspaper without meeting with the words *total* or *sudden death*? Travelling has many dangers, and even to cross the street is perilous. Men die at home; and when engaged about their lawful callings, many are met by death. How true is this of those who go down to the sea in ships or descend into the bowels of the earth in mines! Indeed, *no* occupations are secure from death. A needle can kill as well as a sword. A scald, a burn, a fall may end our lives, quite as readily as a pestilence or a battle. Does your business lead you to climb a ladder? It is no very perilous matter, but have you never heard of one who missed his footing and fell, never to rise again? You work amidst the materials of a rising building: have you never heard of stones that have fallen and have crushed the workers?...Notwithstanding all that can be done by sanitary laws, fevers are not unknown, and deadly strokes that fell men to the ground in an instant, as a butcher slays an ox, are not uncommon. Death has already removed many of your former companions...The arrow of destruction has gone whizzing by your ear to find another mark: have you never wondered that it spared *you*?...How can you say, when we talk to you about preparing to die, that we are talking about things that are far off? Dear souls, do not be so foolish. I implore you [to] let these warnings lead you to [faith in Christ]. Far be it from me to cause you needless alarm—but *is it* needless? I am sure I love you too well to distress you without cause—but *is there* not cause enough? Come now, I press you most affectionately: answer me and say, does not your own reason tell you that my anxiety for you is not misplaced? Ought you not at once to lay to heart [the] Redeemer's call and obey [the] Savior's appeal? The time is short! Catch the moments as they fly and hasten to be blest.

Remember also, once again, that even if you knew that you should escape from accident, fever, and sudden death, yet there is one grand event that we too often forget, which may put an end to your day of mercy [suddenly]. Have you never heard that Jesus Christ of Nazareth was crucified on Calvary, died on the cross, and was laid in the tomb? Do you not know that He rose again the third day and that after He had spent a little while with His disciples, He took them to the top of the Mount of Olives and there before their eyes ascended into heaven, a cloud hiding Him from their view? Have you forgotten the words of the angels, who said, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Act 1:11)? Jesus will certainly come a second time to judge the world. Of that day and of that hour knoweth no man—no, not the angels of God. He will come as "a thief in the night" to an ungodly world (1Th 5:2; 2Pe 3:10); they shall be "eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage" (Mat 24:38), just as they were when Noah entered into the ark. They knew not until the flood came and swept them all away! In a moment—we cannot tell when: perhaps it may be ere next the words escape my lips—a sound far louder than any mortal voice will be heard above the clamors of worldly traffic, ay, and above the roaring of the sea! That sound as of a trumpet will proclaim the Day of the Son of Man. "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Mat 25:6) will sound throughout the Church! And to the world, there will ring out this clarion<sup>107</sup> note: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him" (Rev 1:7). Jesus may come tonight. If He were to do so, would you then tell me that I am talking of far-off things? Did not Jesus say, "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev 3:11)! And has not His Church been saying, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:30)? His tarrying may be long to us, but to God it will be brief. We are to stand hourly watching and daily waiting for the coming of the Lord from heaven. Oh, I

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<sup>107</sup> clarion – loud and clear.

pray you do not say that the Lord delayeth His coming, for that was the language of the wicked servant who was cut in pieces! It is the mark of the mockers of the last days, [who] say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2Pe 3:4). Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong. But listen to the undoubted voice of prophecy and of the Word of God: “Behold, I come quickly” (Rev 22:7, 12). “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not” (Luk 12:40)...

We are sent to plead with you, young men and women, and tenderly to remind you that at this hour you are acting unjustly and unkindly towards your God. He made you, and you do not serve Him. He has kept you alive, and you are not obedient to Him. He has sent the Word of His Gospel to you, and you have not received it. He has sent His only begotten Son, and you have despised Him...Child of mercy, erring child of the great Father of spirits, canst thou bear to live forever at enmity with the loving Father? “Would He forgive me?” say you. What makes you ask the question? Is it that you do not know how good He is?...Say no longer that we are talking of things of a far-off time!

I have to remind you, however, of much more than this, namely, that you are...in danger. Because of your treatment of God and your remaining an enemy to Him, He will surely visit you in justice and punish you for your transgressions. He is a just God, and every sin committed is noted in His book. There it stands recorded against His Judgment Day. The danger you are in is that you may this moment go down into the pit, and...may bow your head in death and appear before your Maker in an instant to receive the just reward of your sins. We come to tell you that there is immediate pardon for all the sins of those who will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! If you will believe in Jesus, your sins, which are many, are all forgiven you.

Know ye not the story (ye have heard it many a time) that the Lord Jesus took upon Himself the sins of all who trust Him? [He] suffered in their room and stead the penalty due to their sins. He was our substitute,<sup>108</sup> and as such He died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. He laid down His life...that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Joh 3:16). Will you refuse the salvation so dearly purchased but so freely presented? Will you not [believe on Him] here and now? Can you bear the burden of your sins? Are you content to abide for a single hour in peril of eternal punishment? Can you bear to be slipping down into the open jaws of hell as you now are? Remember God’s patience will not last forever; long enough have you provoked Him...It is a wonder that you do not sink at once to destruction. For this cause, we would have you pardoned now and made free from divine wrath now. The peril is immediate; the Lord grant that so the rescue may be.

Do I hear you say, “But may pardon be had at once? Is Jesus Christ a present Savior? We thought that we might perhaps find Him when we came to die or might obtain a hope of mercy after living a long life of seeking.” *It is not so.* Free grace proclaims immediate salvation from sin and misery. Whosoever looks to Jesus at this very moment shall have his sins forgiven. At the instant he believes in the Lord Jesus, the sinner shall cease to be in danger of the fires of hell. The moment a man turns his eye of faith to Jesus Christ, he is saved from the wrath to come. We preach present salvation to you and the present comfort of that present salvation, too.

The Gospel that we preach to you will also bring you present blessings. In addition to present pardon and present justification, it will give you present regeneration, present adoption, present sanctification, present access to God, present peace through believing, and present help in time of trouble; and it will make you even for this life doubly happy. It will be wisdom for your way, strength for your convictions, and comfort for your sorrows...Young men and women, in preaching to you the Gospel, we are preaching that which is good for *this* life as well as for the life to come. If you believe in Jesus you will be saved now, on the spot, and you will now enjoy the unchanging favor of God, so that you will go your way henceforth not to live as others do, but as the chosen of God, beloved with special love, enriched with special blessings, to rejoice every day until you are taken up to dwell where Jesus is. Present salvation is the burden of the Lord’s message to you. Therefore, it is not true, but infamously false, that the vision is for many days to come and the prophecy for times that are far off. Is there no reason in my pleadings? If so, yield to them. Can you answer these arguments? If not, I pray you cease delaying. Again would I implore the Holy Spirit to lead you to immediate [repentance and faith in Christ].

From a sermon delivered on Thursday evening, March 19, 1874, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington.

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<sup>108</sup> See FGB 207 *Substitution*, available from Chapel Library.

**Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892):** the most well-known English Baptist preacher in history; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.

