

# Ecclesiastes Devotional and Practical Meditations- George Mylne

## Lessons for the Christian's Daily Walk

### Devotional and Practical Meditations on the Book of Ecclesiastes George Mylne, 1859

#### PREFACE

Reader, you know that "Scripture" comes from God. (2 Timothy 3:16.) One God inspired it all. God spoke by Moses; God spoke by Solomon; God spoke in Christ; nay, more, Christ spoke in Moses, and in Solomon too. One law, one code of morals, is contained in all. The mind of God is one, and always one — not one in Solomon, another mind in Christ. What Moses said, or Solomon taught — Christ contradicts not, but confirms. That which was duty then, is duty now. The times have changed — the precept is the same. The law could never justify. It was meant to be, and to continue, the rule of life. The rule was founded on the will of God — His sense of right and wrong. Can this be altered? Can God be changed? What once was right, is always right. What once was wrong, is wrong forever. The Gospel deepens and expands the rule, giving it infinite dimensions of truth, and power. And thus Solomon's writings may at once be turned to Gospel lessons. For this, one thing is needful — that you know the Lord; that all be read looking to Jesus and His cross. If thus you honor Christ, the Spirit will open your mind to see the mind of God; and unfold the unity of Scripture truth, blending its every portion into Jesus, Himself the sum and substance of it all. Reader, may Scripture thus be opened, and thus the words of Solomon be blessed to you and I!

#### **"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" Ecclesiastes 1:2**

My soul, why seek your happiness below — here in this fallen world, where "all is vanity?" Often have you tried it, anxious still to find some earthly good. As often you have found Solomon, the Preacher, right, that "all is vanity."

The worldling, too, can say that all is vanity — and yet pursues it still. Be it not so with you! Let all that is empty here on earth, lead you to what alone will satisfy — the grace of God, the love of God, the Lamb of God; to "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8.)

Have you ever asked yourself, "Where does all this vanity come from?" My soul, it comes from you — and you received it from your father Adam! You and your fellows of the human race, have caused it all.

Whence comes the tempest?

Whence come the earthquake, the pestilence, the shipwreck, the blighted crop?

Whence come sickness, famine, death?

Whence come bereavement, affliction, and sorrow?

Whence come murder, drunkenness, wars, and immorality?

Whence come all that is vile, and sad, and disappointing?

Whence comes the universal taint — the wrongs, the groans, the misery of all created things?

My soul, they come from you; from you in Adam, and from him in you. The poison of sin that is in you, has poisoned all others besides. Since you are sinful — all is out of course. Since you are vanity — all things here are vain. The curse that fell on you — you have entailed on your children. My soul, be humbled with the thought — consider and be wise!

Look over the Book of Nature. See all the troubles of this fallen world; see all that is disjointed, vile, and fleeting; and say, "It comes from me!" My soul, you say, "All is vanity!"

Oh, look within, for all is vanity there. How swift for evil! How dead to all that is good! What rank corruption! What inbred sin! How weak your purposes for good!

How faltering your course in holiness! How weak your purposes! How faltering your course! If all is vanity without — it is tenfold vanity

within! If all around is vanity — then you are the master-vanity of all.

Bless, God, then, O my soul — in Jesus you have that which is not vanity. In Jesus you have all that is solid, durable, and perfect! You have eternal riches, strength, life, pleasure, comfort, peace! In Him, what have you not? You have a sure foundation — a Rock that can never be shaken — an unfailing help!

## **"All is vexation of spirit!" Ecclesiastes 1:14**

Who has not felt vexation? Who knows not what it means?

The infant in its cradle, the schoolboy at his play; youth in all its freshness, manhood in its prime, and especially old age —all, all have felt vexation!

My soul, you know it well! Your sins, your fallen nature, your infirmities — all lay you open to vexation.

How easily irritated you get! How quick to feel offenses! How swift to gather sorrows to yourself through your excess of sensitivity! Often have you murmured at your lot, rising in mutiny against your Maker. How often has your patience failed! What trifles have often wounded you!

Some scheme of pleasure has been thwarted — and you were quite vexed!

A rainy day, or even some trifling inconvenience — has often ruffled your composure.

How often a kind reproof, a friendly warning — some imagined slight — a look — a smile withheld, and yet with no intention of unkindness — has filled you with vexation!

How often has wounded pride; a humbling sense of your infirmities; a deep conviction of your lack of judgment; the fear of standing low in man's opinion — vexed you beyond expression!

My soul, you are not singular in your vexation. Go where you will, you will find it. The world is full of it. "All is vexation of spirit!"

This does not mean that . . .woes may lawfully be brooded over, or sense of injuries be cherished in the soul, or that morbid feelings be indulged in, or that moody silence, brooding vexation, and carking care, are healthful for the soul! Oh, no!

If God is true, if Scripture precept has its weight, and promises their meaning — vexation, O my soul, should have no part in you! Open you must be to its trials day by day. But . . .where is your grace; where is your active holiness; where is your consistency; where is your strength, your comfort, and your steadfastness — if you are conquered by vexation?

Have you, then, learned of Christ, the lowly and the meek One, and not found rest for your soul? (Matthew 11:29.) Have you learned your lesson so badly? Go, learn it over again. Fight, then, against this habit of vexation. Give it no place within you. Look to the Comforter to help you. Taste the tranquility of God. Take every trial, as it rises, to Jesus, your Savior-Friend. Then peace shall be your portion — not vexation! Though faint, yet be pursuing, and you shall gain the victory still. (Judges 8:4.)

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid!" John 14:27

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!" Philippians 4:7

## **"All things are full of labor." Ecclesiastes. 1:8**

Reader, how many things remind you what you are — a fallen creature! Not least of these, the toil and trouble of this changing world. The sun and moon, and planets in their course — the restless wind — the ever-flowing, never-tarrying river — are pictures of the ceaseless toil of man. (verse 4-7.)

The hum of cities; the labor of the field; the crowded factory; the cottage loom; the bread you eat; the clothes you wear; the house

you live in; the fire on your hearth — all speak of labor! How could you have them without labor, either your own, or others? The ploughman and mechanic earn their bread with daily toil. But there are other modes of labor — labor in thought, and speech, and action — not the less trying to the human frame.

My soul, envy not those who eat the bread of idleness. God, in His love, has made the curse of labor, into a blessing! And thus the greater the toil — the greater the blessing; the more the duties done — the more advantage to the doer — if God is feared, and honored in them all.

Look at the household servant — how numerous her calls? Duties to God — to master, mistress, kinsfolk, and friends; no time to call her own; hastily summoned from her work, her meals, or her devotions. She takes her food — for what? to give her strength to labor yet again! The toil of day is done; she lays herself down — only to rise and labor on the morrow! How much to try the temper, wear the body, vex the mind! Yet, if she keeps her soul in patience, and looks to Jesus, not for salvation only, but for strength, for meekness, and a willing mind — if thus she goes the round of daily duties, no station is more dignified than hers!

Reader, whoever you are — whatever your calling — the greatest earthly blessing I can wish you, is to have much to do, and health to do it. May all your work be sanctified by prayer! In all your labor, remember Jesus! He, in a servant's form, once labored here on earth. You say that you are wearied — He was weary too. (John 4:6.) Tell Him your every toil, and this shall comfort you. Lean on His bosom. In His abiding presence, seek your rest.

But if you know not Jesus — what comfort have you in your labor! what comfort in repose? Have faith in Jesus. Weary of sin — seek rest from sin in Jesus. Does an evil conscience trouble you — seek rest from this in Jesus. Then shall the Spirit testify of Jesus, and all your toil be rest.

## **"The eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing." Ecclesiastes 1:8**

The senses are but servants to the soul. The soul desires to look — and sets the eye to see. The soul desires to hear — and sets the ear to hearken. The soul is never wearied. It listens to sweet music, and lingers, longing still for more. When had the soul enough of a sweet flower? When was it ever filled to overflowing with viewing the masterpieces of nature?

Nothing on earth can satisfy the soul!  
It leaves its pleasures, with a craving for more.  
It sighs to increase its satisfactions.  
It grieves to think how limited are all its joys.

Oh, there is a longing in the soul; a restless appetite to see and hear, to grasp, to understand; a stretching forth of thought; a yearning principle — which spurns the restrictions of the senses. And yet (such is the tribute due to sinful human nature) sense, in its feebleness, keeps down the soul. The soul, with all its energy, cannot overpower sense! How sad, how humbling the condition of fallen man!

Yet, child of God, you have no cause to mourn. Gifted by grace with higher faculties, you have that with which to fill your soul to the full. By faith you see, hear, and taste better things — you see Jesus on the throne of God. By faith you see the "sea of glass," and hear "the voice of harpers harping with their harps." You see Heavenly and eternal realities by faith!

My soul, why linger after the things of time — when better sights, and better sounds invite you? Or why lament your straitened means — with heavenly powers so unlimited?

Then let your eye repose on Jesus! The more you look at Him — the longer will you look. The more you look — the more will be your power to gaze upon Him. The more you commune with Him — the sweeter shall you find His company.

Speak much to Jesus — you shall not speak in vain. The name of Jesus shall be to you "as beds of spices, and sweet flowers." (Canticles 5:13.) The whispers of the Spirit, telling of grace and peace, shall ever and always refresh your ear!

My soul, these pleasures shall never fail you!

Not like the music, that was, and is not — with no hand to sweep the chords!

Not like a feast of yesterday — which is now gone forever!

Not like the flowers that once were fragrant — and now are fragrant no longer!

Not like the beautiful landscape — which you have left behind!

Your Savior, Friend, and Comforter, is ever with you — now and to all eternity the same!

**"What has been — will be again, what has been done — will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun! Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time!" Ecclesiastes 1:9-10**

So spoke the Preacher. But "Stop," you say — "Solomon never saw the railway's iron road. The electric telegraph was then unknown. No brilliant gas lamps converted night to day. And no balloon yet floated in the air." My friend, was Solomon, then, wrong? Can we prove his saying false? Are things, then, changed since Solomon? Can we say, "This is new?"

Ah, wisdom more than Solomon's inspired the sacred Word; and One who, from the first, knew all things that would happen to the end of time, still said, "What has been — will be again, what has been done — will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun! Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time!" What does the Preacher mean, then?

My friend, man is unchanged from Solomon — yes, even from Adam — until now. His nature, feelings, appetites, his sins, corruptions, and infirmities — are ever the same. The Railway carries the same freight of selfish man — as traveled formerly in other ways. The Telegraph conveys the messages of the same passions, enterprise, and avarice — as swayed our forefathers. The Gas lights up the same abodes of sin. The aviator, from his balloon, looks down on man — the very counterpart of all he was before.

Then, is there nothing new since Adam? My soul, is nothing new to you? Yes! grace is new. Neither man, nor angels knew it at the first. And my soul, you knew nothing of it, until God Himself enlightened you. No religious rite of man, no power of education, no moral character — could give it; nothing but the Spirit of the living God.

My soul, if Christ is yours, and you are Christ's — to you all things are new indeed!

A new heart, a new mind, a new birth, new tastes, new faculties, new powers, new hopes, new fears; new prospects, new desires; new company to keep, new friends to love, new brethren to cherish!

Yes, a new world to view — a new kingdom to inherit! All things in grace are new — all unknown before. All things in nature are new — since you have seen them in another light. New things you find in each promise, and in each precept of the Word! Your God, your Savior, and your Comforter — are newest of all. By prayer, by watchfulness, by meditation, stir up the heavenly gift; excite the new-born taste — and at every turn, you will find all things new.

O you who lack variety — why seek it here in earthly mundane things? Come, O come to Jesus, and then find all things new indeed!

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

**"That which is crooked, cannot be made straight." Ecclesiastes 1:15**

Do what you may, crosses are crosses still. No art of man's device can make the crooked, straight.

The train, or ship, which bears some dear friend away; the quiet sea, after a night of shipwreck; the rain that robs you of a holiday; the broken pieces of some favorite vase — all say the same, "The crooked must be crooked, do what you will."

Oh, there is anguish in the thought, as disappointment, stealing over the mind, throws its dark shadows on the brow — that nothing can be done! The soul then muses on its sorrow, and thinks again, "Remedy there is none! Truly this is a grief — and I must bear it!" (Jeremiah 10:19.)

Philosophy is useless then. Stoic patience brings no real comfort with it.

A smiling face, may hide a broken heart; and lips will speak of resignation, when the worm of blasted hopes is preying on the soul! Where, then, is comfort to be found? What, then, will make the bitter, sweet; or the crooked, straight?

Not the mere fact of looking at the Word; nor yet in owning that your trials come from God. (Ecclesiastes 7:18.) Cain owned as much as this — yet Cain was wretched still. (Genesis 4:13,14.) And, reader, you will be wretched in your trials, if you can do no more.

Nothing but the Cross of Christ, makes other crosses straight! Do you know Jesus Christ? By name you know Him, doubtless; but is He in your heart? Say, are your sins forgiven? Are you at peace with God? Does the Holy Spirit dwell in you? Does He instruct your soul? If not, then must your cross be crooked still. From my heart I pity you, my friend! Bitter to you — must still be bitter, with nothing to sweeten it. Full many a blast shall blow upon you — where then is your shelter? But, oh, your soul! your precious soul! What will it be? Where will it be hereafter!

But, child of God, you know what it is to have your crosses straightened. Often have you brought them to the cross of Christ, and even rejoiced to have a cross to bear. All things are precious, which bring you to the Cross. Tried by this rule, your bitter things are sweet, and your crooked things are straight.

Believer, are you downcast at your cross? Oh, look again! Don't you see Jesus there? Can He not make it straight? Where, then, your patience? My friend, where, then, your faith.

## **"That which is lacking, cannot be numbered." Ecclesiastes 1:15**

How simple is the truth here spoken, yet how deep! Of wounded hearts, of withered hopes it speaks — of losses, trials, and sorrows; some lighter, some more serious; yet in them all, the truth is still the same. Your favorite flower droops and dies; some keepsake gift is lost; some cherished member of the family has died. How often it rends the heart — it always costs a pang — to count one's treasures over, and to find one lacking! Objects may still be found to fill the vacant place. But ah! the missing one is gone, not to return again, and leaves the heart to mourn its absence!

But there is a blessed secret (to those who know it) to fill such empty spaces with more than they have lost, and add ten thousand fold to their diminished store.

Christian reader, whatever you have lost — put Jesus in its place. Fill every blank with Jesus — and it shall be a blank no more! Have you lost a friend? Does memory cling to the spot before occupied? You look, and look again — and he is not there! No opening door brings back his well known form. Once you could number him among your treasures, but now you number him no more.

Hasten to fill the blank with that which cannot fail you! Do not strain your sight to gaze on emptiness, nor fill your mind with shadows of the past. Oh, fix your thoughts on Jesus! Think of Him, as your best, your dearest Friend. Think of His grace, His dying love for you.

No living friend — no friend that is departed — could love you, think of you, or watch you, as Jesus yes has done. Though other friends are gone, yet you can "number" HIM. Though earthly goods are lost, yet Jesus still is there. No blank can be a blank, when Jesus fills the void. Your losses are but gains, when they bring Jesus to your soul. See every blank through Jesus. All that you should forget — His form shall hide. All that you may remember — you still shall see in Him. Memory shall thus be chastened, and God Himself shall soften every woe.

But reader, say — is Jesus such to you, that the void places in your heart can thus be filled? Oh, if you know Him not — if He is not your best, your bosom Friend — then it is vain to speak to you as I have done. But I would ask you to think this matter over. Before other friends are taken away, or other treasures gone; before life itself is ebbing, and you are no more numbered here, oh seek and find that treasure which never can be lost!

## **"In much wisdom is much grief; and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." Ecclesiastes 1:18**

What kind of wisdom causes grief? What kind of knowledge is it, that increases sorrow?

Perhaps it means the knowledge of the world, its vileness, its vanity, its futility, its uncertainty — to have learned that all its show is vain, and all its pleasure is fleeting. This causes grief to those who see its vanity. God's people mourn it. And worldlings oftentimes disgusted with themselves and all around, and having nothing to sanctify the feeling — are filled with bitter disappointment.

Also to know one's own corruption, to catch a glimpse of SELF in all its frailty; to see our sin, to taste its power — to dread the pains, and not to know the remedy — this causes grief. Sorrow like this is turned to joy, when sinners look to Jesus. Yet many saints forget the promises, and fill their souls with bitterness, from lack of faith.

Again, wisdom may mean the education of the schools — the round of human learning, and attainments in the arts. Here also grief is to be found. There is much futility and many vexations — in searching after knowledge. The mind is hampered by its limited capacity; and, having gone thus far, it sighs that it can go no farther. How many a bright experiment, thus ends in grief; and man discovers, to his cost, that human wisdom, after all, is vanity!

But, most of all, wisdom like this occasions grief, in that it tempts the soul to rest in second causes, and thus to slight the Lord. It is true, there is sometimes exquisite delight in following some cherished study; to trace the hidden things of art and science — to bring to light some fact, or principle, unknown before.

But then, what of the eternal world to come! Are you prepared for it? What of your sins? Are they forgiven? What will declining age — what will your death-bed be? What is to be the end of all your labor? If all your wisdom ends in misery; if all your knowledge only perverts your soul — is it not sorrow, after all?

Reader, would you be saved? Then learn true wisdom in another school — the school of Christ. There you will learn to know yourself. This is no trifling part of wisdom. And, better still, there will you learn to know the Savior — God, in Christ Jesus, forgiving sin, changing the heart, and bringing you to eternal glory! This wisdom never grieves; this knowledge adds no sorrow. Taste it, my friend — be happy and be wise!

## **"I said of laughter: It is madness! And of mirth: What does it accomplish?" Ecclesiastes 2:2**

Of natural gifts none is more rare than cheerfulness; that elasticity of mind, and buoyancy of spirit; that even temper, and sunshine disposition — which cheers the man himself, and all who know him. Cheerfulness, gilded with grace, and sanctified — savors most largely of the mind of Christ. It speaks . . .

of peace with God, of resignation to His will, and freedom from sordid appetites and cares.

Who would reprove the beaming smile; or, in due season, the hearty laugh? In youth, especially, it is pleasant to behold it — it were a somber thought to wish it gone. The cares of life will throw their shadows soon enough across the mind, and we may wish again to see some of that cheerful elasticity we were accustomed to chide.

But this is not the "laughter," nor the "mirth," that Solomon means. He meant the idle laughter, the fool's mirth; merriment followed as an object; the love of pleasure, as the grand pursuit of life. "Laughter," like this, is "as the crackling of thorns under a pot." (Ecclesiastes 7:6.) Empty in sound — it tells of emptiness within, and savors of a mind unused to sober thought and healthy action.

Who should be cheerful as the child of God — as he, who has nothing to fear, whether on earth, or in the world to come? But, oh, my soul, let not your cheerfulness assume an air of levity. Laughter is good in moderation, and the cheerful interchange of merry thought is often refreshing to a jaded mind. But, oh, beware how you indulge it to excess, or slide unwittingly into the habit of unguarded mirth. Such mirth as this must tell most hurtfully upon you. It will . . .

mar the spirit of prayer, unfit the mind for meditation, and eat away the taste for heavenly things!

It is pleasing to a man to move his friends to laughter. The play on words, the studied joke, the repartee; the art of mimicking another — his tones, his gait, his actions; to see a company hanging on your words for merriment — all this is captivating.

But, child of God, beware! This will not keep you at the feet of Jesus. Human applause is dangerous, and much to be avoided. When tempted, therefore, to exceed in mirth, and lose yourself amid its fascinations — fall back upon your soberness. Remember Jesus, and the truths of Scripture; think of your past experience, and forbear.

## **"The wise man's eyes are in his head." Ecclesiastes 2:14**

The worldling has no spiritual sight; his eyes are gone. Thus blind he will remain — unless the Lord should give him sight. He sees neither his lost condition, nor its remedy. To him, sin is not sin — God is not God — Christ is not Christ — Heaven is not Heaven — Hell is not Hell — because he walks in darkness. My soul, be it not thus with you! If God has given you sight, are you not bound to use it to His glory? Then, let your eyes be in your head — not, like the fool's, "to the ends of the earth." (Proverbs 17:24.)

You have an eye, if rightly used — will be quick to discern the Tempter's snare, however well concealed. If you have fallen into sin — whose fault is it? Why have you eyes to see with, if you use them not? Say not, "I did not see it — the Tempter was too subtle for me." This is to throw discredit on the gift of God. You should have been more careful — then this grief would not have been yours.

Beware of dreaming, as you walk along, gazing on empty nothings — on your own futile imaginings. In doing so, plain duties will be overlooked. Oh, my soul, look well around you — see what your duties are. Look at them in the face. Turn not away, because they are difficult, or because your eye is fixed on something more inviting. Your wisdom is to keep your eyes at home. Home duties, and home temptations — demand your earliest and best care. Keep these, then, in the foreground of your vision — then may you safely look at what is beyond.

If you are given to abstract thought, and spend much time in study, oh, take care! None should observe their steps, like star-gazers! Some sudden call to active duties, some trifling interruption — something which tries your patience — may prove a stumbling-block, over which you would not have tripped, if your eyes had only done their duty.

And you, my soul, keep you your eyes from wandering in forbidden paths. When in the haunts of vanity, oh! keep your eyes at home; hide them within the lids of watchfulness. Beware of looking everywhere, not knowing what to look for! This leads to vanity. The showy magazine! The mirthful attire! Walking temptations, mighty to allure! My soul, you know them well. Make, then, a covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1); call in your wandering energies; restrain the prying vision of your appetites! Think of the grace of Jesus, and fix your eyes on Him!

### **"Therefore I hated life!" Ecclesiastes 2:17**

So thought the prophet Jonah. So thought Job and Elijah, Moses and Jeremiah. (Jonah 3; Job 6:9; 1 Kings 19:4; Numbers 11:15; Jeremiah 20:14.) But were they right — these men of old — to rise in mutiny against their lives, and God's corrective dealings? Not so the great Apostle Paul. With all his sufferings, none had such cause to feel life burdensome, as he. If ever man were justified in hating life, it was the Apostle Paul. Yet, with all this, and a strong "desire to depart and be with Christ" — he hated not his life. "To me," he said, "to live is Christ" — although he felt that it was gain to die. (Philippians 1:21, 23.) To hate his life, would be to hate the thoughts, the presence, and the smile of Jesus. To him these treasures were intertwined with life itself. He could not breathe, but Jesus breathed in him. He could not journey, but Jesus went with him. He could not suffer, but Jesus suffered in him. In bonds, imprisonment, and stripes; in watchings, weariness, and fastings; in perils by land, and perils on the seas — in these, and such like visitations, what was his life? It was Jesus! Jesus in his thoughts; Jesus in his heart; Jesus ever present to his soul. As long as life lasted, it was the gift of God — the vehicle, for the time, of Paul's existence — that living state, on which was grafted, by the Spirit, the life of Jesus. How could he, then, hate life, except he hated the thought of Jesus!

Reader, this is a lesson to you and I. Be it our aim to be with Jesus; to be done forever with our sin and shame, and earnestly to long for glory; but never to hate the life, which God has given to be a blessing.

Reader, before the worlds were made, the time of death, both yours and mine, was settled, to a moment, in God's eternal will; and when the moment comes, nothing can detain us here on earth. Until then, God has a purpose in our length of days; something or other to be done, or suffered — which purpose it is our glory to fulfill.

When God says, "Live!" then it is good to live. When He says, "Friend, come up to Me!" then it is good to die. Then, Christian, whether in sickness, poverty, or pain; in care, uncertainty, or sorrow — to you to live is Jesus. Your life is precious, to the last breath and throb, because God gives it; and because, in every throb and breath, Jesus lives in you. Hate not your life; despise it not; but ever honor it for Jesus' sake; and live by faith in Him, who gave himself for you! (Galatians 2:20.)

### **"There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink." Ecclesiastes 2:24**

Had Solomon's wisdom left him? Did he mean to say that, after all, the drunkard, or the epicure is the happiest man? Not at all! The Preacher's object was to ascertain which, of all earthly goods, involved the smallest disappointment.

The man of sensual pleasures looks not beyond the moment. Present enjoyment is his sole pursuit. He eats, and drinks, and, for the time, is satisfied. No distant calculations fill his mind; no stretching into things unknown; no measuring of causes and effects; no vast comparison of past and present science; no thought that carries him beyond to generations yet to come, and, in its yearnings after knowledge, sighs that it cannot live forever, in the fond pursuit!

Oh! what a thought it is! What a result of fallen nature! Apart from grace, the more a man is raised above the brutes — the more he rises in refinement, and in lofty enterprise — the more he is doomed to disappointment in the end! The world may profit by his labors and applaud his work; but what will this avail him after he is gone? Judged only with regard to earthly happiness — mental pursuits excel the love of pleasure, as darkness is excelled by light. But — weighed against eternity — sensual pleasure, and earthly wisdom,

are merely on a par. Each fails alike to give a taste for Heaven; to bring the sinner to the Cross of Christ; to take the sting from death; or to regenerate the soul.

Christian, beware! We live in dangerous times, when human are and intellect are worshiped by too many. Some, even of God's people, are led away, and think that cultivation of the taste, and mind, will fit them better for the joys of Heaven. Others, by mental culture, would teach the ignorant to love human learning. Alas! that men of God should so forget themselves! They do not consider that even in its highest flights (compared with heavenly truth), philosophy is, after all, a carnal thing. The things of earth are earthy; spiritual things are Spirit. You cannot mix the two; therefore confound them not. The one will never help the other; then try it not.

Nothing but "Christ crucified" will civilize the soul. Nothing else deserves the name. Be satisfied with nothing short of this. The mind, the taste, the intellect of man — are as much fallen as the body. Nothing which directs itself to these, can cure his soul malady. Jesus, from first to last; God's Holy Spirit manifesting Christ; the drawings of the Almighty Father's love — these, and these alone, uplift the soul from earth, and nurture it for Heaven!

## **"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under Heaven: Ecclesiastes**

### **3:1-9**

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under Heaven:

- a time to be born — and a time to die,
- a time to plant — and a time to uproot,
- a time to kill — and a time to heal,
- a time to tear — down and a time to build,
- a time to weep — and a time to laugh,
- a time to mourn — and a time to dance,
- a time to scatter stones — and a time to gather them,
- a time to embrace — and a time to refrain,
- a time to search — and a time to give up,
- a time to keep — and a time to throw away,
- a time to tear — and a time to mend,
- a time to be silent — and a time to speak,
- a time to love — and a time to hate,
- a time for war — and a time for peace." Ecclesiastes 3:1-9

"There is a time for everything." That is, there is a divinely appointed time when God ordains each varying circumstance to happen. Some things proceed directly from his hand. In others, man is the agent — man's love or hatred, skill or power, mysteriously working the will of God. Thus human purposes are over-ruled, and the worst passions of the heart are turned to good account. Thus "wicked hands" fulfilled the "counsel" of Jehovah in nailing the Lord of glory to the cross. (Acts 2:23.)

The "time to kill" was "beautiful." It sealed the covenant with blood — the blood of Jesus.

The "time to hate" was "beautiful," when Shimei cursed David. (2 Samuel 16:10.) The sin was Shimei's, the benefit was David's — the benefit, the beauty of sanctified affliction; the grace of resignation to the will of God.

The "time to scatter" was "beautiful," when Job was stripped of all that he possessed. The patriarch confessed it beautiful, and blessed God's holy name. (Job 2.)

"Beautiful," with the Shunamite, the "time to weep." Her only child was taken: yet she said, "It is well." (2 Kings 4:26.)

And yet, no dint of human patience, or of moral fortitude, gives beauty to affliction, or makes us recognize God's righteous hand. When you are told . . . of shipwreck, famine, pestilence, or battle; of families left fatherless; of widowed mothers bereft of an only child; of wealth in a moment turned to poverty; of loss in trade, or sudden fire.

When blood runs cold with what you see or hear; when sympathy is on the rack, when bitterness pervades the soul; or when some act of Providence befalls yourself, and lays you low — then can you say, "It is beautiful! It is the Lord. It must be good — God Himself has done it!" (Isaiah 38:15.)

Ah, this requires a spirit taught of God, a mind renewed by grace; a heart at peace with God. This requires one to have brought his



sins to Jesus; and, in the school of Christ, to have learned to look at all things with the mind of God. Such wisdom comes from Heaven. It is not stoical. It hardens not the heart, nor deadens it to tender sympathy. It is not a dogged resignation, nor cold indifference. It is faith prevailing over flesh; hope smiling in its tears; patience enduring to the end, and calmly triumphing over unbelief!

### **"God has set the world in their heart." Ecclesiastes 3:11**

What does this verse mean? What world, what heart is meant? Truly the world is in the heart of man — the world in all its vanity and sin. But was it God who set this world there? The work was Satan's. He set it there, and man, with suicidal hands, finished what he began. This cannot be the world which the Preacher means.

Then say, what do the words mean? Compare them with the context. You will see that God has set the world — the world of all that happens here — in the "heart," or midst, of all the times and seasons, which the Preacher names. Survey his list of joys and sorrows, of purposes and events. (Verses 2-8.) Is not "the world" — your world and mine, the world of all our history — set in the "heart" of all the seasons, numbered there?

The sailor's "world;" his voyaging to and fro, his storms and calms, his shipwrecks, and his prosperous adventures; the whole is set in the heart of changing winds — east, west, and north, and south encircling him with breezes foul or fair.

The farmer's world, again, is "set" in the "heart" of varying seasons — sunshine and shadow, snow and rain, and frost and thaw, working with seeming opposition, yet with secret unison, the purposes of God, and good of man. What more uncertain than the wind? What less to be relied on than the weather?

So is it with the things of life — sickness and health, prosperity and woe — giving each other place in quick succession.

Life for a year, a month, a day, an hour — life for a moment! What is it, reader? What has it been? What will it be to you? It is as it has been; it will be as now it is — in length uncertain, and diverse in its hue. It is so uncertain, that none can "find out the work that God works from the beginning to the end." (Verse 11.)

And, Child of God, is it not so with you? The frost and thaw — the sun and rain — the calm, the storm, are not more needful to the soil — than varying experience to you — to nourish grace, to nip evil in the bud, to exercise and fructify the soul. Bless God for changes and uncertainties, whether in spiritual frames or outward things. Seek not to have your "world" torn from the "heart" of varying dispensations, but look to God, in Christ, to overrule them all.

### **"Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals." Ecclesiastes 3:18**

It is well to be reminded of our origin; to see that out of the same materials, were made both man and beast. He who made one — made both; from the same lump He made them. "By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, until you return to the ground — because from it you were taken. For you are dust — and to dust you shall return!" Genesis 3:19

Reader, even now say to the dust, "You are my father;" and to the worm, "You are my mother and my sister!" (Job 17:14.) Nay, take the potsherd on the dunghill — and in it, greet your kindred dust. If you are brother to the worm — then you are a "near connection" are you to the clay potter's vessel. Who made you differ from other forms of dust and clay? Not you yourself, but God! God's image was in man at first — His likeness was in soul, imparting to the outward man a godlike form; the moral life, thus given, lighting humanity with godlike qualities. Man's nature was suffused with glory not its own. It was lent — to be recalled at will — not permanently given. And when sin came in, God's image fled — and man became a fallen creature.

Reader, compare yourself with other animals. Say, which is better off — yourself, or they? They are dust, and so are you. They are mortal — are not you the same? The beasts have nothing godlike — by nature, what have you? Nothing that is godly — nothing but what is fallen and corrupt. You are like the fallen Angels — that is all.

In death, do you have "preeminence" over the beasts? They die, and so they end. If they have not bliss in the world to come — at least they have no misery. If the spirit of the beast goes "downward to the earth" (verse 21) — does yours go down to Hell? Will it indeed go "upward?" Far better be a beast, and perish thus — than live eternally in misery.

And you, my soul, in your new nature, what do you have? Nothing but what you have "received." (1 Corinthians 4:7.) It was not yours

— God gave it to you. But for His grace, you would have been more brutish than the beasts! This was your nature; such is your nature still. God alone makes you to differ. Blinder than Bartimeus — more dead than Lazarus — where have you light and life? Only in Jesus! Only in the Comforter! See, then, your nothingness. Fear not to take it to yourself. Yours is the sin — the righteousness is God's. Yours is the corruption — His is the glory. Grace gives you nothing of your own. It clothes you, crowns you, fills you, with Jesus. Then be content. In self-esteem be nothing; be everything in Jesus.

### **"All are from the dust, and all return to dust!" Ecclesiastes 3:20**

What a mysterious thing is life! The moving, feeling, breathing, thinking! Wherein consists the principle of being? Who can define it? Who can fathom it? Who can analyze it? The powers, the tastes, perceptions of the mind — what are they? The art of painting the works of nature — taking the form, the tints, the softness of the landscape, and tracing it on canvas; the faculty of drawing from the soul the combination of sweet sounds, and thus devising melody; the power of searching and pursuing science — Reader, what is it? Say, in what corner of the mind does it grow. What chamber of the brain does it inhabit?

That immaterial thing — the mind; acting, and acted on by matter, floating upon life's surface so mysteriously — what is it? Oh my soul, what is it — what are you?

And, then, the instinct of the brutes — the horse, the donkey, the dog, the elephant! Those wondrous faculties! Intelligence, almost akin to human! What is it? Where was it, before it came? Where is it, when it's gone? It was, and is not!

Of all wonders — life is surely the greatest. But still it is a greater mystery that life should be, and cease to be — that life be turned to death, soundness to rottenness, and rottenness to dust! That man and beast should mingle dust with dust, and none be able to discover which is which!

My soul, this leads you to conclusions, facts, and feelings, which are overwhelming to your powers. It bids you to shelter beneath immortality; "mortality" that is "swallowed up of life" mortality exchanged for incorruption. For a season you have lived, and live still within an earthy frame; your energies called forth, your feelings exercised, by earthly things. Hence your phenomena of heart and mind; hence all the phases of your being; hence all the mysteries of which we speak. Thus flesh and spirit dwell together for a time.

As age advances, the soul draws in its feelers. Its faculties shrink back within itself; its powers thus fade, and fade away — until, lo! the curtain drops in death, and all is veiled! Then earth returns to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust. Man, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things are then alike again. Who then shall say, "This the philosopher's dust — and this is the dog's dust! This is fair woman's dust — and this is the worm's dust!"

Reader, you will dwell in dust! In dust will you abide, until resurrection sounds shall greet your ear — when the earth casts out the dead. Say, where shall you appear?

### **"But they had no comforter." Ecclesiastes 4:1**

Poor sufferers! And was there none to comfort them? Not one of all their brothers of the human race! Were they not brothers? Sprung from one father; by the same God created; bound by the tie of blood! O sin, what havoc you have made of all that is brotherly!

"They had no comforter!" Such are there still. Some have no comforter, because they are friendless. Some, because none can understand their sorrows. Others, because no human sympathy can reach their woes. Others, again, because they are wild with sorrow. As far as comfort goes, they have nothing between them and suicide, madness, or a broken heart.

Reader, have you no comforter? Are you too poor, too humble, too retiring, too little like the world — that men should care for you? Or are your trials, conflicts, and temptations — what few can understand? Are you thus solitary in your sensibility? Are you tempted to despair? Ah, my friend, is there, indeed, no comforter? None to pity! What! none to love! And none to comfort you!

Where then is Jesus? Do you not know Him? Where is God's Holy Spirit? Does He not dwell with you, abide in you? If not, no wonder you have "no comforter."

"Miserable comforters" are all earthly things. They play upon the surface; they cannot reach the heart. They cannot take the poison from affliction, or draw the arrow from the wounded soul. Such comfort you must seek, where alone it is found — with Jesus! He came expressly as a Comforter. When upon earth, He comforted his friends; and when He left them, whom did He say He

would send? Another Comforter! (John 14:16.)

Oh, my friend, what comfort do you need? Comfort for your sense of sin? Comfort for sharp temptation? Comfort for warring conflict? Comfort for darkness in the soul? Is it comfort for sickness, poverty, or sorrow? For loss of friends? For loss of character? Oh! if you love the Lord, say not, "I have no comforter!" The Lord is your comforter!

"No comforter!" Is there no comfort, then, in Jesus — in leaning on His bosom — in telling Him your griefs? No comfort in His grace? No comfort in His love? Ah! think again; and say not, "I have no comforter!"

And you disconsolate! You who know not Jesus! You who seek for earthly comforters alone! What shall I say to you? Why, bid you also look to Jesus! Bring all your sins to Jesus! Seek for a comforter in Jesus! If so, He will not dismiss you in your misery; but comfort you indeed.

### **"The fool folds his hands and ruins himself!" Ecclesiastes 4:5**

Simply on worldly principles, idleness is bad. In spiritual things it's worse by far. In earthly goods a man may have a store, and live upon it, while it lasts. Not so in grace. There we can have no store — no stock to go to, laid up within the soul for many days. The Christian's glory is to live from day to day — to know that in himself is emptiness — that all his "fresh springs" are in Jesus. The Christian must daily to take his pitcher to the well of living waters; daily to gather heavenly manna for his daily needs; nay, every moment to receive out of Christ's fullness, grace upon grace," (John 1:16.)

Living upon Jesus! The food is to be found, not in us — but in Jesus alone. If it were in us, what need, then, to obtain more? Why does the laborer toil from day to day? Because he cannot live upon himself. Food must be obtained; and for it he must work. "No work — no food; no food — no life" is his daily rule.

So is it with the soul. Its only food is Jesus; and this from hour to hour, from day to day, is always the same. Of itself, the soul is ever lean — ever in need of food. It knows no plenty, but in Jesus; and every morsel of its sustenance is drawn from Him! Oh! it is a miserable time when Christians live, or try to live, upon their own resources; to treasure up the days gone by, and feed upon their past experience.

The man may be perfect in doctrine, rich in experience, versed in the knowledge of the ways of God. But what is this? Neither doctrine, knowledge, nor experience feeds the soul. They are but finger-posts pointing to Jesus — to tell the pilgrim where to have a meal. The man who feeds on Christ, can feed on nothing else but His sin-atoning work; His person; His love; His presence; His words; His visits to the soul. He says, "Jesus is with me. With Him I am happy — without Him I am undone. Health, strength, and peace, and comfort, I have none, except in Jesus!"

It is thus, and only thus, that the soul is fed. Oh, then, my soul, fold not your hands in indolence; feed not upon yourself. Seek daily strength for daily needs in Christ, and Christ alone.

### **"Better one handful with tranquility — than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind!" Ecclesiastes 4:6**

TRANQUILITY! To many a weary plodder, how sweet the thought! Tranquility! Many pursue you as a phantom — and few find you in the end, because, though love of tranquility is great, the love of gain is greater. "Could I not increase my business — enlarge my warehouse, or have a second business in another street? True, my business is large enough already; my time and strength are already largely taxed; but, then, my fortune will be sooner made; and I shall soon have tranquility!" Thus often speaks the tradesmen.

How many more "join house to house," "lay field to field" (Isaiah 5:8) — all meaning to have tranquility at last! Alas! at such a rate, will tranquility ever come?

But, what is "tranquility!" Is it a cottage in a woods? A villa with a pleasure-ground, and nothing to do! Ah! tranquility like this, is far from tranquility. What weariness, what fretting emptiness! Time, in its very course, becomes a labor; and listlessness corrodes the soul.

Then, there is the quiet of a large inheritance, with literary ease, or country occupations — the farm, the chase, the garden, or the fond pursuit of nature's science. There is tranquility in these, it is true; but will it stand the test of time? It is quiet on the surface — but is there tranquility within? The soul, the conscience — is it quiet there? Does it disturb the tranquility to think of death, and judgment,

and eternity? If tranquility is thus destroyed, does it deserve the name?

True tranquility consists in having peace with God — a quiet conscience — Christ in the soul — the sense of sin forgiven. With tranquility like this, a handful is enough; a pittance grows to plenty, and poverty to wealth. Oh! it is a blessing to have enough to live upon; to have neither poverty nor riches; to be fed with "food convenient" for our use. (Proverbs 30:8.)

While others are oppressed with wealth, and travail, and vexation — may true tranquility be our lot! All this, and Jesus too! This tranquility! My needs supplied! And comforts too! All this, and Jesus! My lonely dwelling lighted with His presence! Each frugal meal made sweeter by His love! My walks, my works, my solitude, my social moments — all graced with Jesus, and His company! Is not this tranquility indeed!

My soul, if greater wealth were yours, might not this tranquility be in danger — and your ease be turned to travail? Know, then, your true riches in Jesus — and be content.

### **[atcin](#) "A threefold cord is not quickly broken." Ecclesiastes 4:12**

Union is strength, whether with two or three, or more. Thus man was never meant to be alone; and God provided him "a helper." (Genesis 2:18.) In Heaven, no solitude exists; neither would earth have known it, had man continued holy. Sin is the cause of all the desolation which pervades mankind. It needs an effort now to escape it. To make friends, and to keep them; to float within the current of society, and not be stranded by some eddy on the lonely shore — all this is done by dint of effort. Without it few would have anything but solitude at last.

Our corporations, our societies, our friendly unions all say, "Union is strength, and we must work to have it."

But in communing with God, man must be solitary. This is another consequence of sin. True, there is social prayer; but in the heart prayer, there must be solitude. No blending there can be of soul with soul, but for a season, and by an effort too. Sin has thrown up its barriers between man and man. Each sinful body, each fallen mind, presents an obstacle to union. The sense of union with the saints, must be an act of faith, an effort — a flash of light, of more or less recurrence — and then it is dark again. Unbroken union is reserved for eternity, when sin, with all its barriers, gives way to glory.

Union is strength. A twofold cord is something; "a threefold cord is better." Though union here on earth is faulty, yet, even here, much may be done by union. If two or three agree together in the name of Jesus, their prayers are mighty. How strong is this "threefold cord!" When those who live together, strive jointly to resist and conquer sin, each knowing his own infirmities, each trying to improve the rest — each practicing the grace of meek forbearance, and humility — they weave a cord of many folds, and strong endurance. But if one or other ceases to pray, to watch, to strive, and to forbear, how can the cord maintain its unity, or keep its substance?

"A threefold cord!" But where can it be found in perfectness? Only in God — in God, distinct in three persons, but in essence One — divers in office, yet in purpose undivided — one God, one Lord, Jehovah; one, in Father, Son, and Spirit; each, in the covenant of grace, before time began, pledged to redeem His people; each bound by covenant to love, to keep, to bless, to perfect, them; all, in the unity of wisdom, majesty, and power, acting in holy concert. The Three-in-One — the One-in-Three — in mercy, grace, and truth — say, who can break the threefold cord of Deity?

### **"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God." Ecclesiastes 5:1**

The Preacher says, "Guard your steps!" A prophet says the same, "Keep your feet from being unshod." (Jeremiah 2:25.) The advice is good. To walk unshod is a sure way to pierce yourself with many sorrows. For slipshod grace will never advantage you — and never less so than in going to the house of prayer. Leave not your Gospel shoes at home; nor lose them along the way. If so, you will not find them when you come to worship.

What do you think of, and speak of, along the way to the house of God? If earthly things engage the mind — the doings of the past or coming week; the dress or manners of the passers by; the news you have heard; the letters you have had — if thoughts like these are in your mind up to the very threshold of the church door — this will hinder your devotions.

God's worship must begin before you leave your home; your thoughts, your speech, your eyes — must be focused on God. Fix them on Jesus — and then you will not have them to bestow on other things. Make Christ your company along the way — and He'll accompany you in the house of God; then all its acts shall savor of His presence.

In private worship, or in social prayer, we cannot be dwelling on worldly things — and then spring at once from earth to Heaven. Oh, there is a preparation of the heart; a setting of the countenance heavenwards; a girding the loins for fellowship with God; a deep conviction of His majesty; a pausing on the threshold of His presence — that the first word of prayer may have His blessing. If you would "guard your feet" in seasons of devotion, be sure you keep them well at other times. As is your daily walk — your prayers will be. A careless walk begets a wandering mind, unfit to gather in its thoughts, and settle them in prayer. Prayer and the daily walk act, and react, on one another. He who is much in prayer will guard his feet; and he who guard his feet properly, be much in prayer.

Nothing feeds the soul like meditation — the habit of reflecting on our ways, and Scripture truths. This leads alike to holiness, and converse with the Lord. Then, child of God, at all times "guard your feet;" not only when you go to the house of prayer.

**Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong." Ecclesiastes 5:1**

In converse with a friend, it is not one alone who speaks, but two people; and of this converse, listening is as much a part, as speaking.

So is it in communing with God. Time was, my soul, with you, when prayer was but a form, and nothing more. No thought had you of listening in prayer; of watching for the breathings of the Spirit, telling you what to say to Jesus, or whispering what Jesus said to you. Now, by God's grace you have learned to hearken. Dull is the prayer-time, when you hear not the voice of your Beloved! Oh, if you can not feel that God is speaking to you, as you speak to Him; His presence telling that He loves you, hears you, answers you — then your prayer will be to you a "tinkling cymbal," or as "sounding brass."

Often have you sat before the Savior in silent devotion — on your part silent, but not so on the part of Jesus — and found more eloquence in silence, than in fervid utterance. But oh! to speak, and be the only speaker — the Spirit bringing no response, no message from the throne! Oh then, my soul, you fall back upon your emptiness, and are sad indeed.

In prayer and devotions, be . . . much alive in listening; quick to discern the voice of Jesus; and ready to obey. Often has the Spirit beckoned you to prayer, and you have framed some fond excuse — some imagined duty, or yet some occupation that pleased you better. How often has some casual book — a journal — or a work of art, robbed you of communion with the Lord! In every room — on every table — looking from every window — there is danger, more than enough for your constancy — so beware, beware!

Look for the Spirit's movings, when you pray. Do not grieve Him; nor resist Him in His promptings. Some word has quivered on your lips, and been withheld. And why? It savored of some duty you had wished to shun; some heart-confession that your pride refused to make; a prayer for one, for whom you did not wish to pray. The Spirit urged it; your heart said, "Nay."

Say, is not this the sacrifice of fools? My soul, this should not be. Be more ready, then, to hearken. Thus shall you hear what Jesus says — what Jesus thinks. Thus shall the Spirit indite your thoughts, direct your prayers, and nourish you for glory.

**"Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong." Ecclesiastes 5:1**

OH what a tender thing is Prayer! How surpassing wonderful, is man's fellowship with God; and God's fellowship with man!

The motions of the Spirit, how refined! How easily repelled! How lightly interfered with! How promptly thwarted in their action!

Say, do you feel a sudden burst of prayer? Do tears flow fast? Are your lips enlarged in speaking to your God? Beware, my soul, how you give up your prayer, or break the current of adoring thought. True, it may be the time for reading. The Word may be in hand — the place be open, where you are going to read. Or it may be in midst of study, when thought has been in exercise, but not with reference to prayer. Or yet you may be otherwise engaged — in secular pursuits, that may be left without a breach of duty. Quench not the Spirit's movings — He is leading you to fellowship with God. There, in the bosom and the smile of Jesus, you will find all that is needed for the time.

If you well-versed in Christian devotion, and know the lights and shadows that attend it — you will learn to seize the moment, and lift your soul to Heaven when you can. In studying the Word, if anything is sent with power to your soul; if thought flows quickly, and light is shed upon you from the door thus opened into Heaven — turn not to other portions, as long as the Spirit keeps you there. This

were to dictate to the Spirit, to interrupt His actings, and tempt Him thus to leave you to yourself.

The treasures of the Word are His to unfold — His to apply. And if He feeds you in this, or other pasture, He has prepared a blessing for you there. You may have wished to read some other portion, as coming in its course, or as better suited to your present need. Leave that with God. Be sure that power, thus derived, will . . .

give you strength for any trial; fit you for any duty; and answer every end you had in view.

The Spirit knows your daily, hourly need, and He has given you what seemed Him good. Trust, then, the Spirit's leadings. Strive to discern His intimations. And thus increase in wisdom, grace, and peace.

## **"Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God." Ecclesiastes 5:2**

Of yourself, my soul, you are incapable of prayer. By nature you are far from God, how could you pray? If something must be said, your native powers can furnish words. But if the Spirit does not move you — it is not prayer. None but the Spirit's voice can speak to God. None but the Spirit's mind can reach his ear. "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Romans 8:26-27

Why does the Spirit dwell in you? To be the framer of your thoughts — the organ of your speech — to God: that you in Him, and He in you, might think the thoughts, and think the language of prayer. To pray without the Spirit, is the same as thinking without a mind, or speaking without the power of speech. Bright thoughts; well-rounded sentences; the flow of sentiment, and earthly sympathies — what are they? They come not from the Spirit — and they do not lead you to God.

What has the Spirit thought? What has the Spirit said, within you? Your life, your heart, your thoughts — must be centered in the Spirit. In Him you pray. In Him you praise. In Him alone you are a living thing. Without Him, while you live, you are spiritually dead.

My soul, whence all your waverings in prayer; resolves half formed, and forthwith given up; playing with sacred duties; uttering many things, but feeling not? Whence all your parleyings with conscience; pleading for grace, yet half-afraid to have it; striving against sin, yet longing to indulge it; praying against some idol, yet hugging it all the while. Whence your discomfort after prayer; conscious of not having dealt with God? Is it not this — the mind has thought — the lips have moved — without the Spirit? Why did you speak without Him? Better be silent altogether — than run before his motions.

In private prayer, fret not, though waiting times be long — though often you leave the throne, and not a word be spoken. What could you say? The Spirit spoke not. You could not but be silent.

## **"God is in Heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few!" Ecclesiastes 5:2**

God is above in majesty and power. He hears your every word. He reads your every thought. You may forget what you have thought or said. Not so with the all-knowing and all-seeing God.

Beware of making vows to God. Who asks them of you? Make holy resolutions, if you will; and pray for grace to keep them. Have deep convictions of your own infirmity; trust only in the Spirit's power for strength; think of the love of Jesus; be daily crucified with Christ — and thus go forth, to meet the trials of a fallen world. This will advance you more than all your vows.

Do not rashly prolong your times of worship, nor enter lightly on a course of self-imposed pious duties. If these are followed for a time, and then be given up — it is worse than if they never had been pursued. While yet your time remained, was it not still your own? Who asked you to employ it thus? God goes to meet you at the usual hour — will He not mark your breach of purpose?

Again, when prayer time is diminished, or study of the Word is hurried over — does the Spirit say, "It was not always so!" Thus God is mocked, and you receive injury. Retrograde habits speak of backward grace. Your only safety is in going forward.

"Let your words be few!" Five minutes heartfelt prayer — is better than hours of formal worship!

"Let your words be few!" Abhor the habit of empty prayer — praying for praying's sake, it may be to eke out the moments of a given time set apart for devotional exercises. Your words cannot be too many — when God is present with you. Does Jesus ever think your words too many? Does He grow weary of your company? Did He ever motion you to leave his presence? Your own infirmities cut short your prayers — Jesus can never wish you gone. Speak often to the Lord, even though your words are few. Thus moments of communion grow to hours of prayer. Originating thus, your praying times are sweeter, than when they come from formal words. Whole days may thus be spent in true devotion; in walking; eating; communing with others; your every hour may be prayerful, and your every thought may be sweet. Such seasons, oh! how precious, unutterably precious!

My soul, reckon not on their lasting. Cherish them while you have them. Be reluctant to part with them. Thus, by God's grace, they may return again.

**"Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the angel, (or temple messenger) 'My vow was a mistake!' Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?" Ecclesiastes 5:6**

Angels appeared on earth in times of old, bearing God's message to His people. They heard the vows then made, and might have come to claim fulfillment.

The priests of God were called his "angels, or "messengers" (Mal. 2:7). And in the Church of Christ preachers, and ministers, are called "angels", or "messengers". (Rev. 1-3) Had vows been made before the priest, and then excuse been offered for their non-performance — the priest would say, "While you promised — was it not your own? Why did you vow — not meaning to fulfill your vow? You have not vowed to man, but unto God!" (See Acts 5:4.)

And is there not One, greater than angel, minister, or priest, to claim performance of our vows? I mean not formal vows, the solemn dedication of one's self, or means, to God; all these are very solemn, and, if broken, must pierce the soul with many sorrows. But I mean the resolutions, whether of more or less determination, that either flit across the mind, or assume a more enduring character. Have you been sick, or afflicted in other ways? Has danger suddenly beset you? Before health were scarcely returned, or danger gone — did thankfulness depart? Your vows of service — your fervent resolutions — where are they? Where is your change of life, solemnly pledged in the hour of need? Your former sinful books, your sinful pleasures, your sinful companions — are they renounced? Say not before the angel — still less before the living God, "It was an error; I did not mean it so. Religion is good in sickness, but in health it is not befitting."

My friend, will God accept excuses such as these? Ask your own conscience — it shall tell you true.

And you, my soul, I have a word for you — a word for every child of God: Think well before your resolutions. Even your passing thoughts are known to Him. Harbor not the thought with marked self-satisfaction, unless prepared to act upon it. Hold it far from you; let it not come within the range even of slight resolve, until you can count the cost, and see if you have faith to make the sacrifice. To break even passing resolutions unnerves the soul, and, more or less, impedes its healthy action. Remember, then, with whom you have to do, and be watchful of your vows!

**"In the multitude of dreams there is also vanity!" Ecclesiastes 5:7**

In telling idle dreams, there is vanity. It must be so — the Scripture says it.

"What harm?" you say; "How can I wrong myself, or others, by telling them my dreams?" The vanity is this: at best, it is needless to describe the nothings of a dreaming hour, the fantasies of a dream world. The mind which deals with Truth, thinks it a waste of breath to tell such vanities; to tread a ground, on which it finds no standing; to breathe an air without an atmosphere: sight, hearing, sound, perception, memory, all conjured up — for what? To tell the phantom wonders of a dream!

Man's waking thoughts are mostly vanity — mere shadows, and no more. If so, then what are your dreaming thoughts, my Friend? Mere shadows of your vanity; the shadow of your shadows; the mere reflection of your nothings. Dreams mostly hinge on SELF. Their world is thus shut up within the dreamer. If you hate to speak of self — then it is irksome to you to recount your dreams. It is but another way of feeding vanity — to have the thoughts of others fixed upon yourself.

If Christ is much the subject of your thoughts — then you will not have heart, or mind, thus to employ your speech. If it is vanity

to tell your dreams — then is it not vanity to think of them; to have the mind disturbed because some imaginings crossed it in its sleep?

Yet, Reader, I do not deny that God may be pleased to visit you in dreams, and stamp his truth upon you in the night. Such dreams are not to be despised; they savor of something better than yourself.

Some simple rules will tell you when a dream is good. Has it made you feel your sin — and taught you that you need a Savior? Has it brought a sense of Jesus to your soul? His love for sinners? His power to save? Have dreaming thoughts thus done some good to your soul which waking thoughts had failed to do? If so, thank God for your dream, and treasure it up; yet, not because it is a dream, but for the sake of what it taught you.

God's ways are various. Mostly He brings us to self-knowledge in our waking hours; but it is as easy to him to do it in our sleep. Happy are they who, waking or asleep, are brought to Jesus! To them, the world itself is one vast dream. Their true, and only waking hours, are when they feel His love.

### **"For in the multitude of words there is also vanity!" Ecclesiastes 5:7**

"When words are many, sin is not absent; but he who holds his tongue is wise!" (Proverbs 10:19.) Can it be otherwise? Words are but thoughts made audible — the inward man clothed in external form. And what is thought? It is but the working of the heart within.

"The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked!" How, then, can "many words" be free from sin? The larger the garden — the greater the room for weeds; the more the words — the greater the room for sin!

The pride of speech is natural to man, and nothing delights him more than when he is listened to. To SELF it is delightful, to be the best speaker — to give the interesting discourse, while others hearken; to tell, for hours, what SELF has thought and done. To worldly men the pleasure is unmixed; their conscience tells them not it's vanity, nor troubles them with sense of sin. But to the child of God it is otherwise.

I ask, you, Christian reader, have you ever spoken largely, and, in after-thought, had a sense of inner delight and vanity? Your speech has been of doctrine — of Christian duty — of all that tends to edify the soul — we'll grant it. But has not SELF crept in; self-congratulation at having spoken well — SELF, seeking to be praised for soundness, wit, or discernment? Have not the promptings of the Spirit been outstripped — your lips gone faster than His teaching? Have you not spoken often for speaking sake, reluctant to renounce the charm of hearing self — unwilling to give way to others? Poor humanity! Alas! Alas!

I pity you. Oh! it is a dangerous thing to have the gift of speech — the love, and ability to speak well. It is well to know how we may hit the golden mean; to steer midway between cold reserve, uncourteous silence, and the opposite extreme; if need be, to speak much — if more expedient, to say little. Frankness, and openness of heart, are pleasing: a readiness to impart knowledge, experience, and information is admirable: to give one's mite to cheer the social circle with apt discourse is good. But be it ever done in meek submission to the Spirit, with inward self-possession and with prayer; that self be crucified, and God's glory simply sought. Thus to possess the soul is glorious. Say, is not this to have the mind of Christ?

### **"For in the multitude of words there is also vanity!" Ecclesiastes 5:7**

Oh! what a power there is in "words!" On lightning's wings they fly, bearing their messages to heart and mind, telling invisibly, yet surely, on the hearers. Who should be as guarded as the Christian in his speech? How often a thoughtless word turns holy talk to controversy and vain jangling! How often, through a word, some worldly theme is started, then eagerly pursued — while heavenly things are disregarded! How often a single word stirs discontent, brings injuries to mind long since forgotten, and sets men harping on their grievances! How often a word kindles the smouldering embers of dislike, or fans the flame of scandal! These, and like evils, might be much avoided, if we would only think before we speak, and weigh the probable effect of what we are going to say.

It were a sad bondage to the worldly mind, forever to keep watch over its thoughts and words. To careless saints the task is likewise hard. But, to the heart well kept, Christ's yoke is easy, and his burden light. (Matthew 11:30.) Reader, is this experience yours? Are you not bound to practice what you know? Why have you, then, the faculty of thought, as quick in its movements as the lightning's flash; strong in its powers of forecasting; in the twinkling of an eye, able to calculate effects, and stop ideas halfway between thought, and utterance? Why, but to use your powers well!

Be quick in speech, if need be; but calm in thought, collected in discourse. Much may be done by practice; unruly tongues may be



tamed, loose habits may be corrected, and every word led captive to Christ. Before you mention what you've seen or heard, say to yourself, "Should I repeat it? Will it foster my pride? Will it expose no faults of others? Will idle curiosity be fed, or vain remarks be made? Is it not better to keep it to myself?" Much time and comfort would be saved, did men but reason thus! Examine well the converse of a day; balance your watchfulness against your thoughtless speech. Compare the loss and gain incurred by either, and then you'll see that, if in careful speaking there are many benefits, "in the multitude of words there is also vanity."

### **"I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner." Ecclesiastes 5:13**

SELF is much made of in the things of time, but little thought of for eternity. If self is the body, self is also the soul. After the body-self is laid in dust, the soul-self is still alive — doubly alive for happiness or misery; self lives forever! All that we do, has influence on self, its interest, or its injury. All that self does, has bearings on its state, either in hindering, or helping its eternal good. Man, in his blindness, sees it not. Thus "bitter is put for sweet, and sweet for bitter; good is called evil, and evil good." (Isaiah 5:20.)

The miser hugs his gold. To him his gifts to others are losses. He thinks that all that is kept is gain. How different the Bible truth. "One man gives freely — yet gains even more; another withholds unduly — but comes to poverty!" (Proverbs 11:24.) Thus the Christian finds that what he keeps, he loses; and what he gives, he gains. Oh, for more faith to see this principle — and more faithfulness to act upon it! It is easy to avow it, where self is not concerned; but to say "Amen" to it, when self is called to give — this is another thing.

Reader, have you ever given in faith, and found that God increased your store? Have you ever had a hoard — a sum saved up and cherished — and yet have difficulties come and clouds obscured your prospects? (I speak not of the comfort to the soul in giving, or of the spiritual loss sustained when gifts have been withheld.) Then can you understand how "riches" may be "kept to the hurt of those who own them." If your means exceed your needs — what do you with the rest? Why do you hoard it? Is it for some unrealistic purpose — to provide for children (this may be overdone) — to meet some necessary call? Isn't it in truth, kept for self? Ah, what will self do with it, when self is gone? Say, for what then is it kept? — the moldering corpse, or the departed soul! You keep it to your hurt!

Yet giving, of itself, profits nothing. It neither saves nor sanctifies. (1 Corinthians 13:3.) To give indeed, men must be saints indeed. Is love to Christ the motive of your gifts? Then are you qualified to give indeed — able to lend to God. (Proverbs 19:15.) Money, to pass with God, must all be coined in the mint of faith. No loan will He avow, nor interest pay, except upon that which bears Christ's image, and His superscription. To give in faith — to give in love — to give with understanding — Reader, may this be your, and mine!

### **"This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes — so he departs; and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?" Ecclesiastes 5:16**

As we came naked from our mother's womb — naked shall we return. (Job 1:21) Nor shall we be able to carry in our hand anything that we had below. Oh, what a character this gives to earthly things! They are all connected with a sinful world. They are left behind, because they cannot enter Heaven. Hence the Apostle's moral is added to the Preacher's truth, "Having food and clothing, let us therewith be content." (1 Timothy 6:8.)

How few of man's possessions are really needed! Take food and clothes away — the rest are mostly useless. We live in times so artificial, it is hard to say what are mere luxuries, and what are needful comforts. God's servants often are carried down the stream of vain conformity. Did they but keep the Scripture rule in mind — what loss of time and strength would be avoided! The Scripture does not say, "Be content with what you have." (Hebrews 13:5) without a reason.

God would not stint His children, nor ask them to abstain from anything, merely for self-denial. It is that injury is wrapped in the indulgence — and good is gained in keeping from it. I beg you, reader, analyze your time, and occupations. See how far your thoughts are lost, and energy expended, in seeking things, or doing works, that are of no real use.

Even little things have great effects. Each need that you create; each needless article, or ornament, for house or person; every pursuit you follow, must have its influence on your soul — if in nothing else, at least in this respect, that more or less it occupies the mind.

You say, "It is but a moment — the thing is quickly done; the object is now bought, the arrangement is now made. It all falls in with daily occupations, and habits ready formed; no harm can possibly arise." Oh, my friend, nothing can lodge within your mind, even for

a moment, but it must impact upon your life. Character is made up, for good or evil, by objects ever flitting through the mind. The more that Christ is thought of — the more the life is pure. The more the world is in the thoughts — the less will Christ be there. Little things soon make great things. A great world is made of little worldly things. Be jealous, then, with godly jealousy Beware! Your vines have tender grapes! (Canticles 2:15.)

**"Better what the eye sees [the enjoyment of what is available to one] than the cravings of wandering desire. This is also vanity (emptiness, meaninglessness, and futility) and a striving after the wind and a feeding on it!" Ecclesiastes 6:9**

It is a bitter disappointment for a man to long for what he has not — for what he cannot have. That is, to sigh for plenty — in the midst of poverty; to aspire for luxury — and have nothing but simple fare; to have dreams of grandeur and ambition — and yet to walk in humble life; to aspire to eminence — and then return to our mundane occupations.

All this is indeed lamentable to the heart!

Oh, how "desire" wanders, refusing to be satisfied with present comforts! Memory revels in the past; and hope dwells upon the future. The soul thus feeds on shadows — and leaves reality behind. There is bitterness in this, more than the tongue can tell.

Philosophy says, "Do not repine at your lot, but make the best of it." This is cold comfort, after all.

Blind fate says, "Hush! it is your destiny." Neither is this a cure for wandering desire.

The Christian has a remedy which never fails, when properly applied — the Savior's presence. This . . . turns poverty to riches; invests the humblest meal with luxury;

makes crowded cities as pleasant as the mountain top; imparts refreshment in the midst of labor; fills voids with Christ's fullness; and gives us the presence of the best of friends.

"Surely, I am with you all the days (perpetually, uniformly, and on every occasion) — to the very close and consummation of the age!" Matthew 28:20

Children of God! your heavenly Father says, "All things are yours!" (1 Corinthians 3:21) — and so they are, in the degree and manner that is good for me. All the gold in the world is Christ's, and as His child, He gives me just as much as suits my best interest. If more were good for me — would not my loving Savior give me more — money, or material things, or health, or friendship?

Come back, then, wandering desire! Do not roam abroad over that which is not yours — that is forbidden ground.

What is your present lot? Scan it well; look at it through the lens of faith — and you will see a blessing in it. You will find a Father's love, a Savior's presence, and the Spirit's comforts — wrapped in the garb of present things, and rays of glory coming from them all.

Is not what I now have, better than the cravings of wandering desire — with such realities, better, far better, than the shadows of wandering desire!

"Be content with what you have. For God has said — I will never fail you. I will never abandon you!" Hebrews 13:5

**"That which has been is named, for it is known that it is MAN." Ecclesiastes 6:10**

Oh, what a name is MAN!

What worlds of meaning are shut up in its brief space of letters!

What floods of evil! What depths of woe! What mighty histories! What a ceaseless round of change!

The name of MAN! Once it meant all that is lovely, glorious, and happy — all that is steadfast, solid, and enduring. Backward, man pointed to his Maker, God; forward, man looked to glory.

Alas, how all has changed! Now it means . . . all that is fallen, and corrupt; all that is far from God, estranged from glory, all that is

changeable, and changeable.

Such, such is man; such I am now.

Nothing is changeable, but man. God knows no changes. The angels, fallen and unfallen, yes live and act on changeless principles, of good or evil. Sun, moon, and stars revolve in orbits fixed and unvarying. Plants, minerals, and animals are ruled by laws and instincts, regular and sure. Even the uncertain weather, and the fickle wind, changeable in order of succession, change not in nature and effect. Man, fallen man, is the one exception to the rule.

Thus changed and changeable, man has himself to thank for it. As he is the cause, so is he the effect, of change. The first seed of sin, lodged in the heart of man, contained the germ of all change; root, stem, and branch — the flower, and fruit, of all that happened since. Hence came the change of empires, dynasties, and powers; of customs, languages, and laws. Hence, the excess of cold and heat, moisture or drought. And hence, the endless changes of events, so hard to calculate, so difficult to meet.

Look where you will, and when you will, there is change — The Preacher says, "That which has been is named." He means that he had named the history of the past, the order of the present, in all its changeability — and now, in a word, he gives the sum and substance, the root and essence of it all — it is "Man!"

But, wondrous to relate, within the precincts of that very name is found again, all that man was at first; yes, infinitely more. It is holiness in man; wisdom in man; stability in man; glory and happiness in man; eternal life in man; yes, God in man; the second Adam — the man Christ Jesus! Oh! my soul, mourn not your changes, your changeability, your changeability! It is overruled for good. You have found your all in Him who knows no change.

### **"A good name is better than precious ointment." Ecclesiastes 7:1**

Many who fear not God, nor care for man, think much of losing their good name. On moral principles, it is well it should be so; and, failing at higher rule of action, it is wholesome for society. It is so far well to have a name for moral worth — but will your character bear God's inspection? That is the question. If your good name consists merely in human merit, I pity you, my friend. This will avail you nothing in the end. Has Christ said of you, "I will write upon him my new name?" (Rev. 3:12.) Is Christ the heart, the head, the substance of your character? Are His merits, your merits? His name, your only trust? His Cross and Blood, the rock on which you stand? His character, the ground of your acceptance with God?

And yet there is a character — "a good name;" the outward witness to the inward grace. "A good reputation among outsiders" is precious to God's people; not for their own sake, but the Lords.

Beware of seeking a good name for anything but Christian truth. If the world speaks well of you, merely because you are kind, polite, and amiable — it is not a name worth having. Better, if so it happens, be reviled for the name of Christ, than to have praise of men for merely human merit. Plume not yourself upon your character. If it is good, the glory is not yours; then take not to yourself that which belongs to Jesus.

Oh, what a deceptive thing is flattery! The love of a fair name — how stealthily it works upon the soul! Some unwise friend commends you. You say, "Give God the glory; the gifts are His; so are the graces too; grieve not my soul by praising me." Your friend is hardly gone, wondering at your deep humility, when immediately vanity returns; you take the flattery to your soul; you take the praise you had rejected to yourself, and fall in love with your own character!

Simplicity! You lovely grace! How rare it is to find you! We all are actors, more or less, and play our part — thinking what men will say of us. A good name! Often it sickens one to think of it; how SELF has worshiped it; how SELF has suffered from it! My soul, beware! Glory in nothing but in the cross, the righteousness, and the name of Christ. Think not of SELF, nor of your own good name.

### **"The day of death, is better than the day of one's birth!" Ecclesiastes 7:1**

"This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (John 6:60) Hard, yes, impossible to flesh and blood. It is spoken to the saints; and yet it is not every professing Christian who can accept it — so few have made their calling and election sure. My soul, you must plead guilty to the charge. Content with present privilege, you have not duly sought to realize the world to come. Shame be upon you, for thus despising your inheritance!

Reader, are you a child of God? If so, I charge you solemnly, halt not halfway between unbelief and glory. The work within you is

imperfect, if you do not long for "the Kingdom." I mean not the desire to be done with sorrow, toil, and care; but the desire to be with Jesus — to have no cloud between you and His glory.

Some will tell you that the desire to depart, and be with Jesus, will unfit you for your active duties. This is a great mistake. Who ever longed for glory — and yet who ever acted up to duty, as did Jesus? Can you do better than walk in Jesus' steps. Can you suggest a better rule? Believe me, nothing will strengthen you for trial, or set you free from love of earthly things; nothing will make you cool in danger, or wise in counsel; nothing make earthly comforts half so sweet, or lawful pleasures half so pleasing — as the desire to be with Jesus — the waiting until He beckons you to glory.

Can it be wrong to wish to be with Jesus — to long to see His face beyond all longing? Say, what is love without it? The love of Jesus! His love to you — your love for Jesus! This is the soul of godliness — the vital principle of Heaven. The more you love Him — the more will you long to be with Him. The more you love Him — the better will you now serve Him.

Some put away the thought of death — and fix the mind alone on Christ's return. But is this scriptural, or apostolic? Paul earnestly desired Christ's second coming, longing to see His glory — and yet he also longed for death. (Philippians 1:23.) Which is the better? To wait for Jesus in a world of sin? Or to be with Him now, and thus attend Him when He comes again? (1 Thessalonians 4:14.)

Should fear of death detain your longings here? Is it not always better to depart and be with Jesus?

Reader, what has your birth done for you? It brought you too to a world of sorrow, pain, infirmity, and sin. What will your death do for you? Which will to you be better — birth or death? Say, are you of the Preacher's mind?

## **"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting." Ecclesiastes 7:2**

Not so! the worldling thinks. He shuns the house of woe. The darkened room — the solemn stillness — the very fact of death — disturbs him. The chastened looks, the swollen eye, the mourning garb — all have a message to his conscience. They speak to him of what he is not prepared for — the eternal world!

Oh! my soul, you can look back, and tell what a relief it was once to you, to escape such scenes, and find yourself again in haunts of vanity — then you could be at ease once more. But things are now altered for you. For now you find a pleasure in the house of woe, which you would not find in worldly merriment.

Why is it so? Is it a pleasure to hear the mourner's sob, to see the tear, to listen to the tale of sad bereavement? Oh,

no! but it is a feast to you, because you feed there upon the Savior. He's present with you in the house of mourning.

Often there you meet with all the saints, in all the fragrance of sanctified affliction — the stars of promise shining upon them in the night of sorrow. You gather light and fragrance to yourself in communing with them. Christ's glory, seen on them, alights on you. Your soul is full with feasting upon Jesus.

But it is not always so. It is not in every house of woe, that faith and grace are found. In some, the name of Christ is neither named, nor welcomed. It is then your hands hang down; such visits pain you to the heart. Yet even then, the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting. For Christ goes where you go — stays with you there — and when you come away, attends you still.

"Sorrow is better than laughter," the Preacher says (verse 3). When things are bright, and sorrow far away — the soul too often forgets that the world is vanity. The sight of sorrow and death . . . reminds us that all is vanity; lays bare our secret sin; shows us at once our deep necessities, and their remedy in Jesus.

To weep with those who weep, in their frail humanity, to be reminded of our own transitoriness; to sympathize with sorrow, until the springs of woe are opened in ourselves — all this is good. It is better than a feast. The vessel of faith mounts on the flood of sympathy, bearing the soul to Jesus! The house of mourning is a blessing. It presents . . . a void, which must be filled; a sorrow, which must be comforted; a corruption, which must be turned to glory. It shuts us up to Christ — and is not that a feast?

## **"It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke, than to listen to the song of fools!" Ecclesiastes 7:5**

None question this most wholesome truth; but few there are who cordially practice it themselves. "Let others be reproved; but, as for

me, I cannot bear it." Thus speaks the human heart.

My soul, many are your infirmities, and none more humbling, than your dislike to receive reproof. Did I really believe myself as vile as I profess to be — would I become angry at hearing of my faults? I profess to be, "The least of saints — and the chief of sinners!" Such is a vain confession, if I am not prepared to welcome reproof! Oh, for more knowledge of myself; more of that chastened mind; more of that genuine humility which says, "Amen!" when SELF is justly censured.

Oh, what a hypocrite you are, my soul! Ready to feed upon the praise of others, and shine in imagined excellence — but how base, how beyond base, you are in reality! Oh, there is a majesty of soul; a greatness more than human — in welcoming reproof.

Music is sweet. Its cadences fall gently on the ear, and tune the heart to favor those who make it — and we thank them for their melody. Thus should you feel, when kindness prompts a friend to tell you of your faults. What can a friend do more than this? What could a friend require more of you? How grateful should you be to him, who wounds himself, in healing you — to him who is willing to bear your wrath — rather than allow you to go on in sin unchecked.

"A wise man's rebuke." Who is the "wise man" here spoken of? He who is wise enough to be faithful. Do not say, "He is not entitled to reprove me. His youth, his station, or his character, unfit him for the office. He is too harsh in his reproofs!" Had you a thorn hurting some tender part, would any be too young, too low in rank — to draw it out? Or were you locked in prison, would any be too vile to turn the key, and give you liberty? The only question to be asked is this, "Has he, then, told the truth? Is this failing or sin really mine? Has he hit the nail upon the head?" If so, your thanks are due to him.

Even though he is mistaken, and charges you wrongfully — yet you should thank him for his good intentions.

Reader, is this saying hard to you? Well, so it is to me. Of myself I cannot bear it, and I say, "Alas! who is sufficient for these things?" Would you have this meek grace? I gladly would have it too. Then, what remains for you and I? To learn of Jesus — of Him, who did no wrong, yet meekly suffered (1 Peter 1:21-23) — to study Jesus — to hide ourselves in Jesus — that we, in some poor measure, may follow in His steps!

### **"The song of fools." Ecclesiastes 7:5**

In nothing is character displayed, more than in the kind of music which satisfies the hearer. The songs of drunkards with their cups, bespeak the taste of those who sing them. The militaristic strain, the plaintive ditty, the flaunting ballad — speak for themselves; each tells the mind of him, whose choice they are.

The effect of music on the soul is most mysterious. The ear is pleased with it — but it knows not why. The heart responds instinctively, in cadences as measured as the melody which tunes its sympathy. It is not the sound alone; not the mere chain of notes, vocal, or instrumental; not the bare fact of melody, nor the harmonious blending of melody with melody. All this is purely physical — of itself it speaks no morality. It is that it finds within the bosom a secret, and responsive agency — a wondrous something which accords with it — a harmony of feeling between him who hears, and him who penned the melody.

This principle is native in the soul. With few exceptions, men cannot hear sweet sounds, and be insensible. Hence it exerts a wondrous agency for good — or evil. Tastes are imbibed, propensities encouraged, and habits formed, unconsciously it may be — yet most decidedly. Have you ever observed your mind while listening to a melody? Have you ever traced its after-tendencies in thought and feeling? Have you never found yourself more grave, or mirthful, more noisy, or more thoughtful, according to the sounds to which you have listened? I counsel you to trace these agencies of mind — to analyze your habits, tastes, and feelings — and, if you are given to music, to watch its bearing on your character.

In this, as in all your works, see how to most ensure the Savior's presence. If sacred sounds attune to holy meditation — suggesting thoughts of better things — awaking sweet remembrances of Jesus, and thus disposing you to fellowship with God — say, has not other music an influence as real, in strict accordance with its character? See, then, I beg you, that your tastes lead not to folly in your melody. For surely, if your soul is injured, you are not wise to harbor it; it then becomes "the song of fools" to you.

### **"The end of a matter is better than its beginning." Ecclesiastes 7:8**

Are all things better in their end, good things — as well as bad; things pleasant — and things painful. Is it alike with all? Is summer best, when ended? Time spent with choice companions — a walk with a bosom friend; are these, too, best when past and gone? Are parting sighs better than smiles at meeting?

The truth is this — all that man does is sinful; nothing passes through his hands without defilement, thus giving birth to sinful actions, thoughts, and tendencies. Thus all things human begin, and end, in sin; sin in the "blade;" sin in the "ear;" sin "in the full corn in the ear." Is not the end of sin, better than the beginning? Each sinner's course is best when ended; a sinful life is closed, and God is glorified, in judgment or in grace — whatever the sinner's end.

A sinful world will be far better in its end; for then God's kingdom will appear, eternal righteousness come in, and sin and sorrow disappear forever.

Things pleasant bring temptation, and while they last, we are never armored against it; when they are ended, the danger is at an end, and this is better.

The Christian should esteem each evening better than the morning; for then there is one day less to come — of sin, of conflict, and temptation — one day the less between the soul and glory.

Say, Christian, would you consent to live your days again? Would you have the shadow to return upon your dial (Isaiah 38:8), even for an hour? Would you bring back your thoughts, your words, your actions? Would you have self dug up, even from the grave of yesterday — to gaze upon its doings? That is far from you, O my soul! All things to you are best, when ended. Whatever there was of pain, is gone. Whatever there was of pleasure, is replaced tenfold. While the thing lasted, pleasure was mixed with pain, enjoyment was marred by sin; but now the thing is gone, and you may be glad.

When all is gone, Jesus is left! All joy — no sorrow; all peace — and no temptation, left in Him! Then say, can you regret the end of times and seasons — the end of all that is sweet and tender, loving and refined? Is not the Preacher right? Is the beginning better than the end?

## **"Patience is better than pride." Ecclesiastes 7:8**

Pride is the opposite of Patience. Man is impatient, since he is proud. Am I impatient with the ignorant — it is that I pride myself upon my knowledge. Am I out of patience with the uncultured — it is from the conceit of my own superior breeding. Many are proud — who think themselves humble. They make confession of their sins, or condescend to men of low degree — they think they are humble. But let vexations come — have they to bear reproof, to meet the faults, or ignorance of others, impatience tells the truth — they are proud, not humble.

Pride argues ignorance of SELF. Would you be humble?

Look at your own corruptions; survey your features in the Scripture looking-glass; consider well your own deformity; study the failings of your character.

Ah! if you know your heart — none will appear so vile, so corrupt, so sinful, as yourself!

You will wonder then how men can bear with you, and not how you can bear with them.

Would you be humble? Think of the cross of Christ. What nailed him to the tree? The bloody sweat; the crown of thorns; the tears; the pains; the taunts; the buffetings; the piercing cry — what caused them all? Your sins! Christian, remember this — your sins! Can you feel this, and yet be proud?

Think of the pit, from which He snatched you!

Think of the price, at which He bought you!

Think of the grace, with which He clothes you!

Think of the bliss, with which He will crown you!

Say, can you think of this, and be proud! Man prides himself on many things — his wit, his rank, his power, his moral goodness. For this he sets himself up as some model of perfection. But, oh! my soul, you have a pattern to consider — the God of patience! The more of patience, then, the more of God; the more of God — the more of glory, majesty, and greatness. The more impatience — the more of Satan, the more of all that's vile.

**"Do not be quick in spirit to be angry or vexed, for anger and vexation lodge in the bosom of**

## fools!" Ecclesiastes 7:9

Of human passions, none is so quick as anger. Hence by a hasty one — we mean an angry person: thus man instinctively writes his own character in the words he frames. Satan, indwelling in the soul, invests the passions with an amazing power — and on the stock of fallen nature is engrafted the strength, agility, and cunning of the fiend! Hence all the quickness of the passions; hence the electric speed, at which they move. Temptation lures — then lust conceives — sin is brought forth — the work of moral death all finished in a moment!

Say, who can trace the progress, from the first thought of anger to its outbreak? Oh! my soul, I gaze on you and wonder, to think of all your properties and powers. Within you dwells a world of evil. Where lurks the poison in your veins? In what secret principle is hid the element of anger, ready to show itself so quickly? To see you, in your gentler mood — who could suppose you capable of violence? No tinder less inflammable, when free from sparks — no lake more calm, when undisturbed by winds — than you, when not exposed to provocation.

What angered you, my soul? Your brother differed from you! He dared to have opinions of his own! And so you lost your temper! Or, yet, someone reproved you, slighted, or contradicted you! "Behold, how great a matter, a little fire kindles." (James 3:5.) The smallest trifle sets you in a flame!

Do your brother's failings anger you? You say, "My feelings are very sensitive; I cannot bear it." My friend, God bears with you! He sees your every sin — and yet He loves you, and bears with you! Boast not of sensitivity — it is a carnal thing. "Sensitive feeling" merits not the name, unless it is joined with meekness. All true refinement comes from God. Nowhere can it be learned, except at the cross of Christ. Restrain your feelings; smother your sensibilities. When words grow quick, be prompt to check them. Deal with your passions, as the Psalmist dealt with wicked men; be dumb with silence. (Psalm 39:1-2.)

Often have you said, "I will not speak a word." But resolution failed. You spoke — your brother answered; reply provoked retort — it was then all over with your meekness! Then learn from your experience; scan well the spot where once your feet have slipped, and, as you near it again, beware!

## "Anger rests in the bosom of fools." Ecclesiastes 7:9

God's estimate of folly is different from man's. In Scripture words:

- the godless man is a fool (Psalm 14)
- the base man is a fool (Job 30)
- the rash man is a fool (Proverbs 14)
- the slanderer is a fool (Proverbs 10)
- the mocker is a fool (Proverbs 14)
- the idolater is a fool (Romans 1)
- the lover of pleasure is a fool (Ecclesiastes 7:4)
- the undutiful man is a fool (Proverbs 15)
- the self-confident man is a fool (Proverbs 28)
- the spendthrift is a fool (Proverbs 21), and here,
- the angry man is a fool (Job 5:2; Proverbs 14:17).

It must be so. God's Word is ever right.

Wisdom is the opposite of folly. Wisdom, we know is peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated. Meekness itself is called wisdom — the wisdom from above (James 3.) — the wisdom of saints made perfect; the wisdom of God Himself.

Is meekness wisdom — then anger must be folly. Does not your own experience confirm it? When were you happy in your anger? A savage pleasure it may give you, while it lasts; but it leaves a sting behind!

Is it, then, wise to be unhappy, when you can have it otherwise? Is it wise to lose your temper, and thus reap anger's bitter fruits? The heaving bosom; the flashing eye; the sharp contention; the sullen mind; the feeling of estrangement from each other; and conflicts between your duty and your moodiness, between pride and due confession of your fault — when did these make you happy? When did you come uninjured from your anger? Whom did you hurt the most — yourself, or him, with whom you lost your temper?

Does anger help you in your prayers? Can you draw near to Jesus in your wrath? Or if He visits you, how does He look on you? Can

you return his look? Ah, no; you dare not look on Jesus in your folly. Say not, "I cannot help it." How often they are spoken wrongfully in sin and shame!

Meekness is wisdom; anger is folly. This we may learn from Moses' history. When Moses walked in meekness, he was wise — for then he found favor with God, and dignity with man. (Numbers 12.) When he was angry, he proved his folly. For this he forfeited his entrance to the promised land. (Numbers 20; Deuteronomy 1:37.) My soul, this was written for your learning. Then learn your lesson well.

### **"Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these?' For it is not wise to ask such questions." Ecclesiastes 7:10**

Such questions are not wise. They savor either of ignorance, or discontent. If former days really were better, then you are discontent — if not, then you are ignorant. At all events, days past, and present, are just what God has made them — so it is bad to raise the question. Faith takes matters as they come. Blind unbelief asks many questions; it often says, "Why!"

One says, "Trade was far better before I entered business — I wonder how it is?" Another, "Markets were better before I took to farming — How can it be?" A third, "Fortunes were sooner made, when I was young — Why does it happen thus?" "The seasons are not what they once were," exclaims a fourth — "all rain, no sunshine; what can the reason be?"

What are the times, my friend? Who made, who ordered them? Out of whose bosom did they come? Who holds them in His hand?

To quarrel with the times — is to find fault with God! He has made them all beautiful in their seasons. (Ecclesiastes 3:11.) If they do not please you — whose fault is it? Could you have made them better?

Examine well the links which interweave time present with time past — the mysterious chain of providential dealings. Look at the ordering of events, one hanging on the other, in perfect order, though mysterious. Survey the wonders of God's providence, the wondrous workings of His sovereign power. These are the the sum and substance of the times; times past, times present, and times future; your times and my times; the times of all men in all ages!

To change the times — were . . .to derange the ordering of Providence from first to last; to break the golden chain of divine events; to mar the beauty of God's structure.

God's dispensations revolve in fixed and sure orbits, all moving, acting, following, in perfect order. To pluck one adverse event away: to change sunshine for rain — or rain for sunshine; sorrow for joy — or joy for sorrow; easy for hard — or hard for easy, would be as foolish as to arrest the planets in their course, or sweep a constellation from the skies!

You say, "Times past were better than the present." Is God less present now than then? Are His paths more difficult? Are His ways less sure? Has grace, then, changed its character? Is it harder to be found? Is Jesus not the same? Is man less wicked now than then? Does he deserve a milder treatment?

Do not compare times against times — your hard lot against the "fortune" of your forefathers. Compare your "lot" with your deserts — and say which best befits you — to thank God or complain of His providential dealings with you!

### **"Wisdom is good with an inheritance." Ecclesiastes 7:11**

Wisdom is good, with an inheritance, or also without it. But without wisdom — an inheritance is bad. He who inherits nothing, may be wise to "gather substance, and leave it to his children." (Psalm 49.) But to inherit substance, and not be wise — to hoard it or waste it, is dangerous.

Many are wise enough to plod along, and use their earnings well, who have not wisdom to employ what others leave them. Nothing tries our wisdom more than wealth, suddenly inherited. Some men make shipwreck of their virtue, others have lost their reason, upon the quicksands of an inheritance. A poor exchange indeed!

What is it which constitutes the love of money? It is something more than the desire of having. There is in money a mystery of power, to dazzle and to turn the brain; a something which intoxicates the man, and makes him other than he was before.



Poor human nature! Never so little — as when the greatest in your own conceits; never indeed so wretched — as when you think yourself most enviable!

Oh! it is a wonderful sight, to see a man unchanged by an inheritance; with all the humble graces he had before; not proud in manner, nor suddenly transformed in style of living! It is sad to lose your friend in his new inherited estate — that wealth should loose the bonds of fellowship, or cool the flame of love! Yet so it is — alas for poor humanity!

"Wisdom is good with an inheritance" wisdom to humble you beneath your riches; to make you blush at your prosperity, and tremble for your honor; wisdom to clothe the naked; wisdom to feed the hungry; wisdom largely to give to God what God has given to you; wisdom to look to Jesus; wisdom to look beyond your riches; wisdom to desire a better inheritance, "a priceless inheritance — an inheritance that is kept in Heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay!" (1 Peter 1:4)

Woe to the man that has an inheritance, and lacks this wisdom. Those who bequeath an inheritance, cannot leave wisdom to their heirs. But God never gives His inheritance, but, with it He bestows the gift of wisdom: wisdom to know the value of the inheritance; wisdom to love it; wisdom to adorn it; wisdom to live according to the grace bestowed; wisdom to discern evil from good, and good from evil; wisdom to resist the world, the devil, and the flesh; wisdom to know that earthly wisdom is nothing, and thus to seek the wisdom "from above."

Reader, may this wisdom, and this inheritance be yours!

### **"Wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense." Ecclesiastes 7:12**

"Money" defends a man from many evils: from hunger, cold, and nakedness; from being houseless, friendless, penniless. It will save a man from injury and insult; many oppress the poor, who would not vex the rich. Money invests a man with dignity. Money will often save from death; food, medicine, medical attendance, may all be had for money. Money will help a man to justice; it pays for "justice," and thus "defends" from loss of property or character. What will money not do in this poor, mercenary world?

"Wisdom," again — mere earthly wisdom — "defends" from much that is hurtful. Wisdom devises remedies; is fertile in resource; and often saves from poverty or shame. It will solve perplexities; and will change adversity to prosperous seasons. What will not wisdom do, if there is only scope to use its powers!

Yes, money and wisdom are means for earthly good; but there they stop. What do they in the hour of death? What in the judgment day? Can money purchase Heaven? Can human wisdom regenerate the soul? Can it know the truth of God? Can it clothe with righteousness, and cover sin?

Wisdom and money! Place not your confidence in either. Will they ease the burdened conscience, or heal a blasted character? Can they bring back the father to the fatherless, or dry the widow's tears? Many would change their "better fortune," as it's called, for early days of toil, with less to tempt and dissipate the soul.

There is many a Christian who sighs for his first experience, before zeal for "honors" hampered him, and spoiled his singleness of heart. Learning that has to be unlearned; storing the mind with what must be forgotten.

Reader, beware of this. It will not help you, either for yourself, or for the cure of souls. Wisdom and money!

Would you be wise and rich? Be wise in Jesus — be rich in Him. He is your wisdom — He your riches too. This wisdom gives life. This wealth redeems from death. There is no defense like this! It will . . . guard you here; perfect you hereafter; arm you with power; beautify with grace; invest with glory!

In giving Christ, it gives you all. It gives you durable and true riches! (Proverbs 8:18.)

### **"In the day of prosperity, be joyful." Ecclesiastes 7:14**

Prosperity, you meteor of bliss, who woos you not? Who seeks you not? From earliest dawn of hope, before life's first prospects are begun — you flit before the mind. What merchant, tradesman, man of learning, or aspirant for fame — but desires that he may be prosperous! Some call it "Providence." Some call it "Fortune." Some call it neither — yet all desire to be prosperous. Prosperity is the gift of God.

The Preacher says, "In your prosperity be joyful;" yet he would also say, "Rejoice with trembling." (Psalm 2:11.) God's gifts are all good, if rightly used — all are meant to be received with thankfulness. All may be sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:4, 5.)

Prosperity is sweet, but dangerous. It makes the worldly man tenfold more worldly! Christians, from being prosperous, have pierced themselves with many sorrows! (1 Timothy 6:10.) It is well when prosperous times come gradually; not from a sudden rush, but step by step — for then the soul is not so apt to lose its balance, and to forget the Giver in his gifts.

Have you been prosperous in life? I ask you, how is your soul affected by it? God gave you your prosperity; has it drawn your heart to Him? Has having little, made you long for much? Has having much, made you desire more? Has it eclipsed eternal realities from your view, and made you think the less of Heaven? Have you asked a blessing on your increase? And, before you placed it in your coffer, have you, in spirit, given it to the Lord, that He might sanctify it? Has He, then, shared your store? Have you well considered the snare enfolded in each shining gold-piece, and prayed for grace to use it well? Has each step in your prosperity enlarged your heart — humbled you, proved, and bettered you?

There is nothing in gold itself to lead astray. It is in the heart that loves it, the mind that misapplies it. Grace is sufficient for prosperity; nothing can withstand the power of grace. It is well to find a sweetness in prosperity; to eat your food with pleasure; to enjoy your comforts; to be thankful that poverty is not your lot — yet to rejoice with moderation, and a chastened heart; seeing a snare in all things, and watching unto prayer; knowing that this poor world is not your portion, not your inheritance. It is only yours to look at for a season; to use for your need; and, in the end, to leave behind you! Your true prosperity is in better things than these.

### **"In the day of adversity consider." Ecclesiastes 7:14**

In your adversity, consider: That you deserve it all! That had you nothing but adversity, it only were your due! That every moment free from trouble, is a mercy!

That had the full curse been poured on you — your life would be nothing but sorrow and vexation! Consider that God afflicts you for your profit — to bring your sins to mind, and lead you to the Cross. Believer, God chastens you in love, to make you a partaker of His holiness. (Hebrews 12:10.) How often have you forgotten Him! But He never forgets you — and thus He chastens you.

- Consider, how much you live for the world — how little you live for the Lord!
- Consider how earthly, sensual, and devilish your nature!
- Consider your thoughts — how vain!
- Consider your service — how unprofitable!
- Consider, then, God's love in chastening you.

Are you in sickness — then consider your many days of former health — all undeserved by you! Consider your many helps in trouble, God's presence, and His grace — all undeserved by you!

In sleepless nights, consider how many nights you have slept soundly and sweetly — all undeserved by you! Consider Him, who gives you songs in the night — all undeserved by you!

In poverty, consider how all your former needs have been supplied — food, clothing, lodging, and so many comforts — all undeserved by you!

Have you incurred the loss of sight or hearing; loss of limbs, or power of using them? Consider, then, your former powers; how much enjoyment you have had in seeing, hearing, moving, handling — all undeserved by you!

Are you kept from going to the house of prayer? All your Sabbaths are now spent at home — it may be on a bed of languishing. Consider how many Sabbaths you have spent in full enjoyment of the means of grace — all undeserved by you! Consider Jesus, the Fountain of all ordinances; the Bread of life; the Shepherd of the sheep; the Prophet, Priest, and Teacher of His people. Still you have Jesus — the Lord of the Sabbath, the spring of Sabbath blessings — all undeserved by you!

O tried believer, consider, then, that your afflictions are light — and they are but for a moment. They are all ordered in divine wisdom, tenderness, and love! Consider Jesus! what sufferings He endured — all for unworthy you! Then faint not, nor be weary, but consider your "eternal weight of glory" eternal glory — glory "that far outweighs" all your woes — glory, all undeserved by you!

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but

**"In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other." Ecclesiastes 7:14**

Adversity and prosperity are divinely balanced against each other with unerring skill. In each, respectively, the due proportions are precisely weighed, so lovingly and wisely, that none should say, "It might have been better done!" Christian, I appeal to you: Could it have been better done? Are God's ways unjust? Have they been so to you?

It is true, your path is chequered — sweet chasing bitter — and bitter chasing sweet, in quick succession. It may be, that bitter is more frequent than the sweet — that your prosperous times are few and far between. Is there no reason for it? Is God's divine balance, then, deranged? God knows the reason for your adversity, though unknown to you. He faithfully keeps the balance true between your needs — and their supply; between His chastenings — and your good. He cannot be unkind, or unequal, or unjust. Perhaps you cannot hit upon the specific sin, and say, "For this particular sin I am chastened." But say, my friend — if there is no particular sin, is there no particular lack of virtue in you? Is there no grace to strengthen — no infirmity to check?

God's ways are always just — His purposes are always wise and loving. How beautiful is His providence! How exquisite is His skill!

Grace is poised against temptation, joys are balanced against sorrows. The lights and shadows of experience thus perfected, and perfecting each other. Were all prosperity — we would be lifted up in pride. Were all adversity — we would faint under the heavy load.

God's ways are just and equal — look back and see. Had times been pleasant with you, experience been sweet? How surely they were followed by deadness in the soul! Your joy was gone — you knew not why. Ah! but God knew it. It was the adjusting of the scales, that nothing might be out of balance. Has life gone prosperously? Sooner or later, crosses came — some disappointment, something to bring you down, something or other, counter to your will — it was the adjusting of the scales. And just so with health, and other comforts — God keeps the scales perfectly balanced.

Watch God's providence in great things, watch it in little things — the events, the thoughts, the feelings of the day. You will always find it just — the balance must be kept. Hence all your variations in the scale of comfort — the endless shades and vicissitudes of your experience. All this is well-ordered in God's wisdom, love, and mercy!

**"Do not be over-righteous." Ecclesiastes 7:16**

How can this be? Can any man be over-righteous?

When zeal oversteps discretion; when tasks are self-imposed; when religious forms are trusted in; when flesh is vainly mortified — all this is being over-righteous!

God's people unwittingly fall into these very errors.

Prayer, as a task, persisted in — that we may think how long our prayers have been — this is a great mistake. It is wrong in principle, and practice too. Have you ever been more fretful after prayer, more worldly, more inclined to levity? The truth is this — you prayed too long; your mind was over-taxed; your soul responded to your weariness. The enemy rejoiced in your infirmity — you were "over-righteous."

Or you have found refreshment in the house of worship. You have gone a second time, and found the same. You went again (three services, three sermons in a day!) — the third occasion undid the other two. Trying to have too much — you lost all. The wearied brain could not recall its former devotion; the jaded memory broke down — you were "over-righteous."

It is often the same in reading Scripture. The mind is proud of its performances, and reads too much. To read each day so many chapters; in a short time to have gone the whole round of Scripture — rapidly to move from the Law, to History, to the Prophets, to the Gospel in the hurry — my friend, you are "over-righteous!" This is not the way to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Were you to spend a lifetime over a single Psalm, gaining daily refreshment to your soul — would be far better, than to scamper rapidly through the Word.

When household duties are neglected for the sake of devotional exercises — this, too, is being over-righteous.

The same is true when others are inconvenienced by our devotional exercises. The family waiting in the hall, the carriage at the door — while prayers are too lengthy. Is not this being "over-righteous?"

Prayer, meditation, and the Scriptures — how good they are! Yet there is a time for all things. If duties rise so thick, that you are hindered in your prayers — even this is better than prayer persisted in, and duties left undone! Beware, then, Christian friend, and do not be "over-righteous."

## **"Be not over-wicked." Ecclesiastes 7:17**

Is there a point in wickedness, which men may safely reach, but which it were dangerous to overstep? Can we covenant with divine justice, that it spares some of our sins? Will God wink at transgression — because it is small; or pardon sins — because they are few? Has man some goodness to make amends for folly; some virtue to neutralize his sin? Is our inherent corruption only partial? Have we merits which to remedy the Fall?

One sin brought ruin on Adam and his race. One sin! Was there, then, no virtue left; no room for further license; no redeeming power in the soul? Was this one wickedness already too much? Let Scripture answer.

Let our own imperfect faculties, inbred corruptions, and fading nature tell the tale. We are fallen, fallen — fallen in body, mind, and soul. Do we innocently enter we the world? Ah, no — we are all ingrained with sin, even from the cradle! We are all steeped in corruption from our mother's womb. Our sin is born in us — its germ wrapped in the buddings of our infancy, and drawing its nurture from our growth.

Over-wicked! What can be over-wicked, where all is much wicked — comparison's degrees all lost in universal sin. Man makes comparisons — God knows them not. Our very breath is sin — one moments life involves it; one passing thought incurs the charge.

Over-wicked! Do not mistake the Preacher. He warns you, sinner, to pause in your career, not to run riot in your wickedness; to go no further in tempting God, and trifling with your soul. Before the door of grace is closed, or your heart be hardened more — he urges you to think upon your ways. Before health is ruined in the haunts of vice; before power of thought is lost through idleness; before life itself is sacrificed in sin — he tells you to retrace your steps.

Over-wicked! What is it? The next round of worldly pleasure; the next visit to the alehouse; the next solitary glass of liquor; the next scoffing at the Word — this may but seal your doom, this may be over-wicked to you! Beware, then, ah, beware!

## **"The one who fears God shall escape them all." Ecclesiastes 7:18**

"Escape" from what? Escape . . . from dangerous extremes; from snares on either hand; from being over-righteous, or being over-wicked.

There is wondrous depth in Solomon's experience. He always hits the nail upon the head; and Gospel light only confirms his sayings. Can it be otherwise? The same God, who spoke by Paul, or Paul, guided the pen of Solomon. Is it not true, my Christian friend? Are you not exposed to danger, on the right hand and the left — now tempted into carelessness, now led to hush your conscience wrongfully; one moment to neglect your duties — and the next to build too much upon them? How needful, then, the Preacher's warnings! How comforting his promise, that grace shall do its work from first to last!

By grace we are chosen; by grace we are called; by grace made willing in the day of power. (Psalm 90.) By grace we live. By grace we stand. By grace we are kept. By grace we persevere. By grace we enter glory. But for this grace — what could we do? No faith, no hope, no strength, no peace, were ours.

- How could we battle with our sins?
- How could we rise above temptation?
- How could we flee from snares?
- How could we overcome the enemy of souls?
- How, but by grace?

In Solomon's day it was still the same. God called his chosen ones.

- By grace He saved them;
- by grace He sanctified them;
- by grace He glorified them.

Without this grace, how could the promise stand? Man's strength is nothing; his perseverance nothing; his good intentions less than nothing. It is not man's "will". God's "shall" is that which does it. God says, "It shall be," "The one who fears God shall escape them all."

These promises are given, not to exalt us — but to humble us. Boasting is excluded. By what law? The only law that could exclude it — the law of faith and grace. (Romans 3:27.)

Tell man that HE can do it — and you only . . . feed his pride, deceive his soul, and lead him further from God, and deeper into sin.

Tell him that God's GRACE must do it — and you humble him low in the dust of helplessness. My soul, God's grace has saved you, built you on Christ, and nourished your soul. It is God Himself who has laid the top-stone of your glory, while saints and angels shouted, "Grace, Grace unto it!" (Zech. 4:7.)

Oh, my soul, your only hope is this — that God is faithful; that, having loved His own, He loves them to the end. (John 13:1.) In life, in death, through all eternity, this will your glory be — that God's grace has done it all.

## **"There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is good and never sins!" Ecclesiastes 7:20**

God's ways are perfect — perfect in wisdom, holiness, and power. God knows no change — no shade of turning. (James 1:17.) God's words are as perfect as Himself — in truth unbending. God's only standard of morality is God Himself. His only test of worth is His own intrinsic purity. With God "righteous" means righteous, as He interprets justice — integrity without a flaw.

"Goodness" is likeness to the living God; for God is good — and "good" means God. It means all that is holy, pure, and wise; with no admixture of anything that is not godly. How, then, shall "man be just with God?" (Job 9.) When justice forms the "line," and righteousness forms the "plummet" — who can abide its test? (Isaiah 28:17.) Whose character will square with such a scrutiny? Think it not hard. To have a lower test, would set aside the principles of justice. God would no longer be righteous, no longer be good — did He not judge you by His own perfections.

Reader, does not your very conscience tell you so? Conscience informs you of God's character. Would He be God, if fallen creatures feared Him not? Why do we fear God? Because our conscience feels that God is righteous, and deals with us accordingly.

What means the fear of death; the shrinking from God's presence; hiding (nay, I should say, the wish to hide) from His all-seeing eye? Why frightened at a shadow? Why startled at a leaf? Why have a dread of darkness? But because you know that God is good; that God is righteous; and you yourself are neither righteous, nor good.

Reader, would you have fellowship with God? Would you inherit glory? You must have righteousness and goodness, as perfect as God Himself. Nothing else can equal your necessities — nothing else comply with God's demands. Where can this perfectness be had? Where, but in Jesus!

Are you "in Christ," my friend? Ah, what a question! How much depends upon the answer! Are you in Christ? If so, that spotless robe, that perfect righteousness is yours; for it is Christ's; and you are made the "righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21.) Would less suffice you? Does God require more? As Christ is, so are you — holy, and just, and good; good in God's goodness; perfect in God's perfection. Even "in this world" it is done. (1 John 4:17.) By faith it is done already — nothing can be added — nothing shall be taken from it. As Christ is — so are you.

## **"Do not take to heart everything people say." Ecclesiastes 7:21**

That which is spoken to you — it is wise to hear. All else, it would be wise to disregard; it is not intended for you. Your neighbor's thoughts are sacred. Until he imparts them, you have no right to have them; they are strictly his. That which he speaks to others — is not yours. Even though he speaks of you — you are not right to listen.

Does not your own experience tell you? Are not your thoughts your own? Words are but thoughts expressed. You mean them only

for those to whom they are spoken. You deem it invasion of your privilege, if others come to listen. So is it with your neighbor. The devils have as little right to Heaven — as you to penetrate, unbidden, into your brother's mind. Hence, in all ages, listening has been condemned.

Why do you listen, my friend? To hear others flatter you? Harken not — it is poison! Or do you listen to your censure — to know what evil they will say of you? If possible, this is worse; it is very treachery. Take care, then, how you listen. To hear SELF spoken of at all, is odious. It is instinct in the soul to hate it. It is nature's tribute to its own deformity. Conscious of its fall, it shrinks unconsciously from contact with itself.

If you hear others in secret conversation — if possible, go from their presence; if not, then make a covenant with your ear; lay curiosity aside, and be determined not to hearken. If you can't but hear, then make it known that so it is. If this would wound their feelings, then hear, and hearken not. Let not their converse lodge within you. As words follow each other, dismiss them from your door; dwell not upon them for a moment; they soon shall be as though you heard them not. In this, as other things, practice does much; and with the Spirit it will do even more.

How often do we think evil of another! But if we hear another thinking aloud of us — our anger is soon stirred. We are ready to take vengeance on the evil speech of another — but the hidden evil in ourselves we overlook. Oh, then, deal leniently with others — and severely with yourself. Think of your ways, your failings, your infirmities! Think of your many thoughts; think of your many words — and, as you would that others deal with you, so likewise deal with them!

### **"I said, 'I am determined to be wise' — but this was beyond me." Ecclesiastes 7:23**

READER, how often have you, how often have I, experienced this! A greater one than you or I, expressed the same: "I have the desire to do what is good — but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing!" (Romans 7.) My soul, how is it? Within you dwells the Holy Spirit — the Lord of life and power. None can resist His will. And yet, the evil that is in you gains the day; strength becomes weakness; and wisdom is turned to folly.

Which is the greater wonder — that, being foolish, you are ever wise; or that, at times so wise, you ever should be foolish? How often, on your knees, you have seen the way so straight, the light so clear, God's grace so strong — that you have felt wisdom were your forever — that folly never would dwell in you again? And yet, my soul, what tales of after-folly have you had to tell!

In your better moments, wisdom is near; so near, that it seems a part and parcel of yourself; it seems the eye you see with, the ear you hear with, the air you breathe, the framework of your thoughts, the substance of your mind — your very being seems suffused with wisdom.

At other times, wisdom is far from you — so very far — as far as innocence from sin, as man from God, as earth from Heaven. In truth it is so. Wisdom has no part in you. Between you, and your better self, is fixed — an impassable gulf; an unmeasured breadth; an untold depth! On either side the gulf are you — and wisdom. On this side wisdom — on the other side are you.

Oh, what a mystery! Your days are spent on one side, or the other; either in wisdom, or in folly. Now flesh is uppermost, and now the Spirit — no union can there be between the two. Each moment of your life you live, either to yourself, or to God.

My soul, bless God for your experience; in mercy is it given. It is not for nothing that wisdom seems to elude your grasp — that

you have known the fitful nature of your frames and feelings: the bitterness of broken purposes; the flimsy nature of your best resolves; the lightning speed with which sin comes between you and your vows; the wondrous ease with which you pass . . . from wisdom — to folly; from thoughts of good — to deeds of evil; from meekness, humility, and patience — to petulance and pride; from all the virtues of a saint — to all the sinfulness of fallen nature.

It is not for nothing that you are mortified — to see yourself so fickle, and so vile. It is to bless, to teach, to humble you — that when you would be wise, wisdom is far from you.

### **"That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?" Ecclesiastes 7:24**

Wisdom is far from man — as far off as sight is from the blind; as far as God is far. The blind see not the object, whether far or near. Thus, man knows as little about himself, as he knows the Lord. In ceasing to know God, man ceased to know himself. Then light and knowledge winged their flight away, and all was dark indeed.

Sail around our planet, if you will — all distant earthly things come near to you, and you to them; but Truth is still as far from you as ever — no earthly figure can express its range. Soar upwards, if you can; forever wing your way onwards, and on, and on; how hopeless ever to reach the end! It is infinite! As far off as that (if possible, still farther) is man from Truth, and Truth from man. Nothing but a miracle brings man and Truth together. God speaks, and it is done. The Spirit enters, and wisdom lives again; man knows himself; he knows his sins; he knows their remedy; in Christ he knows his God.

Until then grace, truth, and peace were far away; the Lord was far; all, all was far! Now all is near. God's judgments are a deep, a mighty deep. (Psalm 36:6.) All that God is, all that God does, is deep — His Word, His attributes, His grace, His providence, His essence, His eternal being — all, all is deep. Say, who can fathom it? "It is as high as Heaven, what can you do? It is deeper than Hell, what can you know?" "Can you by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7, 8.) Measure the waters in your hand; measure out the heavens with a ruler; take up all the earth's materials at a grasp; then weigh the hills in scales, the mountains in a balance — then may you measure God — then may you fathom Truth.

The plainest Scripture is too deep for you. The shortest precept — the simplest promise — beggars your understanding, and confounds your heart. But grace supplies a line with which to fathom what is fathomless. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1.)

The Christian fathoms all things; what can be known — he knows; what can be seen — he sees. The rest he leaves, in full assurance of its truth. He rests on Christ, in whom he knows, and sees, and trusts, and lives — in whom he hopes to reign forever!

## **"So I applied my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things." Ecclesiastes 7:25**

We live in stirring days, when deeds are everything — when closet work is often neglected for active business, and little time is given to meditation. Yet, with more thought and prayer — wholesome activity would be greater in the end, and all our actions more successful. Time is not lost, which is spent in meditation — in searching wisdom's ways, and seeking out profound realities. There is one who often meditates — and yet accomplishes much. There is another who hastens — and yet does little. None works so heartily, nor reaps so fully — as he whose wits are sharpened by prayer and meditation.

Reading either Scripture or Christian books, apart from meditation, does little good. It is much the same as not digesting what you eat — this only starves the soul. How many read the Bible thus!

If thought is exercised at all, it is but to find what commentators say — and thus they have all their knowledge second-hand. How different when the mind is bent on what we read, and help is sought from God, to aid the meditation. The art of thinking is difficult at first; but "practice makes expert." The art of meditation may be learned by dint of effort. It is well to set yourself a task.

You say, "I am quite unused to meditate. How shall I begin?" Deal gently with yourself at first. Select your subject — some passage from the Word. Then fix the time you choose to give; say, five minutes at a time. Begin, and think aloud. This makes it easier, and saves the mind from distracted thoughts, the hardest task of all. The sound even of your own voice will help you; it is like speaking to a friend. And what is meditation, but communing with self — that self may be a constant hearer.

But, more than all, make it a time of prayer — of communing with God. This helps the matter greatly. You take the words of Scripture — ask Jesus what they mean. In doing this, the mind is exercised. A glow of thought attends the effort. You honor Jesus; and He will honor you, by pouring out a largeness of capacity — a quicker mind. The interchange of thought between you and Jesus goes on apace, and you are surprised to find how long the exercise has lasted.

Thus meditation grows, the more it is exercised. It . . . feeds the soul, expands the mind, increases thought, and, best of all, it brings you into fellowship with Jesus. This is the very life and soul of meditation.

- "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." Joshua 1:8
- "But his delight is in the Law of the LORD, and on His Law he meditates day and night." Psalm 1:2
- "I will meditate on all Your works and consider all Your mighty deeds." Psalm 77:12
- "I meditate on Your precepts and consider Your ways." Psalm 119:15
- "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long." Psalm 119:97
- "I meditate on all Your works and consider what Your hands have done." Psalm 143:5
- "My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on Your promises." Psalm 119:148

## "I found one man among a thousand." Ecclesiastes 7:28

Only "one man among a thousand!" The Preacher tells us elsewhere the kind of man he meant — one who interpreted God's Word, and ways, entreating men to listen; one, who declared the righteousness of God, and the sinfulness of man; one who bore messages of God's grace to sinners' souls — in short, he meant a Christian. Of such he found but one among a thousand! (Job 30:23.) Was grace less frequent then than now? In Christian England (England, Christian so-called) would Solomon still find so small a number? We might expect that greater honor would attend the mission of the Comforter — that when He had to take the things of Christ (John 16:14, 15) — Christ born, Christ crucified, Christ risen, and Christ glorified — His teaching would be seen, and known, the more. Yet still we mourn the smallness of the numbers. Still the way is narrow; still the gate is strait; and still few find it. Still the road to misery is broad — and many walk in it! (Matthew 7:14.)

"One man among a thousand!" Ah, were it one in a hundred; one among ten; one out of five; or even one of two — it were sad to think how many still were lost! Full well we know, but for the grace of God, not one among a thousand would be found. One of a million would there be? One of a generation? One of a world? No, not one! This is the character of man; man as he is by nature; man unregenerate, unvisited by grace; man without Christ; man without God, "There is none righteous, no not one." (Psalm 14; Ephesians 2.)

One of a thousand is a miracle of grace; even one from Adam to Adam's latest child, would still be still a miracle; a greater wonder than if ten thousand worlds were formed anew, and twice ten thousand suns sprang daily into being!

Reader, are you a Christian? If so, your heart and mind present a miracle of miracles; a wonder far greater than anything that nature has to show. Are you disposed to mourn the smallness of the number — that Christians are so few? It is well to mourn — yet better to rejoice; better to know that all the flock are saved; that all the redeemed are written in the Book of Life, and that they shall all surely come to glory. They never shall perish, none can anyone pluck them from the hand of Jesus. He is pledged to guard — to love them to the end. He who chose them — will call them; He who calls them — will keep them; He who keeps them, will glorify them — His word is sure. (Romans 8:30.)

## "But not one woman among them." Ecclesiastes 7:28

It is a hard saying — who can hear it? One man among a thousand the Preacher found; but not one woman among them!

Is woman's heart, then, different from man's — harder and blinder, further from grace and truth? First in transgression, was it thus she bore the penalty, until she undid the harm, by giving birth to Jesus? If, until then a blight was on her — then since then it is far otherwise. Last at the Cross — first at the grave of Jesus. First in faith, in charity, in patience, in steadfastness and zeal — she shines pre-eminent. Look where you will, she is foremost in the cause; look where you will, among the saints, she far outnumbers man.

Yet, Solomon's experience confirms our own — that then, or now, in woman or in man — from first to last — it is grace which makes us to differ. Man's nature, since the Fall, has known no change. The heart, apart from gender or age, has been the same in spiritual blindness and corruption. Lawgivers, patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, bear witness to the fact, which still we have before our eyes. Were godly women rare with Solomon — it was that God called fewer by his grace. Are they now more numerous — it is that more are called by grace — God makes them willing in his day of power. (Psalm 110:3.)

One thing we learn from Solomon — that the fair form of woman conceals a heart as hard, and sinful, as that which dwells in man. We learn that beauty, elegance, and softness, have no effect upon the soul, except to ensnare it — and that all the blandishments of are, and mirthful attire — with all the fascinations of her nature, enhanced a thousandfold by education and a polished life — bestow no real excellence on woman! What are all women, but white-washed sepulchers? Within their walls are "dead men's bones," and "all uncleanness!" (Matthew 23:27.) Woman has all the infirmities, and sins of fallen nature — the same corruptions, passions, and affections, which reign in rougher man.

By nature more impressible, more easily affected by outward things — so far she is more devotional than man; more frequent in the house of prayer, to forms and ordinances more attentive. But still, within her there is found an ignorance of God, and opposition to the truth. She requires the same Almighty power to renew her soul, as the vilest male needs. How beautiful when woman's brought to see her own deformity, and say, "All this is true! "



## **"God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes." Ecclesiastes**

**7:29**

The origin of evil, who can tell? How did it find a place in God's creation! Satan infected man — and there we stop. It is not for us to search what never can be known, or guess at that which God has not revealed. All that God made was very good. (Genesis 1.) No taint of sin was on it — no seed of evil in it. God could not give birth to evil; His attributes of wisdom, holiness, and goodness, alike forbid the thought — the thing is impossible. Essential excellence harbors no imperfection; eternal being implies unchanging good.

Sin was an unmixed invention of the wicked one, made from his own materials; he found them not in the fair works of God. Man, self-apprenticed to the fiend, has learned the lesson well. Trained by the devil, now, for six thousand years — no wonder if he is clever at inventing evil. Each circling year beholds new forms of sin; fresh means of doing mischief; fresh vanities discovered; fresh ways of setting at defiance good sense, good order, and good feeling; new blinds to youth and inexperienced ones. Man's ingenuity is racked for fresh amusements — in other words, for fresh temptations — while grosser evil drives a busy trade in turning out fresh stimulants to vice.

But, oh! my soul, why go so far from home? Within yourself the sin abounds. You have also learned your lesson in the devil's school; fertile in evil as your fellow-man — you are not behind him in invention — in giving birth to evil. Whence all your readiness for sin? Your ingenuity to frame excuses? Your quickness in devising reasons why SELF be gratified, and sacred duties ignored? How apt to veil your faults! How quick to seize the opportunity of pleasing man! In how many ways you try to cheat the Lord, and rob Him of his service! How often have you countenanced the sinful world, and set your seal on its inventions, by following its pleasures and its sins! What is your life, and what your nature — but one invention of all that's evil! Mankind at large, are but a storehouse of vanities. What endless shades of evil character! What great variations in sin! No two alike in the complexion of their failings; each mind, each character, framing its special faults and sins, inventing ways peculiar to itself; but all alike showing an ingenuity for sin. How true the Preacher's word that "God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes."

## **"A man's wisdom makes his face shine!" Ecclesiastes 8:1**

What makes the difference between the well-bred person, and the barbarian? It is education — the being well-versed in wisdom. You see it in the gait, the speech, the manners; the eye expresses it, the very features tell it; you read it in the whole demeanor. Thus a man's wisdom makes his face to shine.

If thus it be with earthly learning, much more is it the case with heavenly understanding. In giving vigor to the soul, and planting there a godly principle, it sows the seeds of higher bearing. It gives learning superior to the "schools;" it treats of things unseen by mortal eye — of agencies unfelt by mortal man; it brings before the mind a science more profound than all the depths of man's philosophy. These treat of matter only, or of mind; but this treats of God himself, His nature, attributes, and will. It penetrates the veil which severs God from man. It shares the angels' thoughts. By faith it sees what they behold more nearly, and, in its heaven-born powers, has deeper notions of the truth than they.

If human learning makes a man the "gentleman," say, who should be as refined as he who learns from God Himself, and gets his wisdom in the school of Christ! If good society improves the manners, who should be as courteous as the man who is daily in the company of Jesus; imbibing from His presence; breathing the atmosphere of Heaven! Have you not seen it in the Church of Christ — the altered deportment; the softened look; the chastened speech, of one who lately was far otherwise? The eye bespeaks a change, and, in its new expression, tells you that Jesus dwells within.

Can it be otherwise? Can God be there — and no one know it! Can the Comforter be there — and not cause the face to shine! Who has not witnessed it in men of low station! Their manners immediately assume a dignity above their station. They have seen the King of kings, and learned true feeling, manners, and politeness. The worldling wonders where they have learned it. He may deny the principle, but cannot deny the fact. His conscience tells him it is something godlike — hence he dislikes it. He sees no charm in godliness. The shining face thus shines in vain for him. It speaks to him of what he neither knows nor loves — the life of God, and principle of Heaven.

**"A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the boldness of his face is**

## changed." Ecclesiastes 8:1

Reader, what is the meaning of the text? Perhaps it seems to you obscure. Then bear with me a moment, while I tell you my thoughts concerning it. If haply I have found the mind of Solomon — the mind of God in Solomon — this is well. And may it thus be blessed to you, and I!

Boldness is either holy or unholy — either abrasive or honest confidence. True wisdom removes the one, and gives the other.

The Pharisee is bold from ignorance. He is blind alike to God's requirements, and his own defects — hence he is not afraid, and thinks himself prepared for death and judgment. Such boldness is not safe. I hope it is not yours.

How different is the boldness of the Christian! He is bold (and justly so) because his sins are cancelled, and his pardon is sealed; because, in Christ, he stands complete — trusting in unchangeable promises which are built on faultless grace. Through a sense of the perfect love of God to His redeemed children — he is bold even for the judgment day. (1 John 4:17.) He owns himself to be the least of saints — the chief of sinners — and yet, in Christ he is not afraid. Thus he, who once was bold in ignorance, has now his boldness changed.

The Pharisee fears not the evils of his heart; sees not the danger of temptation — but plunges boldly into sin. How different the child of God! (Proverbs 14:16.) He once was so; but now he dares not tamper with his sins. Knowing how weak he is, he ventures not a step, but in the strength of Jesus. He fears to meet his trials, to combat his infirmities, or face the enemy, unarmed with grace — and, in his helplessness, he throws himself on Him, who is pledged to support him in all his need.

"The boldness of his face" is "changed" in every way — here on earth, changed to filial fear of God — in the day of judgment, changed to boldness once again. What once he feared not — now he has learned to fear — the world, the flesh, and the devil. And, having learned this fear, he has also learned how to be bold in Christ. Armed from God's armor, and clad with His power, in faith and prayer he runs his daily race. Where duty leads — he feels that it would be wrong to fear. Where grace demands a sacrifice — he is bold. Ever and always he chides his fearful heart, and listens for the voice, "Do not be afraid, it is I!" (John 6:20.) None can prevail — but he who is bold in Christ; and none shall fall — but he who is bold in self. Reader, may you and I be bold aright!

## "I counsel you to keep the King's commandment." Ecclesiastes 8:2

Solomon preached loyalty — that every soul be subject to the higher powers, and "all the ordinances of man" be kept, as unto God. (Romans 13; 1 Peter 2:13.)

But, doubtless, Solomon looked higher than to earthly laws, and, by "the King's commandment," meant the Law of God. This was the statute book to Israel — their only code, alike for spiritual and earthly rule. But who could keep this holy law? None ever kept it; none keeps it now; and no man ever will. It asks for perfection — which none can yield. It claims a penalty — which all must pay, except they be in Jesus. (Gal. 3:10, 11.) "Do this — and you shall live," the precept ran. (Luke 10:28.) Where none could do it — it was plain that none could live. It was but a law of death. It was only given to prove man's inability — to be a schoolmaster to lead to Christ. (Romans 5:13; 7:13; Galatians 3.) Such was the King's commandment.

Then what did Solomon mean, by telling us to keep what never could be kept? By faith he pointed to the types — the dying goat, the bleeding lamb; through them he pointed to the Savior, the Lamb of God. Jesus on Sinai sat (Acts 7:38; compare verses 30-32). From thence He gave the law, "Do this, and you shall live." (Lev. 18:5.) But from the Cross — a new commandment came, "Believe, and live!" Henceforth this was to be the law of life and death. Believe — and live! believe not, you shall die. (John 3:18, 19, 36; xvi. 9; Mark xvi. 16.) The Jews had asked, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John vi. 28.) They wished to find some royal road to keep the law, and thus to save their souls. Jesus replied, "Believe on Him whom He has sent." (Verse 29.)

The reason is plain. Christ kept the law; Christ paid the penalty. Believe on Christ, and then you are one with Him; your sins are His; His righteousness is yours. Christ kept the law. Not for Himself He kept it, but for you; that you, in faith, might say, "I have kept it too — in Christ I have paid the penalty." And thus the two commandments meet in one. Am I in Christ, I have kept them both. "Do this, and live!" In Christ I've kept it. "Believe, and live!" Through grace I've kept it too.

The new command includes the old; hence all its virtue; it destroys not, but fulfills. (Matthew 5:17.) Yet know, my friend, it is not in you to keep even this new commandment. This would be harder to fulfill than the old. To us it is "given to believe," faith is the gift of God. (Philippians 1:29; Ephesians 2:8.) Could you believe of yourself, grace would no longer be grace. Obedience to the faith must come from God, that He be all in all.

## **"Obey the King's command, I say, because you took an oath before God" Ecclesiastes 8:2**

The old command was binding. Israel had pledged themselves to keep it. (Ex. 19:8.) It was as binding as an oath; it was sealed by blood, a covenant between God and man. God bound to recompense obedience, and to punish sin. Man bound to keep the law, or suffer the penalty for it. Thus man had bound upon himself his own destruction; for who could keep the covenant he had made? No formal oath had been expressed either by God or man, but virtually both had sworn. The better covenant, the new command, had better promises. With it man, in his sinfulness, had nothing to do but believe.

God in His unity (Galatians 3:20) — the Three in One — devised, contracted, and performed the New Covenant. The parties were the Father and the Son; God the eternal Father; and God in man — Immanuel — the man Christ Jesus. Each party pledged; each able to perform; each qualified to covenant with each other, since each alike incapable of change. The Spirit heard. (John 16:13.) The covenant was His, in common with the Father and the Son. He pledged Himself, as well as They, to call, to nourish, and to keep, all the heirs of glory.

This covenant was ratified by oath. God swore to Abraham. (Genesis 22:16.) He swore to David. (Psalm 89:35.) Before the worlds, He swore to Abraham's seed, and David's Son (Psalm 84:4), "whose goings forth" had been "from everlasting." (Micah 5:2.) This oath was made to assure "the heirs of promise," that they might know God's certainty of purpose (Hebrews 6:17), and, through the comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. (Romans 15:4.)

God's word is passed, His oath is given, that all His Church shall live. To Christ, He gave His chosen ones. (John 17:6.) By oath they are His. By oath He calls them, by oath He keeps them; by oath He promises to give them saving grace; by oath He is pledged to give them eternal glory.

With men "an oath for confirmation" ends the strife. (Hebrews 6:16.) When God has sworn — Who shall doubt His word? He says, "Believe, and live!"-God swore in promise; yet once He were in wrath, that sinners should not see His rest. (Psalm 95:11.) And why? Because of "unbelief." (Hebrews 3:19.) This oath is still in force; the King's command is doubly fenced; salvation pledged by oath to all the redeemed saints; and eternal death denounced by oath on unbelievers. Believe — and live; believe not — and be damned. (John 3:36; Mark 16:16.) God's word is fixed; His oath is passed; forever sure, in Heaven, in earth, in Hell. The Lord has spoken. Who will not fear? The Lord has sworn. Who will not be afraid? Hear His command: Believe and live! His oath inspires no terror. It will be the ground of all your hopes, and the comfort of your soul!

## **"Do not be in a hurry to leave the King's presence." Ecclesiastes 8:3**

If earthly monarchs claim respect, and courtly manners are required of those who serve them — then much more is kingly honor due to Him who made the world and rules it!

That man should have fellowship with God! Oh, what a mystery! The mystery, however, is scarcely less, that, with the privilege, man should forget the majesty of Him with whom he has to do. One courtly rule for earthly kings, is to retire backwards from the throne — ever to turn the face to him that sits upon it, and not to go unbidden from the kingly presence.

Shall lesser deference be paid to God, the King of kings? If reverence is due on coming to His presence — is it not due on leaving it? Should we not wait the beck of His dismissal? If He has more to say — shall we be reluctant to hear, or slight the honor of His condescension? Can time be better spent? Can we so soon exhaust the royal bounty? Before you rise, let it be told you by the Spirit, "It is time for you to leave." He will not let you be a loser, if you thus confide in Him.

Do not leave the throne too suddenly. Slide not at once from prayer — to earthly things. Resume not hastily the thread of occupation. Be slow to act upon a worldly thought which struck you as you went to prayer — while in the very act of kneeling down; this would encourage unworthy thought to come again unseasonably.

If you have left the family circle, that you may pray, beware lest fond excitement flutter you while you pray, or tempt you to hurry your devotions, and mar your fellowship with God.

If interrupted in your prayer, and called away to do some needful thing — go cheerfully. Do not be provoked with him who thus, unwittingly disturbed you. If able to resume your prayers, you will find it has not suffered by the shock. If not, God knows your heart. Be still. He will give you a loving audience at another time.

In social worship, it is unedifying to engage in secular discourse the moment you are risen from your knees; forthwith to take a public journal, or other reading of the kind; or make engagements for the day. Better allow a space to intervene (be it however short) while

you retire backwards from the throne. And, before you leave the royal throne-room, have time to say, "Lord, look upon your servant, he is going now to meet the world; be with him still. Pardon his lack of reverence, and, as he leaves the throne, be with him still!"

Such rules are needful. They seem the "little things" of grace, but they are great indeed. If followed out, they keep the mind more able for devotion, and make it taste "the powers of the world to come." (Hebrews 6:5.)

The closer company you have kept with Jesus — the more you have prayed in spirit — the slower you will be to turn to worldly things; the more devoutly will you retire from the throne. Just as the more the eye has gazed upon the sun — the more the earth will be a blank to look upon. Such tests are wholesome. By these we try the tone of our devotions, and the nature of our fellowship with God.

### **"Do not stand in an evil thing, for He will do whatever He pleases." Ecclesiastes 8:3**

Had Lot remained in Sodom, or lingered in the plain — he must have perished in his folly. Then "stand not," sinner, in your evil ways. The Lord is almighty. He does whatever He pleases. He can even take you away at a stroke, or give you over to a hardened heart.

And you, Believer, were you not in the Preacher's mind, when thus he spoke? "The wise man fears — and departs from evil." (Proverbs 14:16.) This is the wisdom of the saints. Tarry not in temptation — flee quickly from it. Think of "Lot's wife," nor look behind you. You find yourself in front of some forbidden thing; it comes invitingly — unasked — unsought for. You seem almost privileged to look, to hear, to dwell upon it. Flesh pleads entreatingly, and hints that "Providence" has put it in your way. And so it did; yet not to tempt you into sin.

As a minister of God said, long since departed, the door was opened — that you might shut it; not to invite your entrance! God permits these trials of your faith, to prove your faithfulness. Be stern, then, with yourself. Sin cannot lose its sinfulness, however plausible it is. Flesh is still flesh, and must be crucified. Grace is still grace, and grace must have its way.

Again, some duty presses, and time is short; a hurried step carries you swiftly on. You see a crowd. What is that crowd to you? But vain curiosity comes in; you stop to see, and slight the secret warning, "What are you doing here?"

Or else some novelty attracts you — some book or print, set there on purpose to entrap the passers-by. How charming to the enemy to see you stop; to find you "standing in an evil thing;" to catch you mixing with the multitude, wasting the time in vanity!

It is dangerous to walk abroad in scenes of vanity, with nothing to do. You are sure to meet with evil — something to look at, which you should not see; something to hear, to which you should not listen. On principle, it is well to hurry on, steadily, if you cannot go rapidly. Loungers are ever wrong; for them mischief is much in store. Life is a journey through a land of foes. "Hasten for your life!" must still your motto be. Hasten for your holiness! Hasten for your purity! Hasten for your peace! To tarry is to go astray. Forward in grace! Forward in thought! Forward in occupation! Forward even in your daily walks! You have no time to tarry — no time to waste — no time to stand. Then, Christian, forward — yes, forward go!

### **"Where the word of a King is, there is power! Who may say to Him: What are You doing?" Ecclesiastes 8:4**

What word, what power, are like the Lord's? With earthly kings words may be loud — and power small. Days, months, or years, may intervene before the power fulfills the word, and makes it sure. Not so with God. His purpose knows no hindrance. His Word can never fail. Who can resist His power? With God, purpose, and word, and power are but one.

Who, then, may say to God: "What are You doing?" To hinder His purpose, you must be able to overcome Omnipotence! Infinite, unchangeable, almighty — with God to will, is to perform; to speak — is to proclaim His past eternal purpose, and His endless might. Who can arrest His hand, or thwart His providence? Who can? That is not the word. Rather, who ought to wish it? Who ought to quarrel with His will, or say, either with bold or fretful opposition, "What are You doing?"

Your child has died; or perhaps a shipwreck has bereft you, at one stroke, of all your family; or other ills untold, unspeakable, have made you drink the wine of desperation. My friend, these things were ordained by God "before the world began." In God's eternal mind it was written — it was settled long ago. How vain to say, "What are You doing?" And when the time was come, God sent His messengers — noiseless, unseen, invisible — to do His righteous will. Could you have said, "What are You doing with my child? What are You doing with the winds and waves? Forbear!"

Your will was not consulted — your permission was not asked. Do not say, "What have you done?" Be silent before the omnipotent Disposer! "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this!" (Psalm 39:9.) "But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and He Himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul." (Isaiah 38:15.) Go softly all your years — yet not "in anguish of soul." If you have faith in Christ, you are better taught than this. Go softly — yet in faith, in patience. Looking to Jesus; let your language be, "It is the Lord! Let my Lord do what seems good in His eyes." (1 Samuel 3:18.)

### **"A wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment." Ecclesiastes 8:6**

There is a book more difficult to read than all human books, however hard they are. There is a language harder to decipher than all the dialects of human speech. It is the book of "time and judgment" — the volume of God's providential dealings with men; to read His doings and observe His ways. (Psalm 107:43.)

In times of public trouble, or domestic woe, it is easy to "afflict the soul," and, as a bulrush in the wind, to bow the head; to wear the garb of sorrow. All this is done, and yet the soul discerns not "time and judgment." Outward distress it sees; it feels the chastening; yet it cannot see the call to penitence, and faith, and prayer. It does not think of judgment, and the world to come. Blind is man — hopelessly blind, until grace enlightens him. "Lord, when your hand is lifted up — they will not see." Thus spoke the prophet — thus speaks the prophet still. (Isaiah 26:11.)

Nor is it mere acquaintance with prophetic lore; to know the dates and systems of interpreters; to say "The times are threatening; the end is approaching; the Lord is at hand!" My friend, is Jesus precious to your soul? Do you expect His coming, because "you love His cross!" Do you in righteousness, soberness, and godliness — in deep conviction of your sin — in heartfelt yearning for the souls of men, look "for that blessed hope?" (Titus 2:12, 13.) Oh, this is wisdom! Oh, this is to discern "both time and judgment;" to read God's dealings, as He means them; of every lifting of His hand to feel your soul aware; your heart responding to His providence, as pulse to pulse! If so, you are like the men of Issachar, "men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do." (1 Chronicles 12:32.)

It is well to read God's dealings with yourself. You may have found, by past experience, that He has a special method with you; that some events bespeak a certain train of providence concerning you; that certain workings of the Spirit foretell a certain state of soul; that certain throbs of conscience, before this, were calls to listen to the Spirit for some especial purpose; that certain risings in the inner man have told of coming conflict, and fierce temptation, near at hand; that sudden softenings of heart have been the sure forerunners of contrition — deep, solemn, and refreshing; that godly yearnings have been but drops before a shower of prayerful influences, long continued.

If so, in this discern "both time and judgment." Let not experience be lost upon you, but make the present profit by the past.

### **"Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come?" Ecclesiastes 8:7**

God's purposes have all their seasons of fulfillment. His judgments each have their time of visitation. Mapped out in clear perspective, your every dispensation was fixed from everlasting in the eternal mind of God. Your sunny seasons, and your cloudy days; sorrow and pain, anxiety and lack, your every loss of property or friends — all was designed before you ever saw the light. Trials may be in store for you, the thoughts of which would harrow up your soul — if you knew they were coming.

All this is ordained and known by God. What it may be, or when it is to come — He tells not to His creatures. As lightning strikes — for quickness, as wave comes after wave — for frequency; so may trials visit you. They are as uncertain as the wind. Yet fixed in divine purpose, and in performance sure — they come. From day to day, from hour to hour, who can foretell his future?

"Therefore," the Preacher says, "the misery of man is great upon him!" (verse 6.) Reader, is this your feeling? Is "therefore" misery great on you? Does it make you brood over possibilities — alarmed at the contingency of woes? Would you rather, that all were known before, that you might be prepared for what may trials and tribulations come?

Rather, thank God that He has veiled the future, and deals out His dispensations one by one. The time, the way, the kind, the circumstance — are all fixed by unerring wisdom, and by boundless love. It is thus God is glorified; His power felt; His sovereignty known, free from the trammels of His creatures' will. Matchless in skill; unfailing in resource — He thus proclaims His sovereign Godhead.

Known to His children are the ways of God. The world may murmur — but the saints submit. The world may tremble — but the saints are glad. In all their woes, they see a Father's hand, and a Savior's sympathy. They would not alter it. They meekly leave the future to their God.

The times and seasons; the "what;" the "when;" the "how;" the "why" — they would not, dare not, know!

But these things they do know: that as their days — so their strength shall be; that He, who counts the stars, and calls them by their names — will heal the broken-hearted and bind up their wounds; that divine comforts shall keep pace with worldly sorrows, and that God's grace will be sufficient for every time of need!

**"No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit; and no one has power in the day of death." Ecclesiastes 8:8**

Man, for six thousand years, has tried to understand his spirit — yet knows as little of it as he did at first. What is the soul of man? Whence did it come? Where does it go? He can't explain how spirit dwells with flesh — what binds the two together, for a time, in perfect unity. He has never seen, as little can he feel, the links that knit them to each other. It is all within him — his flesh, his spirit, his life, his being — all the machinery of soul and body, thus closely interlaced. Yet is it as foreign to his grasp, as that which happens in another world!

Thus flesh and spirit dwell together. Who could suppose they ever would part again! Who can explain how soul and body part, or how the links of union are undone — what makes the spirit fly away, or how the flesh gives up its hold! God wills it. God does it. God does not explain why. God tells not how. He speaks, unheard; and immediately it is done — the spirit returns to Him who made it.

Man may detain the body — but he cannot keep the soul, nor say, "You shall not go!" God says, "Return to Me!" The word must be obeyed. Neither youth, nor wit, nor beauty, nor strength, nor money, can delay His omnipotent hand.

How mysterious is death! At times how violent! At times how stealthy! At times He takes your darling from your side — and robs you unblushingly before your face. At other times, days, months, and years may intervene before you know it. The spirit fled — and you knew it not. You thought it still on earth; but it was gone. You think of him, prepare for him, and write to invite him to your home. But alas! the spirit is gone; and had you known it, what could you have done!

Oh, vanity of vanities! What pain, what misery, man's sin has brought to pass! And yet how astonishing is the ignorance, the recklessness of sinful man! Dead in spiritual death, he neither knows nor seeks a remedy, but binds his misery around him with thoughtless energy. And yet there is a remedy — a remedy in Jesus — a remedy for those who look to Jesus!

Say, reader, can you look around you, can you look backward or forward and be happy — unless you find this remedy for all the misery and uncertainty of this poor, passing world?

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord!" Romans 6:23

**"No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit; and no one has power in the day of death. There is no discharge in that war!" Ecclesiastes 8:8**

Oh, what a war it is! Since Adam's day, the war is carried on; no respite granted, no peace, no armistice, and no exchange of prisoners. Each moment of the day, thousands are slain! Each one is carried off in turn, but none ever come back again. "There is no discharge in that war!" Some have been prisoners for centuries, and tens of centuries, fast bound in chains of DEATH. As yet there is no discharge!

Parents have seen their children snatched away — and none have returned again! Wives have been torn from husbands, husbands from wives, and friends from friends. There is no exception, "no discharge."

Oh, DEATH, you are the conqueror now! Some fear you; others brave you; most forget you — but all alike fall under you! You take some when life is scarcely begun. Even for them, "there is no discharge!" Some are removed in bloom of youth — in beauty's prime — in midst of usefulness. Death, are you not mistaken? Was not your stroke intended for another? Oh, give them back! Alas! "There is no discharge in that war!"

We have seen one while still young — and loved to think how long and useful he would live. We gave him many years and hopes.

But no! He is taken away! "There is no discharge in that war!" What anguish in the thought, "He will never return!" Imagination can hardly take it in. Each meal you think to see his well-known face. Each opening door, seems opened for his form to enter! Alas! "there is no discharge!"

As YET there is none. But will there never be? "There is no discharge!" Death, do not say so! One day you will see it. As all have gone — all will return; as all have died — so all will live again. Oh, death, you are doomed! "The lake of fire" is reserved for you. (Rev. 20:14.) You will be totally conquered!

The wicked are even taken from your grasp. They rise again — to misery, it is true; yet still they live. Oh, death! they are not yours.

But, for those who have died in faith, it is not death — they sleep in Jesus. They wait the appointed time. Their "change" will come. He will not forget them, nor leave them in the dust of death. (Job 14:14, 15.)

Where, then, is your sting, O Death? Where O Grave, where then, is your victory! O Death, your war is at an end; not now, but then. And then, O Death, "there is no discharge" for you!

## **"There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt." Ecclesiastes 8:9**

Authority is sweet — but dangerous! Misrule is hurtful, not only to the ruled, but to the ruler. History is full of it. But, reader, what have you and I, just now, to do with history? There is something that concerns us all more nearly.

Are you a parent in a family? Do you rule your children for your profit — or your hurt? Do you mark their tempers, and their dispositions? Are your instructions suited to their characters? Are your chastenings well adjusted to their sensibilities? In their sins and infirmities — do you see your own reflected? What they are now, in youth and childhood — such were you. Do you remember that they derive their sinful nature all from you!

Are love and firmness mingled in your rule: love tempered by discretion, and firmness joined to love? How many Christian parents err — well-meaning parents! They forget the Bible rule — they spare the rod! "He who spares his rod hates his son — but he who loves him, disciplines him promptly!" (Proverbs 13:24.)

God rules His sons by chastening. He sends what makes them feel pain, in mind and body too. Can you do better with your child, than God with His children?

Are children different now? Is the Scripture's discipline grown out of date?

In infancy a thousand lectures, loving though they be — fall short of physical correction, wisely administered in season, and degree. Chastening is what the child can feel and understand. This is the simplest mode of teaching — this is the end in view.

If you rule our child in anger, you teach him to be angry in return. One day his anger will recoil on you! The same with peevishness, and fretful speech; it will only make them fretful with yourself — you rule them to your hurt. If you, a parent, deceive your partner, and thus screen the child from chastening, your child one day will practice fraud on you. You rule him to your hurt!

Never strike a child in haste. Is he to be chastened? Then go to prayer, that you be kept from anger, and that God would teach your child, and nurture him with grace. I knew a father once — I never shall forget his way of chastening. He was a tender parent, and keenly felt his children's failings. He never overlooked their faults, and when he chastened them, it was always done in love. I well remember the anguish of his look. He showed his children that it tore his heart to chasten them. Thus, in the father's grief, the children read their faults, and saw how bitter, and how evil it was to disobey!

## **"There is a time when one man rules over another to his own hurt." Ecclesiastes 8:9**

Are you the Master of a household? Do you rule your servants well? What wisdom do you show — what sense of justice, in your family? Do you respect the covenant you made! It was as much implied, that you should rule with meekness and forbearance — as that they should serve you well. Do you bear in mind that they are flesh and blood, as well as you? No difference in this respect between them and you. They have feelings to work upon; failings to be studied; affections to be pleased or wounded — all this they have in common with yourself. How much is this forgotten in the stern realities of service!

Yet God, who made the one, has made the other, too. With Him there is no respect of persons. Will He not mark your lack of feeling?

Do you choose the season well for telling them their faults? How much depends on this! How often we rule them to our injury — by correcting them in the wrong manner! If faults come thickly — yet reprove them not in quick succession; they will not bear it, and you will thus defeat your end. One fault corrected at a time, goes further than twenty told at once. If one reproof is taken meekly, the next may overstrain the patience, and the third produce a storm! On whom recoils the blow? Who feels it most? The master, or the servant? You know full well.

Let not reproof follow the fault too quickly. The sense of having erred, ruffles the mind. It is then less open to reproof, when fresh from erring. Forbear a while. You will find your opportunity. Their hearts, like yours, are in the hand of God. Commit your cause to Him, and lean not on yourself, your warnings and expostulations.

Does your servant answer you in rudeness? You are justly grieved. This tries the patience, and grates upon the feelings, most severely. "To think that he so far forgets himself! Had an equal thus insulted me — it would be more easily endured; but from a servant, it is intolerable!"

But is not this a cause to bear with him more patiently? Inferior station argues an inferior sensibility — inferior knowledge of what is right or wrong — coarse or befitting — vulgar or refined. Your station makes you doubly sensitive, while he is tenfold liable to err. Judge of his fault with calmness, remembering yourself, your failings, your advantages. Perhaps you have erred yourself, as he has done. (Ecclesiastes 7:21, 22.) Never let not his anger, anger you, nor tempt you to exceed propriety in correcting him. It is bad enough in him; it were tenfold worse in you.

What do you for the souls of those who serve you? Do you speak to them of Jesus, and the world to come? If not, how can you rule them well? Church privilege is good; so is domestic worship; but let not these supplant your personal faithfulness. Speak to them for yourself — nothing can excuse you; tell them yourself of what concerns their peace. Servants have eyes and ears. They mark your words, observe your ways, and see your inconsistencies. How can you rule them to your profit, if your deeds belie your principles!

Would you make them punctual — be punctual yourself. Example teaches more than precept. With all your care, your patience will be tried; but how much more, if you neglect to rule them well!

## **"So I saw the wicked buried." Ecclesiastes 8:10**

Oh, what a leveler is death! All die, and all are buried — the grave has no respect of persons. Some rest in hope of glory: After the worms destroy their body, yet their Redeemer lives; in time they will see Him face to face. (Psalm 16:9; Job 19:25-27.) With other some how different. They lived in sin; in sin they died. Their sins lie with them in the dust, and rest upon their bones. (Job 20:11; Ezekiel 32:27.) And yet they seemed to die in peace. Because their face looked pleasantly in death, it is said that all was well. Oh, what a broken reed! Rest not upon it. It will only pierce the hand that leans upon it.

You, too, may have a smile upon your lifeless corpse. What then? Do you think that this will cancel sin, and save your soul? The only safety is in Jesus and His cross. Nothing else will serve you in a dying day.

And then the funeral, with all its circumstance of woe! The sable hearse; the nodding plumes; horses dressed with studied care; attendants numerous — some heralding in front, some following — the coronet on the bier — the mausoleum cold in its marbled symmetry; with all (or high or low) the service solemnly performed, "ashes to ashes," "dust to dust," so reverently given!

How hard to think that any, thus interred, have failed of Heaven! Nature repels the thought. "It cannot be! It were sacrilege to doubt their safety." Thus man takes refuge from unpleasant truth in dark solemnities; and clothes the trappings of mortality — the crowning emblems of his sin and shame — with thoughts of universal safety. How vain the pomp, how false the pride, often shown on such occasions!

Look at that funeral! You knew him well by sight; you often met him, exchanged a nod, or passing word, or stopped to speak to him. Then he passed on, unnoticed, unattended — no show, or vain display had marked his doings. You see him now; at least you see his pageant. More horses draw him to the tomb than he was accustomed to sit behind, when living. Had you not seen the like before, you would ask what noble, or man of note he was. Thus men are borne as princes to the grave, who, in their life, had nothing princely.

It is well to reverence the dead, and solemnly commit them to the tomb; yet not to make it an excuse for vanity. Think what it is to die! Think of the great realities that follow death. Think of the moldering dust; how little it can feel the empty honors thus bestowed upon it! Think of the parted spirit; how is it bettered by the pomp and show? Think of the lowly Jesus, and let your pride be buried in your brother's grave.



## **"They were forgotten." Ecclesiastes 8:10**

How well we knew his person, both in the haunts of business, and the house of prayer! It was a shock to hear that he was gone. It brought him to our mind more forcibly than ever. Slight friendship swelled at once to feelings of intensity. Each person seemed as though he had lost an intimate acquaintance. Excitement lingered for a day, or two. Before his burial it seemed to wane; then suddenly shot up again; flared for a little season, and then — expired! How soon he was forgotten!

Even thus it fares with men of great renown — statesmen, nobles, or public benefactors. As long as they lived, the nation watched their doings. They could not walk abroad, or reach their country seat, but it was read by thousands. What mourning when they died! And yet how soon were they forgotten! Ah! when we hear the sobs of parents suddenly bereft; of widows, orphans, brothers, sisters, friends — disconsolate in woe, we say, can they forget! Ah yes, they may and do! Like writing in the sand, memory pays tribute to the lapse of time, and parts with all its tracery. Yet it is not always so. In some, memory is made of stronger stuff; the stream of retrospective love flows deep, though silently. Absent from sight, their cherished ones are often in their mind. We men of fainter feelings must stand abashed before them, and own them greater than ourselves.

What makes the difference between memory and memory; between man and man? Wherein consists the framework of the mind? How is it put together? What makes affection strong, or weak? What causes the predominance of judgment, feeling, frailty, or of power? Known unto God are all His works; He has not told us why.

Man's memory has shared the fate of all that is human; it is now degraded by infirmity, and spoiled by sin! But this we know, God never forgets His people! Even living saints forget departed ones; but Jesus forgets them not. Amidst sin and imperfection, they never lose His love, His thought, His care; and when they leave this mortal scene, and fade from human memory, they are not a whit more present to His mind than formerly. His memory knows no change.

## **"Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Ecclesiastes 8:11**

"In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:17.) Thus spoke the Lord to Adam. Yet Adam ate, and Adam did not die. It is true that moral death ensued at once, in strict fulfillment — yet physical death was still delayed. Year followed year, and age followed age — yet Adam died not. Nine centuries had passed — still Adam lived! How slowly judgment came! Yet Adam died at last. (Genesis 5:5.) With God it was but a day. With Him a thousand years are but as yesterday gone by, or as an evening watch. (Psalm 90:4.)

For 120 years the flood descended not; for 120 years the world defied the sentence; for 120 years God's patience waited, while the ark was made; yet judgment came at last. (Genesis 6:3; 1 Peter 3:20.) Since then, all things continue as they were; yet judgment only tarries, it is not gone by. Christ says, "I will come again!" Yet still it is said, "Where is the promise of His coming?" God's promise is not slack; He is very patient, that men may turn and live. Yet still they scorn His grace; and man is wayward, since the Lord is kind. (2 Peter 3:3-9; Romans 2:4.)

Of all God's attributes, methinks, patience is the chief. Perfect holiness looking on continuous evil — with infinite forbearance! How astonishing! The mystery of divine power (Num. 14:17, 18), thus set forth, is quite unsearchable by mortal minds.

But why is God so patient? Willing to show His wrath, and make His avenging power known — why does He yet forbear? The cause is plain — to show the riches of His glory on the vessels of His grace! (Romans 9:22, 23.) The Book of Life unfolds the mystery. Traced on its page — written indelibly in truth and love — God reads the chosen names. The time is noted for their birth and effectual calling. The world must last, and judgment tarry, until the last name is called — the whole family of God made up — the whole redeemed flock completed.

My soul, how wonderful that God has borne with you! That you should know His grace! And share His love! You have tried His patience by manifold transgressions. Say, with how many sinners has He borne, that you, the chief of sinners, might become the least of saints? Then hide your head, and call yourself the chief of sinners still.

**"Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time — I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do**

**not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow." Ecclesiastes 8:12-13**

Men live and die. They call it life and death, and so it is. But yet this life and death are purely physical — breath dwelling in the man, or breath departed. True life is something more than this. Its source and center is in God. It is an emanation from Himself — a streamlet from the fount of self-existence. The life of God is, like Himself, holy, and just, and good. No other life but this could God impart. While life retains this character, it is life itself; what it was meant to be; containing in itself the impress of the Holy One, Himself the sole epitome of life. True life infers God's presence and His love; the pure enjoyment of His favor. Peace, holiness, and purity, are but the breath of such existence.

Without these properties, physical life is death, however long it lasts. Long life, in fallen beings, is but a death prolonged — no mark of blessing or of God's delight. By heavenly rules, how can a fallen state, a lifeless life — a covert death — be a blessing? The only blessing it boasts, is that the sinner still is spared, if, by God's blessing, he may learn to count his life but death; and come to know the principle of true life, and taste the power of life from Heaven.

Men deem long life a blessing. They hug their days, and count their opportunities of sin; each moment added to their life is hailed with joy, a respite from the dreaded and unknown future. But what is our life? It is simply the prelude to eternity — the first beginning of an endless end. What is eternity, but time prolonged — the after links of one unbroken chain! Our mortal life, without the heavenly birth, is but the spring of eternal death. But with the life of grace implanted in the soul, is the first breathing of eternal day. Die soon, die late — it is surely well with those who fear the Lord, who look to Jesus, and revere His name. Die late, die early — can it be well with them, who only live to die eternally, because they live without the Lord? May God give us grace to see aright — to call things by their proper names — and thus to find death but the door of life and gate of Heaven.

**"There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve — and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve." Ecclesiastes 8:14**

So it has always been. God chastens those whom He loves. Can His love be better shown? God chastens us to bring us to the Cross, and keep us there; to show us the vanity of earthly things, and nourish our graces!

Say, Christian sufferer, does your heart rebel to see the wicked prosper — and yourself in woe? Say, would you change with the wicked? Is he better off than you? Are his earthly blessings better than your grace? What do you envy? His health, his wealth, his strength, his aptitude for thought, his friends, his intellect, his fine home? Is Jesus, then, unequal to your needs, or unable to provide for your cares? Are your miseries, then, greater than your mercies? Your comforts — are they gone? What do you think of the blessings: that Jesus makes your bed in all your sickness, that He knows your pains, that He counts your restless nights, your tossings to and fro, that He never leaves you; that He nurses you with tender care.

Is health unsanctified a greater blessing? Sickness with Jesus — or health without Jesus; which is the greater blessing?

Perhaps your family is thinned by death. What then? Does not the Savior fill the void? Is He not better than father, mother, husband, wife, or friend? Then do not envy the circle where death has been unknown. You have better friends and relatives than they.

Perhaps your means are low, and changed from what they were. But what is Jesus? Is he not more than gold and silver? Is He not more to you? Are the ways of God unequal, because . . . He gives you Jesus, He gives you His grace, His love, His presence, He gives you Himself besides?

Have you the lesser portion, because you have the Lord? Then how can you complain? Complaint would suit the worldling more than you: that he has only time — and you eternity; that he has this poor earth alone — while you inherit eternal glory in Heaven. Then envy not the rich, the strong, the prosperous; the man who knows nothing but pleasure from morn to night, and from night to morning. You see not their hearts; you know not their cares; oftentimes their happiness is nothing but restlessness; they dare not think; they hurry on, because they dare not stop. They know not God, they know not Christ. What is their health — or what their happiness, to you!

**"When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth . . . then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the**

**sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it." Ecclesiastes 8:16, 17**

READER, consider well this passage of the Word.

"The work of God!" What is it? God's works in Heaven. Angels behold His Majesty. Departed saints feed upon his glory. In Heaven (with reverence I speak) God's work is simple, uniform in kind, and in degree. It is the maintenance of holiness in sinless beings; the outgoing of His wisdom, love, and power, in one continuous, unresisted stream; glorious in itself, and not less glorious in the glory thus imparted to saints, and angels.

But oh, "the business that is done on the earth!" "The work of God!" The business of His hand in this poor, fallen world — how great, how intricate, how various!

Think of the workings of His power even in the outward world; the guidance of the seasons, and all the dispensations of the winds and waves; now sent in mercy, now in wrath — or to supply the needs, or chide the failings, of His creatures.

Think of His dealings with the hearts of men; the strivings of the Spirit; the calls of Providence; His actings on the conscience in all its prickings, throes, and sensibilities! Think of the work of God in guiding, keeping, chastening, His people; each want considered; each failing studied — grace, comfort, and experience supplied in kind, and season, and degree, fitted to every case — each soul as much the subject of His care, as though the only object of His love. And yet the entire body, the universal Church, maintained in order and relation; all knit together and compact, as if it were a single soul; its government complete; its life secure; its members numbered by unerring love; none to be lost — none to be overlooked — none ever removed from the heart, or mind of Jesus!

Oh! what a work it is — the work of God! Say, who has known His mind, or been His counselor! Who taught Him wisdom, that God should be his debtor! (Romans 11:33, 34.) The Preacher tried to find it out, to trace its workings, to mark its purpose, to calculate its doings — but all in vain; it baffled all his skill. Even Solomon might study it by night, by day, determined to pursue his search — but none, not even Solomon, could find out God, or understand His ways.

**"So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands — but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him." Ecclesiastes 9:1**

The preacher is speaking of "the righteous and the wise," of all their circumstances — of all their liabilities to joy or sorrow. "All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and the wicked." (Verse 2.) God's children know the trials, pains, uncertainties of life, as do the wicked. The saints have no exemption here. "No man, not even the righteous, knows whether love or hate awaits him."

What does the Preacher mean! Whose love? Whose hatred? Is it the love of God — and God's hatred? God cannot hate His people; He loves, He hates them not. Are these terms employed as figures — love, to denote God's smiling dispensations; hatred, to mean His bitter things — His chastenings? Or does it mean man's love, and hatred — the "time to love, the time to hate," as spoken of before? (Ecclesiastes 3:8.) God may use man's passions, or affections, to chasten, or to soothe His people. Whichever it is, the truth is still the same, "The wise," "the righteous," and "their works, are in the hand of God." (Verse 1.)

They often plan and purpose — but who can tell if he shall ever perform? Often they begin — and never end; their works are all attended with uncertainty. God's providential visitations stop them; man's hatred disappoints them; what they intend for good, often ends in harm. Their wisest schemes are brought to nothing. Their brightest prospects fade away. They work in darkness. From day to day they know not what the morrow brings — what means may help them — what means may thwart them, human or divine.

Man may pronounce his trials, to be hatred; and his mercies, to be love. But to the saints nothing begins, or ends in hatred, as from God. All ends, as it begins — in Divine love. Is man the instrument? Yet still they see God working by the hand of man. Man hates — God loves. Man persecutes — God overrules. Man means it all for evil — but God still turns it into good. And thus the same event brings "love," and "hatred," joined in one. God's love, and man's hatred, thus combine to work unfailing good — untiring mercy, for all who love the Lord!

**"The hearts of men are full of evil, and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and**

## afterward they join the dead!" Ecclesiastes 9:3

In life a madman — a madman still in death! Such, such is man. It is piteous to hear of one who is born bereft of reason. It is sad to say, "He passed his life in madness — then he died!" Oh, what a picture of a physical and moral waste! Dead as a child, a citizen, a brother, long before he died — the very acme of all that's desolate.

Man thinks he is wise. He looks with pity on the poor maniac. How little he suspects that he himself is tenfold mad — not only mad for time; mad also for eternity!

He brings madness into the world; he imbibes madness with his mother's milk; he learns madness at school; he confirms and strengthens madness in manhood;

he feeds madness by all he does; he reads madness in books;

he finds madness in every company; he bears madness along in every walk of life; sleeping or waking — silent or speaking — learned or ignorant — rich or poor

— he is a maniac still!

A madman was his father; and so his father's father! Go backwards until you come to Adam — they were all maniacs!

All his children are mad; and so will be his children's children, even to the final child — they will all be maniacs!

What do you think of a man, who walks blindfolded on a yawning precipice? Is he not mad?

And what are all men? What do they do?

- They sport with life.
- They play with death.
- They slumber above the flames of Hell.
- They defy their Maker and their Judge.
- They think nothing of judgment and eternity — and thus they die!

Is it a libel, then, to say, "They are all mad!"

And what comes after death? Does wisdom then come? Will madness cease then? They will hear of wisdom, but they will not have it. Man will then discover how mad he has been. He will see his madness then — but only to know its endless misery!

Happy the man who, coming "to himself," resolves once more to seek his Father's house! (Luke 15:17, 18.) Yes, "coming to himself." Thus speaks the parable. I ask you to mark the words; they are full of meaning. As though the man had been asleep; or drunk; or mad; or had swooned away — unconscious of himself, and all around him. And then, as touched by a sudden hand, and sense as suddenly infused, he awakes — comes to himself again, and immediately he lives, as another man. Such is fallen nature; and such is grace in its effects.

Happy is the man, who thus recovers the gift of reason! Happy is the man, who sits at Jesus' feet, "in his right mind," and clothed with grace — cured of his madness! Jesus has said the healing word — the "legion" is cast out and gone. The man is a maniac no more. (Luke 8:35.)

Reader, either you are mad — or you once were! Say, have you looked to Jesus — or are you a madman still?

## "A living dog is better than a dead lion." Ecclesiastes 9:4

The Preacher's figure is homely — yet how true! The lion was a lion, while he lived — the king of the forests, the first of all the beasts. But now he is dead — and what is he? The name of lion, and no more. A living dog is better. Such as he was, such is he still — to all intents and purposes, a dog! What dog would like to change?

Just so, a living beggar is better than a dead king. Some few would rather die a king, than live a beggar. Yet, in the main, man clings to life, and would rather live a beggar, than die a king.

But if life is valued for the present time — then much more may it be valued for the eternal world to come. The Preacher gives a reason why humble life may be preferred to stately death. "The living know that they shall die." (Verse 5.) Were man but wise — did he but know the blessing of life, and rightly prize the lengthening of his days, how happy would he be!

But the dead man — what can he do? Death is no longer future — death has come! What can he do? Can he prepare for death? The time is past, and preparation gone. Look at him in his 'narrow bed' — his long home! Say, can he now repent now? Can he look to Jesus now? Can he cry for mercy now? What do his nobility, his velvet coffin, his stately tomb, his lofty pedigree, and worldwide fame — matter now? If he died in unbelief — say, who would envy him now? No grace in store for him; no mercy to be found by him; no prayer to make for him; no Word of God to read to him; no gospel promise to be had — he is hopelessly, forever, at an end! How wretched!

How precious, then, to live — even if it is in pain, or poverty, or woe! The living still, through grace, may look to Jesus; trust in His cross for righteousness; may "turn and live." Life to the last, is precious — oh, how precious — if saving grace is found, and pardon is sealed! Better (but, oh! how dangerous the state) — better (with reverence I speak it, but in truth) — better to be a living profligate, a murderer, a thief — than be a dead king. For those who live, there is hope; for the dead king, there is none. Those who live, yet may cry, "O Lord, remember me. Remember not my sins. Remember, Lord, your grace. Remember Jesus and His blood!" Those who live may yet "turn and live."

But, oh! the man that died unsaved! His sin lies with him in the grave. (Job 20:11.) Who, now, can make him "turn and live?"

### **"Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God now accepts your works." Ecclesiastes 9:7**

Your works must be "the work of God" — before God accept them; works done in faith and prayer, from love to Jesus; works wrought in you by God the Spirit; works done, not to procure salvation — but because salvation is given. No other works than these, can God accept. Faith lies beneath, and glory crowns, them all.

"What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" The Savior thus replied, "That you believe on Him whom He has sent." (John 6:28, 29.) Works, built on this foundation, find grace with God for Jesus' sake. Happy the man who trusts in Jesus — who makes the work of Christ his only hope! His poorest works are then approved; God looks upon them and accepts them all.

It is not the ministers of God alone, nor those who live for works of charity. All have not time for this; their calling lies another way. Be it the labor of the spade, or plough; the toil in factories, or work in the mines; to serve a counter, or to lift a bale of hay; the lowest labor of the head or hands — in all may God be glorified, and God be found.

For this the Preacher bids us "Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart." He says that God "accepts" these works. A blessing rests upon the table, where Christ is owned, and God is sought; where food is taken, not for eating's sake, but that the heart be cheered, and members nourished, that God be served more heartily; where thankfulness is felt, even for the relish of our food, reflecting, as it does, God's goodness.

"Your works are now accepted." It is not the building of a hospital, nor endowing church; nor even the catalogue of rich gifts to this or that "foundation". Nor even the munificence to supply the needs of thousands. All this may still be done, and not accepted — if it is not done in faith. (1 Corinthians 13:3.) The praying chimney-sweep, who sings his carol at the chimney-top — or the poor believer, who labors in the workhouse — is more accepted in his work than they. From morn to night, from night to morning — eating or working, walking or at rest — the man is blessed, who lives on Jesus. Thrice blessed even the servant's servant, if he serves the Lord.

### **"Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil." Ecclesiastes 9:8**

"Cleanliness is next to godliness" they say. The saying is good; for cleanliness befits the heirs of glory. It was never meant that Christians should be slovens. Uncleanliness is lack of moral principle, and argues a defective mind — as if the the man had neither taste, nor talent, to be clean. It is a flaw in one's character, to be a slovenly person. The dress neglected — the person badly kept — the broken furniture — the unswept floor — even common manners forbids. Shall Christian principle do less, and come behind in matters of common propriety? Some men are slovenly by nature; it is hard to cure — but grace does all things.

And, Christian reader, if this is your infirmity, I beg you to try and cure it! Even here the Spirit's help is needed, more than in greater matters, since here you are tempted to rely on self. Deep-seated habits, of whatever kind, are only cured by hard work and prayer.

Some men are slovenly people from neglect — bad habits make them careless; their eye is fixed on distant abstractions, and overlooks the foreground of reality. This is an unhealthy state.

Others are slovenly on principle, as monks and hermits. They confound neglect of person, with contempt for finery.

Some men are slovens, and that unwittingly. They think and dream, and read and pray, their minds are absorbed in Heaven — they forget they still are still citizens of earth. Forgive me, reader — the coat unbrushed, the hair disheveled, and unwashed hands — can these be fruits of righteousness, or marks of grace? Oh, no!

Much may be learned from Moses' law — the Gospel of Leviticus. How carefully is cleanliness enforced, and all uncleanness awfully condemned! And why? The one, the type of holiness — the last, the type of sin. We have the types enforced by Christ Himself. Shall we be more remiss than they?

Oh, keep before you the countless multitude in Heaven, so bright and fair! (Rev. 7:9.) Think of their robes so white. Think of the fountain opened for all uncleanness (Zech. 13:1) — the blood of Jesus. If you are a true believer, that blood has cleansed your soul! Then let its virtue be seen upon your person — its power reflected even in your house, and clothing — that so God's name be glorified, and that none should say your practice and your principles are at variance.

Cleanliness is never to be despised. Would you not be a sloven in your soul — then be no sloven in your outward man!

**"Live joyfully with your wife, whom you love, all the days of your vanity — for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun." Ecclesiastes 9:9**

Days of vanity are days of care. Man's days are days of vanity; thus man requires a helper. God's works are wonderful; rich in design, variety, and power. Woman is part of man — bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; in nature one; partner of all his frailties; partaker of his passions; in heart and mind his counterpart — and yet how different! From infancy, she is another creature; her sphere of life — her objects and pursuits — her tone of mind — her mode of action — her taste, her energies, her garb, her person — are all cast in another mold.

Whence comes the difference? How is the mind prepared, congenial to the gender? How is the body framed in unison? How is it brought to pass that the creature to be born is man, or woman? But why the difference? That man might have an helper — something so different from himself, that it should be a help, from dint of contrast.

Who can estimate all that woman is to man? Who can explain the nature of her influence — to soothe, to calm, to bear his troubles — to smooth his roughness — to lessen all his cares?

"Live joyfully with your wife," the Preacher says. Live meekly with her; live tenderly; live peaceably. Love her, and cherish her, as Christ loves the Church, and gave Himself for her. (Ephesians 5:25.)

"That is your portion in life" (verse 9) — a fragment of true happiness which survived the fall. That is your privilege — your duty; not less a privilege to love and cherish, than to possess the blessing. You lose "the portion," when you lose the joy; you lose the joy, when you despise the blessing.

The Preacher tells of many wonders. (Proverbs 30:18-31.) Methinks that he forgot the chief of them all — how woman . . . bears with man; forgives his injuries; endures his harshness; overlooks his failings; requites him good for evil.

How often the man turns joy to sorrow! And yet "the weaker vessel" is strong to bear — stronger than the strongest of the stronger gender.

"Live joyfully with your wife!" Oh, child of God, live meekly, tenderly! The more you serve her — the more you serve yourself; the more you cherish her — the more you love yourself; the more you bear with her for Jesus' sake — the more you have fellowship with God in Christ. His glory, dignity, and office, is to love His bride, the Church. Your glory is to imitate your Lord.

**"Whatever your hand finds to do — do it with all your might." Ecclesiastes 9:10**

Duties are duties. Painful or pleasant — trifling or great — public or obscure — duties are duties still. In things indifferent, a choice is

left; but in duties, there is no choice. The rule is, "Whatever your hand finds to do — do it with all your might." Who should be niggardly of time, or strength — when God presents a duty to be done?

How numberless are duties! Masters and servants; husbands and wives; parents and children; buyers and sellers; friend and friend. In all the round of daily work and mutual dependence — all have their duties. To do them with "all our might" does not mean the hurry of excitement, or of noisy business. It means to act with steady calmness, and a quiet purpose, as serving God; to perform each family and household duty, not as a task, with grudging mind — but cheerfully. The most menial duty, thus performed, will give a freshness to our work and acts of service, which nothing else will give. How needful is this refreshment to cheer our daily toil — to see, and find the Lord in every duty — and thus to do it with our might.

Say, you who serve the counter, or who, in other ways, are used the livelong day — to bear the whims, to please the taste, to answer the demands, of all who come — you need something to relieve the mind, to cheer the heart, and turn your trouble into rest. Do you ever snatch a moment, in the midst your many calls, to lift your heart to Jesus to give you wisdom and strength, and to sanctify your toil; and then forthwith renew your energy, add zeal to patience, and do your duty with your all your might?

Perhaps you are interrupted when you wish it not — or you have some other thing to do, than what you wished. Whatever it may be — do it with your might. It is Jesus who sends the interruption. It is He who appoints the task — receive it graciously, and do it heartily.

Some visitor comes in. Maybe you have no desire to see him — but yet, receive him with all your might. Could he have come, if God had not appointed him? Therefore, do not speak irritably to him, as though your time were lost, and every moment were an hour, that he is with you — but seek to improve the time. It is your business for the present; then do it well. Thus you will glorify God who sent it, more than in all the zeal of what you meant to do.

No duty should be done with half a heart, or half a hand. Let not the heart be absent — while the hand is at work. All that is worth doing — is worth doing well. A hurried way, even in a trifle, will neither help you, nor bring a blessing with it. Then seek the way of working quietly, with sober diligence, and peaceful energy; and thus, whatever you do, you will do it with all your might.

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving." Colossians 3:23-24

**"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." Ecclesiastes 9:10**

Oh it is a solemn thought — death cuts your course in two. On one side all is time — on the other is eternity. Things for eternity are done in present time; and things of time must now be done, or never. You cannot take your undone duties with you — to do them in eternity; here they must stay behind, forever to remain undone!

Is your desire to save your soul? Make no delays. Jesus the Savior is here. Jesus the Judge is there. Here you may seek and find; you cannot find Him there. Here sin is washed away; but sin meets with vengeance there

Is your desire to speak of Christ to some poor wandering soul? As far as you are concerned, it may be now, or never. Be faithful while you may.

Is your desire to do some work of charity — some act of kindness? Is it to act the peacemaker? Perhaps you are the only one to do it, the only one of influence to bring discordant souls together. If you neglect to do it, death may come; the precious moment is lost; and lasting discord may proclaim your broken purpose.

Or you may have in mind to benefit a friend, to make a present from your substance; some thing that you may give, yet cannot "will away." Make no delays. What can you do "in the grave, where you are going?"

Have you a "will" to make — a "will" to alter? Delay it not. The mind is averse to it. A shudder seizes you, when called to do it. Flesh shrinks from what is to be, when self is gone — there is a gulf of unreality, when self, even in prospect, is no longer there. You think you are bringing death before the time; ringing the knell of your departure. Let not such thoughts as these deter you. Will death come sooner because you make your "will?" If death at last overtakes you unawares, when power is gone, and sense fast ebbs away — oh what a pang may seize you, to think that wife or child is unprovided for, through your delay!

**"The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise, or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all." Ecclesiastes 9:11**

"The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise, or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all." Ecclesiastes 9:11

Time, and her handmaid, what the world calls "chance", are clad in the vesture of uncertainty. What people call "chance" is nothing but God's divine providence. God's ways bespeak His wisdom and His power — He is wise to adapt, and mighty to fulfill. Viewed with the eye of sense, God's ways often assume an air of fickleness; by which it is inferred that all things happen without rhyme or reason — with no settled law pervading, no sovereign will directing, their occurrence.

Thus man twist the attributes of God, and robs Him of His honor — as though some mock divinity called "chance" presided over us, and made caprice his rule of action.

Man's needs are various, and require an ever varying treatment — hence the varieties of "time and chance." Not one event occurs without its meaning. All events are divinely fitted to correct, to humble, or encourage; to fill the mind with thoughts of God; to show man's utter weakness to keep himself, or guard against the future; to make him say, "It is the Lord — His hand — His power — His will."

Such treatment is required for a fallen race. No one uniform law would suit the purpose. Shivered to atoms by the "fall" — all order is gone from man. Each broken fragment of his nature reflects prismatic rays of frailty — their hue, their color, their intensity, forever varying; each calling for a divine providence adapted to its need; and, as the prism varies, so is the treatment changed.

The divine eye which counts the feathers on the wings of insects; which numbers up the blades of grass; which counts the drops of water in the ocean; and registers each grain of sand upon the shore — is quick to see, and swift to send. Hence, are all the changes, accidents, and "chances," of man's experience.

Hence, "the race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise, or wealth to the brilliant, or favor to the learned." Man may propose — but all the disposing is of God. God's "chance" (divine providence) is not the "chance" of men — all fickle and confused. God's "chance" is sure — fixed in its principle; certain in its aim; acting on rules of wisdom, inscrutable to man, yet clear and well-defined.

Man fails, he knows not why. He calculates in vain. His plans are crossed by divine counter-plans — the underworkings of the divine Hand which made the worlds; of Him, who sovereignly controls all things of "time and chance."

"The word "chance" should be forever banished from the Christian's conversation! Luck or chance is a base heathenish invention! God rules and overrules all things!" Spurgeon

**"There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man." Ecclesiastes 9:14-15**

If man is grateful for your services — be thankful. If he is ungrateful — be thankful still. In serving man for Jesus' sake; you serve God; He will be thankful, if man is not — your service is not lost. The Christian has a remedy for all — a magic rule which turns all into gold. Coldness he finds — where he expected love; ingratitude — where he looked for thankfulness. But still there is warmth, and gratitude, and love, in Jesus — more than he looked for at the hand of man. And thus there always is a heart to feel your kindness, though man should heartless be.

None of your good intentions come to nothing. If man receives them not — they find a welcome, and a home, with Jesus. He counts them up; He writes them in his book — and most of all, your service for the souls of men.

Some scoff at you. Some listen for a time. Some promise well, and then they fall away. Even then your labor is not lost. God's Word returns not to Him void. (Isaiah 55:11.) It carries back the savor of your faithfulness. The travail of your soul, the Savior sees. For those you meant it — He takes it to Himself, and counts Himself your debtor.



Nay, the most trifling act of kindness — be it to fetch a pitcher of water from the well; to lend a hand in harvest time; to take your turn to watch a restless child; the hand stretched forth to steady tottering steps of an old lady; a kind word, even though unheeded, to a passer-by — none of this falls to the ground. The word, unheard by man — is heard by Jesus. The act may be forgotten by man — but Jesus never forgets it.

Men may wound you to the heart by their lack of gratitude. You looked for better things from them. But can you wonder? What is the heart of man? Did you expect to find it thankful? Well, it often is so. Then do not fret at the ingratitude you receive. Your brother's heart is hard, but so is yours. Let all your deeds be done as unto God. In whatever you do for others, see first your duty to the Lord. Even in these, let duty to your neighbor be the second thing. So shall you never miss your aim, nor find yourself requited with unthankfulness.

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

"It is the Lord Christ you are serving!" Colossians 3:24

### **"The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools." Ecclesiastes 9:17**

Speak quietly — never loudly or forcibly. It is not the strength of lungs which makes impression, but the power of the mind and soul. Never speak in rapid nervous utterance; nor in the storm of passionate expression — but in the "still small voice" of quiet speech.

Loudness bespeaks a lack of tenderness, and a lack of propriety. In company, quiet implies good breeding in grace, a chastened mind. He who is much with Jesus, is not loud — His presence charms the soul to tranquility. If you are loud, you cannot hear the Spirit. He ever speaks in quiet — and in tranquility He is heard.

Passion is loud — and so is lack of thought. Self-discipline, retirement, and prayer beget a softer manner and a chastened tongue. He who is loud of speech, hears most of self. It is odious to hear the sound of thoughtless self — to catch it off its guard, giving its vent to carnal feeling in all the coarseness of its nature. It is humbling to the soul — and yet, if others hear, you had better hear it too, that you may know your real character, and thus be quick to learn the gentleness of Christ.

Be quiet when you speak of Jesus — when you invite the sinner to His cross. You cannot unfold His love with violence of speech.

Be quiet when you minister rebuke, or tell another of his failings. If you are loud, you cannot reach his heart. The quieter you are — the louder in effect; the more serene — the more persuasive. When loudness comes, persuasion dies. Then, let your words be "heard in quiet."

On principle speak quietly. Your gentleness will edify your soul, and thus return its grace with interest. Study to speak distinctly, that your whisper may be heard, and thus your power of tranquility enlarged — yet not the affectation of a maudlin gentleness — but the sterling quiet of the mind of Christ.

### **"Wisdom is better than weapons of war." Ecclesiastes 9:18**

Wisdom is better than war — but harder to be obtained. War comes of fallen human nature; wisdom comes only of grace. It is easier to slay your thousands — than to have one spark of wisdom

Peace is a jewel. All honor to the men who preach it — who travel hundreds of miles upon their peaceful errand; and find access to kings and emperors, to speak to them of peace! Men scoff — but God approves their mission. The failure lies, not in the goodness of their cause, but in the sin of man. Yet it is a day-dream, after all, to think that men will hear of reason; the reason of the Prince of Peace!

Man is quite unable to practice peace. Even if he promises — will that ensure performance? Or will it change his heart? He is but a sinner — still brother to Cain who shed his brother's blood. (Genesis 6.) Give him — ah! give him, if you can, the mind of Jesus. Give him new feelings and affections. Make him, in short, a child of God — and then he will understand you. Until then the world will fight, and fight again. Wars will not cease until Christ returns, and fills the world with peace.

"Give them an arbiter," it is said, "let him decide it!" An arbiter is found. Can he, then, change the heart, or bring the nations to their

senses? Reason is nothing; expostulation is nothing better; entreaty, eloquence, and truth, are of no avail. Sin masters everything, but God. Sin says, "We will fight it out — the sword is the arbiter of right! Might makes right!" The scabbard is flung away, and war begins!

Alas! for wisdom; it finds no place to rest its foot upon; it hovers over the battlefield — then hides its head and weeps. Surely the world is out of course, all its foundations gone. What is it but a ruin, after all.

"Wisdom is better than weapons of war." There is another war, besides the conflict of the sword — the war of words, and angry passions — the war of social discord — the war of family dissension — the war of courts of law. For each, and all, the only remedy is wisdom: wisdom to love, wisdom to suffer, wisdom to forbear, wisdom to be silent, wisdom to treat your brother kindly, wisdom to overcome his evil with your good.

You thus disarm him, and fairly conquer him. What weapons are like these, found in the armory of Jesus — kept sharp, and furbished by the Spirit — for the child of God?

### **"As dead flies cause the ointment of the perfumer to putrefy and send forth a stench — so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. Ecclesiastes 10:1**

Flies are but little things — and yet they do a world of mischief. Themselves corruptible, they breed corruption, as the Preacher's figure shows. Often is the odor of good name turned to "stench," because the flies of inconsistency have festered in it.

Flies are but flitting things; they are now on me, and now on you. Scare them — they are quickly gone — and as quickly they return. Let them but settle for a while — they will sip and sip again — until drowsy with their feast, they die — then follows putrefaction, and your sweets are spoiled, and whom have you to thank? None but yourself. Had you but been sure that the lid was on — no thief had stolen, no spoiler tainted, them. The fault was, then, your own.

Thus inconsistencies are flitting things. At first a single act which hardly settles — then hums its flight away. Act follows act, at short, and shorter intervals. Then acts are turned to habits — and habits nestle in the soul, and poison it. Had you but checked the act — the habit would never have come. Be wary, then, and scare the "flies" away. Tease you they may, but cannot settle long without your permission.

And what are Satan's flies — temptations by the score — when met by grace? Resist them, and they soon will fly away. (James 4:7.)

What a fair thing the Christian's reputation — his good report with others! How hard it is earned! How easily it is spoiled! How delicate its substance! The faintest breath is seen upon its mirrored face. The smallest "fly" is enough to taint it.

Guard well your character, my brother! Keep it from taint, not for your own, but for your Master's sake. A trifling act — a thoughtless word — how soon it brings you down, and makes your ointment to send forth a stench! Years of piety will be spoiled through one "unsavory" act!

### **"A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart is at his left." Ecclesiastes 10:2**

A Christian's heart is the treasury of grace. The heart is thus the center of affection — the seat of knowledge — the source of purpose and emotion — the very soul of spiritual life. It is with the heart we feel and think Christianly. It is from the treasury of the "heart" we bring all practical experience — all spiritual fruit — all holy feelings — all edifying speech, and all consistency of life. The heart is the abode of memory, and holy recollections. In fine, the heart contains all the resources of the child of God, drawn from the fountain of God's grace and truth.

To keep the heart with all diligence — to use its powers of thought, and means of action — to exercise our graces with discretion — to have our knowledge at our fingers ends, our feelings in control — to keep our sensibilities awake, and thus to draw them forth when needed — this is the part of wisdom; this is what the Preacher means.

A workman knows the difference between his "right hand," and his left — and seeks to have his implements at hand, that he at once may grasp, and handle them, with all dexterity. It is thus the Christian is called to use his powers — to have them at the right hand of his energy.

It is humbling to meet the enemy, unarmed and unprepared; to lose the victory for lack of grace; to have known the art to conquer — and yet, from carelessness, to lose it; to hear, what might edify — and be no better for it; to have occasion to speak a word — and yet find nothing to say; to try to mention what we have heard — and find it gone from mind — and why?

Our heart is at our left hand, not our right — and hence our failure. The Spirit's sword not kept within our reach; our knowledge was allowed to escape, for lack of practice; the grace of hearing, feeling, speaking, are not to be found — since not in exercise. All this is clumsy workmanship, and bespeaks a badly kept heart. We seek our weapons, and, when the time is gone by, perhaps we find them, too late to use them, but not too late to cause the blush of shame.

A friend says "Pray for me!" Your heart gives no response — no prayer is found! How chilling to the soul! How humbling! To have your sympathy desired, and find no feeling there, as though you had no heart to beat within you! To have to weep with those who weep, and find no tears to weep with, as though the very fount were dried and gone! Oh, if we lived more prayerfully, and sat more constantly at Jesus' feet, would it be thus? Would it be thus so often? My soul, be careful. Let your heart at your right hand be ever found!

### **"Yielding pacifies great offences." Ecclesiastes 10:4**

Yielding makes peace with God. Man's heart is proud, and therefore man is lost. "Hide pride from man," and man is saved. (Job 33:17.) Then to God's righteousness he stoops, and God is pacified. (Romans 10:3.) Only acknowledge that your sin is great — that under every tree you have sought idols — and God is pacified. (Jeremiah 3:13.)

"How does yielding do this? Is not Christ our peace? (Ephesians 2:14.) His blood alone can pacify, and reconcile to God."

It is true, my friend. Christ does it all. The work is His — not yours. But are you willing to accept His work? That is the question. Pride stumbles at the cross. It does not stoop to a bleeding Savior, more than it stoops to a sovereign God. Human pride overtops the highest angels. The angels hide their faces — human pride turns its back on God Himself!

Yes; "yielding pacifies;" but even this is not your doing. It is not man that yields; man does not give way, and never will. It is grace that does it — man's heart made willing in the day of God's power. (Psalm 90:3.) To grace, man is a debtor still.

Even Christians find it difficult to yield. To say, "I am sorry!" To own that I am wrong! This is very difficult for you. You try again, "Is there no other way? Can I not keep my pride, and be at peace with others?" You try to pray. You cannot. Why? You have not owned your fault. Pride still is there. Go, say, "I am wrong! I am sorry!" Go pacify your friend — and be at peace with God.

Who can explain the twofold nature of the saint — that mystery of good and evil! Now sin is uppermost — and now grace. The old man, and the new — are ever at deadly strife. Grace gains the day — but how? The heart proudly held out, and refused to yield. What brought it to an end? But hush, my soul! You cannot solve such mysteries as these. Enough to know yourself is a miracle of grace. Be it your part to follow Jesus — to learn of Him, to yield to God, and man — and be at peace.

### **"Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them. If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed; but wisdom will bring success." Ecclesiastes 10:9-10**

Is God concerned about quarrying stones or splitting logs? Is it not written for our sakes (1 Corinthians 9:9-10); that each might know his calling, and learn to fill it with propriety — that all might strive to be expert in what they have to do? God's name is honored when we thus adorn His doctrine, and show that Christian men can work expertly. How fitting, then, to know our calling! First, to discover what we are called to do; and then, to do it with all our might.

Some call themselves to preach the Gospel — but Christ called them not. It is proved, both by their preaching, and their lives. None but the Spirit "calls" in truth — and when He calls, He gives the wisdom needful success. How can a man direct his ways? How can a man walk in holiness and divine strength? How can a man wield the Gospel weapons, or use the Gospel tools? How can a man lead the sinner in the paths of peace — if wisdom guides him not?

It is the same in other walks of life — in law, and medicine, or philosophy; with merchants, tradesmen, or mechanics; with laborers, or household servants. It is right that all should know their work, and do it well. All are not equally expert — but all may work with diligence; and, if they are the Lord's, may ask for grace to sanctify their abilities, and thus enable them to use them well. Such shall

have "a good reputation with outsiders." (1 Timothy 3:7.) Men honors those who do their best. Men know the difference between those who waste their powers, and those who make the most of what they have.

It was said by one well known for piety, that if a saint were but a "shoeblick," his shoes should be the brightest in the town. And this should be the rule with all, whether to plane a board — or scrub a floor; to steer a vessel — or to plough a field. Whatever the labor of the head or hand — all should try to do their labor well.

The household seamstress! Now-a-days, what endless handiworks! What divers forms, materials, and hues! What shall we say? How hard at times to draw the line between usefulness — and fashion; between what is solid — and what is vain! This we may say (gravely, yet courteously) — all that you do — do well; but still be careful what you do — lest Jesus say, "You worked for fashion, to deck the chamber, or to please the eye — you did not work for Me."

### **"A babler is no better." Ecclesiastes 10:11**

Oh what a comfort to have a friend, a confidant — a man who knows how to keep a secret — whose ear is ready to receive, whose heart is able to retain, whatever may be told him — a man, who can resist the charm of telling others what he knows, and keeps it within the bolts and bars of secrecy! It is a foul blot upon one's honor, to tell a secret; to bring another into trouble, because you could not hold your tongue. How base it makes one feel, to have it said, "Why did you tell my secret?"

Nor is it merely when it is told to you as a secret. Your friend has spoken in your presence of things which touch his honor, or the fame of others. He said not, "Do not mention it!" He rested on your character. He thought, "He will not repeat it. I know I am safe. He is not given to gossip." He gave you credit for discretion, and found himself mistaken!

Oh, who can tell the harm that is done by breach of confidence! Who can follow, in its course, a secret thus let loose! One tells it to another, and thus it goes from mouth to mouth — from ear to ear — depositing in many hearts what never should be known; gathering, as it flies, untold excess of scandal! If itching ears are bad — surely itching lips are worse — far more hurtful in the end.

And yet it is sweet to fallen nature, to be the first to know — the first to tell! It is a strange pleasure, after all — a sorry way of feeding self-importance — that for a time (oh, short-lived pleasure!) you are admired as the mouth-piece of "intelligence!" It is nothing but vanity. I beg you, mortify the taste — and renounce the habit. Even where the matter is harmless, never tell the tale!

Oh, it is a sign that grace is low, when pleasure such as this is coveted, and souls are taken with the charm of "telling the faults of others."

Where another's character is at stake, and what you hear concerns the faults of others — it is well to bury it at once in secrecy — and never repeat it to a living soul. Practice the habit; in the end you will find it pleasant; and then, it will cost you more to tell it out, than to suppress it.

Of all the things we hear, how few are worth repeating! Weigh it before you mention it. You will mostly find it is not worth the breath expended on it; far less will it repay the risk of injuring yourself or others. Shun, then, the approach of evil — and keep your lips from learning babblers' ways.

### **"The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up." Ecclesiastes 10:12**

A world of evil is in the tongue. Though but a little member, yet it boasts great things. It sets on fire the course of nature. No wonder — itself is set on fire by Hell. (James 3:5, 6.) By words we are justified, and by our words condemned. The idle words will do it, without the actions. The idle words will seal the sinner's doom. (Matthew 12:36, 37.) Words of impatience, violence, and wrath — words of disdainful tempers — expose a man to Hell, (Matthew 5:21, 22.)

Our words testify of our whole character — the entire man — as plainly as weathercocks declare the wind that blows. Out of the abundance of the heart, the lips will speak.

Some lips speak nothing but vanity. The wanton oath — the ribald jest — the idle scoff — these savor of the "pit" too plainly. And then, the empty talk — the giggling words — vain exclamations — breath wasted on unmeaning nothings! God is not in all their words, because He is not in all their thoughts.

Oh, what a reckoning with idle lips at last! To have talked of everything but God — of all but Jesus! If ever those names were uttered, it was in lightness, or in cursing. Say, is not this enough to seal our condemnation?

How many a man seems to have wisdom — until he speaks! His looks are pleasant, his manners good — but his speech proclaims him to be a fool! His lips have consumed himself! What silence did — his words have now undone.

How much a Christian reputation depends on what is spoken! How often a word in private has undone the effect of public teaching — or a moment's vanity destroyed the work of years! How often the profit of a conversation been lost through lack of gravity! Say, Reader, have your lips never consumed you, nor marred your influence, through some unguarded word! It is bitter thus to eat the bread of self-humiliation, and see how vain, how foolish, we are! Then pray the Lord to set a guard over your mouth; to keep watch over the door of your lips; lest, otherwise, they become a sepulcher, to "consume" yourself and others too.

"Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips!" Psalm 141:3

## **"He does not even know how to go to the city!" Ecclesiastes 10:15**

Most men would seek "the city" — the City of the Lord, the New Jerusalem. Few like to say they seek it not — for this were to confess they are on their way to Hell.

Some do not trouble themselves to find it. They think they are sure to reach it — though they know not how. "God is merciful!" they say; and there the matter ends. "How barbarous to think it otherwise!" They think that all men fall asleep on earth, and wake up in Heaven. How many such there are!

Others make much ado. Much pains they take to seek "the city." Pity they know not how to find it! They fast; they say many prayers; early and late you see them at the shrine of vain religious observances. Their dress, their hair, their whole appearance, show that they are eaten up with "religious forms," which loudly say, "We seek the city" — but which as clearly prove they know not how to find it.

Some take the Pharisee's road, and think it leads to Heaven. They pride themselves upon their works, and strict integrity of life. Alas! when death removes the blinders from their eyes, they will find they are in Samaria's midst, and not in Zion, as they thought! (1 Kings 6:20.)

Others say plainly that they cannot find "the city." They ask the way from everyone they meet, "Say, friend, will faith, or works, lead me to Zion's hill?" This path they tread, now that path — taking each byway, as it comes; but still with importunity they cry, "We have not found the road!"

Some, strange to say — walk backwards to "the city," or, at least, they try to walk. They say they seek it, but their face is turned the other way; they have the present world in view. Say, can they find the city thus?

But some there are, who walk the narrow road — the only road that leads to Zion. Once they were wanderers too. But Jesus met them as they strayed. "I am the way," He said, "and I alone. None comes to the City but by Me." (John 14:6.) And now, through grace, they follow Jesus. Both road, and guide, He is. His work is the only causeway for their feet; His footprints are ever telling that He is in the way, going before them to Jerusalem — not, as He did before, to death and shame; but, through His finished work, leading them to glory, even to "the City" now prepared for His redeemed people. (Mark 10:32; Hebrews 11:16.)

Blessed are those who do His will, and have a right to enter through the gates into the New Jerusalem. There shall they see His face — there shall they serve Him. "The city" needs no sun nor moon to light it. This is the name by which it is called, "The Lord is there!" (Rev. 22; Ezekiel 48:35.)

## **"Because of laziness, the building decays; and through idleness of hands, the house leaks." Ecclesiastes 10:18**

Beware of idleness — and, most of all, avoid the thief, procrastination, and his counterpart, "tomorrow." Look sharply — or else they are sure to pilfer your time, your substance, and your character!

Why should you say, "tomorrow," when "today" is better? The torn fabric is seen — or the missing brick is acknowledged; you mean to have it done. "It is but a stitch," you say; "only a brick is gone!" Yes, friend, it was but one — but now it is three or four; and will be

twenty, if you mend it not! The less the pains required — the less should be the excuse.

It is morning now; "you will do it in the afternoon." Night, in its darkness, sees it is not done — so apparent is your negligence! The morrow comes; another and another. Friend, say not that word "I'll do it later" again.

How hard it is to be consistent! to carry out one's principles; to work them out in trifles — in things of every day's occurrence! Yet character is made up of this, and that — small things of character, as well as great.

And what, I ask you, is consistency, but to do all things in time, in order, and in place! Bad habits are always worth correcting. Things outwardly in disorder, speak of that disorder within. If you neglect to stop a gap, or mend a hole — most probably you do the same with your personal faults and failings. The principle is the same in either case. The eye that scans the one — discerns the other. One mind affords the energy — one heart supplies the courage — to correct the fault. It is the same face which ought to blush for slovenly delay. Then strive to be exact, for conscience' sake.

Someone says, "What is the need of being so particular?" Because the matter is great — character is at stake! Beware of small delays. Don't you know that the little foxes spoil the vines; and the vines have tender grapes? (Cant. 2:15.)

Young lions have great teeth. Then break them out at once. They will be greater by and by, and do a world of injury! (Psalm 58:6.)

One fault allowed — one evil way unchecked — one sinful passion indulged in — one bad temper not subdued; oh, who can tell what trouble they will cause you afterwards! If duly checked at the first assault, the garrison will soon give in. The more delay — the harder it will be to take the fortress.

Rust is a little thing at first — but how corroding — and how easily contracted! A slight exposure does it. Thus slothfulness creeps on by small degrees, and soon corrodes the vitals of one's character!

**"Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom — because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say." Ecclesiastes 10:20**

It is dangerous to speak, where secrecy is required. The thought is your own, while you keep it to yourself. But once the cage is opened, and the bird let loose — who knows how far its flight may bear it! At first you think to tie it by the foot — that is, you tell your secret to a single friend. He tells it to another, who mentions it but to a chosen few! The cord is loosened — and your bird has gone! Your "bird" no more will roost in secrecy.

What makes you tell your secret? The itch of telling. And can you wonder that others feel the like, and love to gratify the taste, which you could not restrain? Then learn to keep your secret to yourself.

It is good to know the "bird" is in the cage, securely fastened. And, though it flutters against the bars, desiring its liberty — still keep the cage closed. It will do no harm, while there. What mischief it might do, if let loose — you cannot imagine. If you think evil of a man, what need to mention it to another? His faults are known to you, but why repeat them? Who has a right to ask it? God allowed you to his fault, that you might pray for him — and not to harm yourself and others, by spreading his dishonor.

It is dangerous even to think! Thought oozes out at tiny openings! A look betrays it. A word in sleep may speak it; unguarded speech may unfold it.

It is dangerous to think! Thoughts have their way, if once you harbor them — and do their best to to be spoken. What is wrong to speak — it is often as wrong to think. Who made you the judge of your brother's character? Who gave his failings to your care, or bid you ponder them in your mind? Pray for him, if you will; the more, the better. Think what God's grace may do for him. Think of his turning to the Lord. Think of his sitting at the feet of Jesus. Such thoughts are safe; they will do no injury either to him, or you.

But, if you harbor bad thoughts against the man, and not against the sin, most probably the thought will work its way out to the tongue, and injure you.

To keep a thought at bay — how curiously deep — how deeply curious, the exercise! To treat your thoughts as though they never belonged to you; to give them strangers' fare, and keep them at respectful distance! All this is possible. It is often done by those whose sense is exercised to discern good from evil. My soul, may this exercise be yours — that your thoughts be led captive, and Jesus rule your tongue. Then nothing shall escape you, that you should retain; nor others' character be injured at your hand.

## "In the place where the tree falls, there it shall be." Ecclesiastes 11:8

Say, reader — it is a thought of deep solemnity — where shall you be in five hundred years? Have you ever looked it in the face? If not, you well may shudder. Five hundred years will pass away, and find you still in being — more keenly sensible than now, to joy — or sorrow. Not here, it is true; but in eternity.

Ah, reader, tell me where — in five thousand years — where shall you be?

- Where shall you be in five million years?
- Where shall you be in five hundred million years?
- Where shall you be in five thousand million years?
- Where shall you be in five hundred thousand million years? Where shall you be in five million times a million years — where, Reader, will you be?

Ah, tell me how you die — then I will tell you where you will be in eternity. One simple fact will fix the knotty point, and mark your state forever. One simple question I would ask you, "Do you believe in Jesus?" To fall asleep in Jesus, is to awake in eternal glory. This will be your portion, when millions of years shall pass away — yes, countless millions — and find you still amidst the throng of saints and angels; still find you gazing on the face of Jesus — your soul still bathed in glory!

To die in sin; in other words, to die without salvation in Jesus, is to awake in endless misery — in death unceasing, "the second death;" ranging, in woe unspeakable, through all eternity.

One moment fixes you forever — the hour of death. No change can happen after death. What change can happen then? Can the flames of Hell burn out your sins? Say, does the potter's fire burn out the colors of the potter's vase? Nay, but it burns them in, and fixes them indelibly. Thus acts the quenchless flames on sinners and their sins. Or, will the company of devils, and the wicked dead, renew your soul, and make it fit for Heaven? Oh, tell me, if you can, how many years of fire will purify your soul; how many years with Satan will restore you to God's image? Have you not read: "He who is unjust — let him be unjust still; and he who is filthy — let him be filthy still." (Rev. 22:11.)

If, as a tree, you fall toward south, or north — there shall you lie forever. On the north side lies the eternal city, New Jerusalem, the City of the King. Fall there — and there shall you forever be. Fall south-ward, what hand can then remove you, or make you a vessel fit for the Master's use?

## "The days of darkness." Ecclesiastes 11:8

What a mysterious thing is darkness. Who can explain its power? I am still the same in darkness, as in light: in mind, and body, and estate, the same. All things around maintain their relative position, uninfluenced by night, or day. What makes the difference of feeling?

The horror of great darkness! (Genesis 15:12.) What is it? Whence does it proceed? The day was made for wakefulness; the night for sleep. Darkness was never made for waking eyes, or waking thoughts. Grace softens it, and robs it of its gloom; but even then, "truly the light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing" to see "the sun." (Verse 7.) Darkness and sorrow are well-matched things — darkness and misery.

"The days of darkness!" What are they? Days of distress; days, in which it is felt that man is fallen; in which the sunshine of prosperity is gone, and man no longer dreams of unbroken happiness.

With some, how brief the day! How passing short the dream! How soon "the days of darkness" come! Their childhood is ushered in with clouds; sickness or sorrow tends them all their days; and soon they set in darkness.

With others, oh, how different! They hardly know what "darkness" means. They hear of sorrow, pain, and trouble; that is all. They little think that "days of darkness" will at last be theirs.

"The days of darkness!" Yes, they will come. "They shall be many." Oh, how many they will be! You know not what worlds of sorrow are compressed within the nutshell of a moment! When once the bubble bursts, and days of health are gone — when death and judgment stare you in the face — who can express the world of darkness that a few short months may prove? To think of talents wasted! Of God neglected! Of opportunities gone by! Conscience alarmed! The judgment now convinced! The mind unhinged by

fear! The body tottering to its fall! Backwards, a dreary waste — forwards, a yawning void! Death, judgment, and eternity, harrowing the soul!

Say, are these not "days of darkness?" Will not a few suffice you. when they come? Not even a few you would ask — but God may give you many.

If such is life — life, and its darkness, the inner darkness — Oh, then what is death! Death and its darkness! The outer darkness! (Matthew 8:12.) Oh, for the light of life to cheer you now — to cheer you after death! Oh, for Jesus, the sinner's Friend! Oh, for the Bright and Morning Star, to light you now and ever! (Rev. 22:16.)

**"Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see — but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless." Ecclesiastes 11:9-10**

Mankind is a mystery — God overruling, ordering, directing; yet man as free to act, as though none overruled; as bold of heart, as though responsible to none. How clearly this is seen in youth! What lawless vanity! What free indulgence! What passionate excess! What thoughtless unconcern! What elasticity of body and mind! What vast exuberance of health and spirits! Restless in pleasure — eager to enjoy — no weariness in following out its ways.

In each succeeding generation, it is as if sin is renewed, to flow in younger veins; as though the pursuit of pleasure increased with each succeeding age!

Youth is a mystery! In a child's early years — the mind is susceptible; prejudice is unconfirmed; habits are not yet matured; the feelings are tender; the judgment is pliable. You would think it would be easy to conduct the child to truth and godliness. And yet, with all this pliability, there is a force founded of human passion — a great desire for all that is vain — the wildest dream of all that is earthly.

Poor youth! I pity you. Launched on the billows of a treacherous sea — a traitor world without — a traitor heart within; pleasures to tempt your passions — snares made to catch your failings — and all smiles around invitingly. It seems almost a duty to enjoy yourself, and take your fill of all that pleases you.

Conscience, where do you dwell in youth? Can your voice be heard in the midst of rampant vanity? False manliness would choke your utterance. Yet are you felt at times. You may be dormant, yet you are not dead.

Listen, my youthful friend! What voice is it? Look not without — the voice is from within! It bids you to pause and think. It tells you of a God, a divine providence, a righteous Judge. It tells you that you are mortal. It tells you of an eternal world to come. It says, "You are a sinner — and you need a Savior! A Savior may be sought — a Savior may be found. Sin may be confessed — and sin may be forgiven! Beware!" Listen to the voice, my friend!

**"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth." Ecclesiastes 12:1**

Remember your Creator! He speaks as if you had known Him, and forgotten. But is it so? Ah no! By nature you know Him not. Forgetfulness was born in you — forgetfulness of God — forgetfulness of utter ignorance — of darkness tenfold dark, because to you, God is invisible. You are born a prodigal, far from your Father's home — and you continue to wander away from Him. Say, "I will return to my Father, for I have strayed afar."

God deals with Adam's children, as He dealt with Adam himself. Adam's sinful nature is yours. God says to you, "Remember! Trace back your wandering steps. Undo your past forgetfulness. Return to holiness. Return to Me!"

But how can you remember? Your memory is gone. Search all the corners of your heart and brain — you will not find it. They will tell you that many things have lodged in them, but God's remembrance never. Ah, try, and try again! You will find I am right. You never knew the Lord. Then how can you remember whom you have never known? What is to be done?

God must remember you, before you remember Him. He must give you His grace — and pardon all your sins. Then shall you track your way to Adam's sin, and say, "This sin is mine! In Adam I have sinned. I have forgotten my Creator, and turned from God. I have



been a rebel, and a wanderer still." But hark! my friend. What the first Adam lost — the second Adam found. What the first Adam took away — the second has given again.

Am I the Lord's? In Adam I fell — in Christ I am risen again. In Adam I forgot — in Christ my memory came again. In Adam I am in darkness — in Jesus I have light. Now I remember! Now I live! And by the grace of God I will never forget again.

Reader, may this grace — this light — this memory be yours!

## **"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth — before the evil days come." Ecclesiastes 12:1**

"Remember your Creator now!" It may be now — or never! What — is your life so sure? Is your soul so little worth? Is time more precious than eternity? What are you waiting for — the time of sickness and the hour of death? Believe me, friend, these are not times for thought. Tell me, do ailments aid your thinking powers? Do you think that mortal maladies will help you come to your senses — the aching head — the burning skin — the throbbing pulse — the sleepless night — the jaded powers? Why do you wait, then, for these? Why do you wait for later years, to sober you? Do not be deceived. Old age does not change the heart. It does not sober the mind. It does not sever the cords which bind you to the world. Old age only deadens — it does not quicken the soul.

Why do you turn you from the truth? Because the effort is greater than you like to make. If youthful powers shun the task — do you think that old age will find it lighter!

"The evil days!" When all the powers of mind are worn out with use; when mental energy begins to flag; when eyes refuse to see, and ears to listen. The limbs can no longer bear you to the house of prayer. You cared not for your soul in youth and strength.

Old age has evil days. Why wait, then, for these? Is it too soon to look to Jesus? Too soon to love the Lord! When do you mean to begin? "Tomorrow," say you? Next week? Next month? Next year?

My Friend, what can the coffin do — the shroud — the graveyard — or the tomb? Say, can the lifeless corpse — the scattered bones — the moldering dust — can these remember their Creator? Can they turn and live?

Oh these are evil days indeed! Why do you wait for these, my friend? Whether or not, you wait for them, they wait for you! Remember your Creator now! Oh seek for grace to find Him — to remember Him. Why do you wait for? To find a better Savior, or a kinder Friend? Hasten! Oh, hasten! While we are speaking, time is hastening on. The evil days are coming! Oh parley not with sin. Away with vain excuses — with unbelieving doubts. God says, "Remember your Creator now." Then tarry not, my friend.

## **"The clouds return after the rain." Ecclesiastes 12:2**

Say, what are tears? What makes them flow? What keeps the reservoir supplied? What keeps it flowing? How does the soul act upon the body? Why does emotion make me weep? What link is there between my feeling, and my tears? Why weep for joy? Why weep for sorrow too? Ask those who weep the most; the fountain of whose tears is seldom dry. They cannot tell you the answer. Within them dwells a mystery they cannot solve.

This world is a valley of tears. There rolls a constant stream of lamentation, mourning, and of woe in this valley. How many a streamlet feeds it in its course! Deep furrowed channels carry the tears. Since Adam's day they have run and never ceased — and all humanity has fed the stream.

Yet it is a wonder, seeing what man is, that man should weep so little, after all; that intervals should be so long between his clouds, and rain; that man should have his sunny days; his summer time, when tears are seldom known. It is of God's mercy, thus to mitigate the curse; and give a little respite to our tears.

Sorrow is often sanctified. Yet, of itself, it softens not. Like rain, that often descends upon a spot, it hardens. Sorrow unnerves the mind, and thus disables it for action. The more it comes, the more it tells with deadening effect. Thus pressure follows pressure — and the spring recovers not its elasticity. As old age advances, causes of woe increase. Friends are taken, one by one — leaving the soul more desolate. Infirmities increase — painful infirmities — often, of themselves, the source of tears, and rendering the man less able to endure his other sorrows.

Thus weakness, desolation, pain — and strange forebodings of the world to come — harass the aged mind. Cloud follows cloud

across their sky; one shower is scarcely gone, before another comes. The mind — unnerved and full of discontent, rejects all comfort. These are the evil days! Oh, wait not for them! Pray that your early tears are sanctified, that later tears may be restrained.

There is only one remedy for sin — one only antidote to sorrow — the cross of Jesus. Shed your tears for sin there; He will wipe away your tears of sorrow. There tears of penitence are turned to tears of joy — and all your tears are written in his book. (Psalm 56:8.)

### **"And all the daughters of music are brought low" Ecclesiastes 12:4**

Once the songs were heard — his soul the very seat of melody. How fine his taste! How exquisite his skill! What rare perception of sweet sounds!

Alas! how changed in old age! And yet the soul of music is there — only the power of hearing is gone. New melody is nothing to him. New melody — the progeny of modern days, the taste of younger souls. No ear is left to take it in. The echo of the past is there, and fills his languid soul. The sons of painting once were there, and filled his mind with imagery. Science, accomplishments, and art, were his — and cast their shadows on him still; while energies, gone by, play with a flickering flame, and light his drooping sensibilities.

His eye — that window of the soul — how keen it was! What floods of light it once admitted; filling the inward parts with rare perceptions; feeding the thoughts; making the soul aware of what was passing; giving to outward things an inward place and habitation; the man thus kept in fellowship with all material things. The soul looked out, as well as light looked in — and spoke unutterable things.

But now the eye is thickened, glazed, and seared. Light enters scantily, and leaves its information lagging far behind. If anything is felt, it is but vacancy — the sense that once it had been otherwise — grasping what once was there, and finding nothing.

The hearing — once so fine — hears now the knell of its departure, and strains to hear — but hearing is no more.

A soul, thus furnished with a fleshly frame was fed and kept in action by material food and drink. Within the house the food was bruised, and ground. The "grinders" did their work in harmony with all the structure. But now the workshop is bare — the mill well near forsaken. As once it told of ability, so now it tells of ability lost and gone. Behold, my friend, what may be your portrait!

### **"The grasshopper shall be a burden." Ecclesiastes 12:5**

Alas, how changed! Is that the man who smiled at danger; who stood the battle's brunt, and faced a multitude alone? Is that the man, whose brave spirit bore him over the stormy wave; whose brawny arm, and steadfast heart set trouble at defiance? Say, what has changed him? Nothing but the lapse of years! What a change!

None can look within, and trace the process — how boldness turns to fear — rashness to caution — the power of enterprise, to love of rest.

Rest is the luxury of old age — sweet, soothing rest — as much a luxury to old age, as enterprise to youth. But say, what works the change? How strange that vital energy should thus decay! How were the seeds of living dissolution thus planted in the frame?

"The grasshopper is a burden!" Its very chirp a trouble! Its "spring" the subject of alarm! Its shadow terrifies the soul! These are the evil days, when sad decay is the burden of the song — when man feels weakness — bloodless — lifeless; when all his energy is gone — his body a chaos of infirmity; his steps — his breath — his powers — his vision — all bathed in impotency — and weakness seems to start from every pore; when man could cry for very weariness — nothing but the shadow of what he was before!

He dreams of days gone by, uncertain which is true — either the past, or present. The past is a specter — the present is nothing more. The future! Ah! the future! Is that a specter too? It must be so — airy in prospect (but in reality how fearfully substantial!), unless the soul has found the sure realities of faith, and grace — built on the solid rock of Truth. Thus born again, the soul retains its freshness — and though it feels the bodily decay, and pays its tribute to the "fall," it has a principle within — a principle of life — and endless youth; a principle that soars over mind and flesh alike — preserves from fear and pining fretfulness — and new creates the man.

## **"Man goes to his long home." Ecclesiastes 12:5**

The grave is his "long home," but not his final home — there is another home beyond. For some this "long home" is long indeed — yes very long. To some it has been a home more than five thousand years — as with righteous Abel. Others have tenanted the "long home" for centuries. How long their lease will last, is known to no man.

How many have we seen borne to this "long home!" Others will see us carried to our home. Reader, they will see both you and I go to our "long home". And, if that home receives us, who knows how long it will detain us? It may be but an hour, a day, a month, a year. For anything we know, it may be twice as long as Adam now has filled it.

Known unto God are times and seasons. Can we do more than leave them in His hand? Can we do better than love to have it so? At present all is secret. In due time it shall be known to men and angels.

My friend, you have a home beyond the grave — a home prepared and furnished. You look at the country church-yard, and the peaceful sod — and call it peaceful. But what peace for you, if this is all your expectation? Yes, there is a "home" for all — a final and eternal home. Once there, you are there forever. Tell me, my friend — what eternal home do you expect to go to? Has it ever crossed your mind, or formed the subject of your serious thought?

Christ has prepared a home for those who love Him. Say, will your home be there?

Another home is prepared for the devil and the unbelieving. You know its name. Oh! will your home be there? You say, "Who knows?"

Hearken, and I will tell you. Where is your present home? Are you at home with Jesus? Do you ever lean your head upon His bosom by faith and prayer? Say, are your brightest moments spent with Jesus? Is He your confidant, your choicest friend. If so, He will be your home forever. In Him you will live. In Him you will rest. In Him you will sing your song of glory.

Perhaps you say, "Oh! my heart desires to lean upon Him, to find Him all my treasure and my home, though still I mourn my unbelief and fears." Fear not, my friend! Jesus despises not your small beginnings — He will be your home at last.

But if you are not at home with Jesus, nor seek to be so — what home have you, my friend? What home do you hope for? Unless you repent, you will have no comfort of your final home! "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire!" Revelation 20:15

## **"Remember Him — before the silver cord is severed." Ecclesiastes 12:6**

Was our body, this wondrous building made — just to be taken down? These members knit together — only to be dismembered? These organs tuned — only to be disorganized?

Is the bony frame, with all its powers — the force that moves, the pillar that sustains the man, the center of movement — to be taken down?

Is the head, so rich with golden influences; the seat of thought; the throne of intellect; the habitation of the brain, that mystery which none has understood nor yet explained — to be taken down?

Is the heart, with all its vessels; sending its life, with continual force, to each extremity; suffusing all with warmth, and circulating, as it flows, with healthful energy — to be taken down?

Are the lungs, supplying breath and vigor to the frame; sweeping the inner chambers with wondrous ventilation; discharging all that's foul — inhaling all that is pure! Must these be broken up?

Must all their beauty fade? Must all their power cease? Their very life be turned to death? Why is man's frame thus fading? Why does the essence of decay lurk within it? Because of sin!

But does this undo the mystery? It was not corruptible at first. But now, for ages, the life has been but threescore years and ten, neither increasing nor diminishing. Why is it thus? God wills it so. He has fixed the term of strength, the period of decay. They wax and wane, obedient to His will.

It seems a mystery why such an intricate contrivance as man, should be lost, and perish thus. Each day — each hour — each moment, thousands of souls departs — and leave thousands of wrecks behind. Each body thus deserted, even in life's lowest dregs, formed of such exquisite machinery, as none but God could make.

But it is not lost — far from lost. Had Adam's race produced one saint alone, it were not lost. Man's withering frame has been the nursery of countless saints. Their faith, their grace, and hope, first found them in a fallen world. Their house is taken down, only to be built again — to last, to be inhabited, forever! Oh, happy they, who have "a house not built with hands, eternal in the heavens!" (2 Corinthians 5:1.)

**"Then and the dust returns to the ground it came from; and the spirit returns to God who gave it." Ecclesiastes 12:7**

Dust shall be dust once more — simply dust again, just as it was before. The spirit shall return to God — to God who gave it; to God, who breathed it into man at first. Thus spirit goes to spirit, and dust returns to dust — creation's work undone, to all appearance, as though it had not been; the union disunited; the harmony made harmony more.

Dust claims its dust, and spirit claims its spirit. The two were made to dwell together — but sin has sundered them, and, for a time, impressed on each a separate existence. God gathers to Himself man's spirit and his breath (Job 34:14).

The soul returns to God — into the world of spirits — the world invisible to man, yet visible to God. The soul returns to God — to God as Savior — or to God as Judge; in either case to God. But what a difference!

Listen, my friend, oh, listen to the truth; it is solemn, and, oh, how sure! Is God distasteful to you? Is His presence dreaded? And well you may, if now you know Him not. But think — What will it be at last! Now you can seem to hide yourself from God — and God hides Himself from you — and so you are satisfied. But when your naked soul flies shivering away, unclothed by flesh, with nothing to shield you from the living God — ah! who can tell the anguish felt by spirit, when thus exposed to the holy Deity! Ah! who can tell the pain inflicted by God's all-seeing eye upon the spirit, thus laid bare!

And who can tell the bliss, the joy, the rapture of the soul — the happy soul — the sainted soul — the spirit of the just made perfect! It breathes at last its native air — unmixed with sin — unsullied by temptation. It bathes itself in seas of glory — the glory of the Savior's presence. It wings its way into the inmost regions of His love, and sees His face forever!

**"The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails — given by one Shepherd." Ecclesiastes 12:11**

Words spoken by the ministers of truth — words of salvation — messages of grace — brought home with power to the soul! Such are the "nails" here spoken of — lasting impressions; truths fastened in the inner man.

Christian, do you remember the time, when the Lord first saved you? Can you ever forget it? The time — the place — the circumstances — the friend who spoke to you of Jesus — what can efface them from your memory? What can pluck them from your heart? Who can draw out the "nails" thus fastened in your soul?

And in the after days of grace — in all the workings of experience — in all the growth of knowledge, and exercise of faith, is it not still the same?

Look at your Bible! How many texts start up before you, written in type of gold! Why is it thus? Each tells you of a season, when first it sensibly impressed your soul. Each is a "nail," well fastened there. Some pastor fastened it — some brother warrior — some fellow sinner. One taught you that — another taught you this. One planted you — another watered — many have helped you on your way; and yet "one Shepherd" sent them all — one Master Shepherd, even Jesus! He fixed the "nails." His hand has sent them home.

What Jesus does, shall never be undone. He drives the "nails," and immediately they are clenched; each fastened by the power of His eternal will. He first renews the soul; implants the substance of His grace — something to hold the "nails," when once they are driven in. God's nature in the soul retains the Word, and will not part with it. Hence, the perseverance of the saints: God loved them — chose them — called them — beget them by His word — and keeps them fast. Each "nail" is firm embedded in the soul, keeping the whole in place, and makes it sure.

**"Of making many books there is no end." Ecclesiastes 12:12**

And was it so, even in the days of Solomon, before modern printing was known, and books were multiplied as now they are? Oh! what would Solomon have said, had he but seen a street in our metropolis, where books by thousands issue from the press? Could he have seen our libraries — shelf upon shelf, groaning with endless tomes — each day bringing its contribution to the former store!

We live in days when reading must be had. The march of intellect prefers its claims. Science advances with such giant strides, that works of yesterday are obsolete today, and soon give place to others. What is true of science — is doubly true of lighter reading. Book chases book across the field of novelty, in ever-changing form. Woe to the man who lags behind, and talks of what was new a year ago!

Religion, too, has taken up her pen, and works her types unceasingly. Essays and sermons — works of deep doctrine, experience, and fiction — commentaries, history, and prophetic views — all claim their authors by the score, and fill the eye. In such a day we need discretion, wisdom that is useful to direct, how much, and what to read.

The Word of God is overlaid amid the multitude, and suffers loss, even among Christian men. Perhaps it ill becomes the man, who is adding to the store, to make remarks like these! Yet he would make his chapters shorter, and his pages few, that they may interfere the less with Bible hours — and strive that what he writes may point you back to Truth, and make you search the Word of God more closely.

Reader, Whatever you read, I beg you, make the Word of God your chief study. Take it to God Himself in prayer. He wrote it. Who can interpret it like Him? May God Himself be your teacher. Read it with thought, and prayer. All that you gather thus will stay with you, as nothing else will stay. None teaches like the Lord the Spirit. Believe that He can teach you, and He will. The more you trust Him for His teaching — the more He will teach you. The more He teaches you — the less you will care for other teaching. The more your senses thus are exercised, the more you are qualified to judge of other books — to separate the precious from the vile, and thus do honor to the Truth.

### **"Much study wearies the body." Ecclesiastes 12:12**

Study is weariness to flesh; and yet it is not flesh that studies, but the mind. The body is mostly still in times of study — yet flesh is wearied; so closely are the soul and body joined. Where study is followed to excess, self lies beneath it: self-love — self-pleasing — self-aggrandizement. Where do you find more selfishness, than in the "study" with its book and easy chair?

Even in studying the Word, it is wrong to over do it. Self-seeking meets you here. Look back and see. Have you ever found the Spirit work, when weariness came on? He acts in unison with providential laws. These plainly tell you it is wrong to over-tax your powers, and ask of them what they can never yield. When aching head, and smarting eyes warned you to cease — was it not selfishness that urged you on? Wiser than God you have been — He bade you stop. Self said, "I must go on." The Spirit said, "I am not with you." Self said, "I will go along."

Excess of study is to spirit, as gluttony is to flesh. Who thrives by over-feeding? Who gains by over-study? Who can retain knowledge, acquired thus? The sickened mind disgorges it — it is emptier than before. We over do it from lack of faith. We cannot trust the Spirit, either to help our memory, or supply our lack of reading — and so we play the fool by over study.

My friend, are you preparing for the ministry? Coupled with this, you have before you a field of literary fame. Why is your strength expended for this latter end? Is it to help you for the cure of souls — in preaching Christ — or visiting the poor? Is it for these, you over-work your energies? Ah, search again; you will find that self is working here. What has the Cross to do with literary fame, and what are "honors" to the Cross? Has Jesus asked it at your hand? Such carnal weapons are unknown to Christ.

You hear it said that fame for learning will aid His cause, and glorify His grace; that men are predisposed to hear a scholar, and cease their prejudices, when Christian men have taken high "degrees." Do not believe it! Grace is the only weapon. What other do you find in Scripture? When Christ is lifted up, all men are drawn to Him. (John 12:32.) If learning is lifted up, then self is lifted up — not Christ. Then trust it not, my friend; it will only hinder you, and draw no souls to Jesus.

### **"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Ecclesiastes 12:13**

And so it always was, and so will it ever be. So was it in Paradise. It has been so since Adam fell. Man's duty shifted not with Adam's innocence. God varied not His law, to suit his rebel, man. The Gospel made no difference in this. Man's duty must continue still the

same.

This is the reason why he needs a Savior — his duty beats him; he never could perform his duty, and he never will; he needed One to do it for him. This is what Christ has done. Believe in Christ, His doings, then, are yours!

"Fear God!" My friend, do you know what this contains? Who ever feared Him perfectly? Have you, or I? None but a sinless being can accomplish this. Your sinful heart can never fear the Lord.

"Keep his commandments!" Who ever kept them? One, only One. It is neither you, nor I. It was Christ, and He alone.

"Keep His commandments?" Which have you kept? Rather, which have you not transgressed? Which day, which hour, have you kept them all? Which moment have you fully honored one? "Keep his commandments?"

Yes, you may, when you are perfect. Say, will this ever be? Perfect in self — ah, never! Perfect in Christ! Ah, that is another thing.

"Keep His commandments!" Believe in Christ, and then you have kept them all. None kept in self; not one commandment unkept in Christ. All sin is in self; all righteousness is in Christ. In self, God is neither loved, nor feared. God is honored, feared, and loved, in Christ. Oh, wondrous scheme! Man saved! God honored! The Law observed! Atonement made! Man's fall undone by Man! Man's penalty discharged by Man — the God-man, Christ Jesus! Thus man is justified, and lives again. Not only so, he is also willing made; willing to fear the Lord; willing to keep His law — a willingness he did not feel before.

The internal principle is now there. The Spirit is there; and hence the change of principle — the principle of fear, and strict obedience; the principle of faith; the principle of divine love! He looks for righteousness in Christ, even here on earth; he looks for perfectness in Heaven!