

ABSCONDING AND APOSTASY

NO. 3556

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 1917
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“Will ye also go away?”
John 6:67

NO mischief that ever befalls our Christian communities is more lamentable than that which comes from the defection of the members. The heaviest sorrow that can wring a pastor's heart is such as comes from the perfidy of his most familiar friend. The direst calamity the church can dread is not such as will arise from the assault of enemies outside, but from false brethren and traitors within the camp.

My eminent predecessor, Benjamin Keach, though arrested, brought before the magistrates, imprisoned, pilloried, and otherwise made to suffer by the government of the times for the Gospel doctrines that he preached and published, found it easier to brook the rough usage of open foes than to bear the griefs of wounded love, or sustain the shock of outraged confidence. I should not think his experience was very exceptional.

Other saints would have preferred the rotten eggs of the villagers to the rooted animosities of slanderers. Troy could never be taken by the assaults of the Greeks outside her walls. Only when, by stratagem, the enemy had been admitted within the citadel was that brave city compelled to yield. The devil himself is not such a subtle foe to the church as Judas, when, after the sop, Satan entered into him. Judas was a friend of Jesus. Jesus addressed him as such. And Judas said, “Hail, Master,” and kissed Him. But Judas it was who betrayed Him.

That is a picture which may well appall you, that is a peril which may well admonish you. In all our churches, among the many who enlist, there are some who desert. They continue awhile, and then they go back to the world. The radical reason why they retract is an obvious incongruity. “They went out from us because they were not of us, for if they had been of us, doubtless they would have continued with us.” The unconverted adherents to our fellowship are no loss to the church when they depart. They are not a real loss, any more than the scattering of the chaff from the threshing floor is a detriment to the wheat.

Christ keeps the winnowing fan always going. His own preaching constantly sifted His hearers. Some were blown away because they were chaff. They did not really believe. By the ministry of the Gospel, by the order of providence, by all the arrangements of divine government, the precious are separated from the vile, the dross is purged away from the silver, that the good seed and the pure metal may remain and be preserved. The process is always painful. It causes great searching of heart amongst those who abide faithful, and occasions deep anxiety to gentle spirits of tender, sympathetic mold.

I trust, dear friends, that you will not think I harbor any ungenerous suspicions of your fidelity because my text contains so pointed and so personal an appeal to your conscience. There is more of pathos than of pardon in the question as our Lord put it, “Ye will not go away, will ye?” He addressed the favored twelve. I put it to myself, I put it to those who are the officers of the church, I put it to every member without exception, Will ye also go away? But should there be one to whom it is peculiarly applicable, I do not desire to flinch from putting the question most personally to that one, “What, are you going? Do you mean to turn back? Do you mean to go away?”

Let us approach the inquiry sideways. Will you *also* go away? “Also” means as well as other people. Why do others go? If they have any good reason, perhaps we may see cause to follow their example. Look narrowly, then, at the various causes or excuses for defection. Why do they renounce the religious

profession they once espoused? The fundamental reason is want of grace, a lack of true faith, an absence of vital godliness. It is, however, the outward reasons which expose the inward apostasy of the heart from Christ of which I am anxious to treat.

I. WHY SOME LEAVE CHRIST

Some there are in these days, as there were in our Lord's own day, who depart from Christ because *they cannot bear His doctrine*. Our Lord had more explicitly than on any former occasion declared the necessity of the soul's feeding upon Himself. They probably misunderstood His language, but they certainly took umbrage at His statement. Hence there were those who said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" So they walked no more with Him.

There are many points and particulars in which the Gospel is offensive to human nature, and revolting to the pride of the creature. It was not intended to please man. How can we attribute such a purpose to God? Why should He devise a Gospel to suit the whims of our poor fallen human nature? He intended to save men, but He never intended to gratify their depraved tastes. Rather does He lay the axe to the root of the tree and cut down human pride.

When God's servants are led to set forth some humbling doctrine, there are those who say, "Ah! I will not assent to that." They kick against any truth which wounds their prejudices. What say you, brethren, to the claims of the Gospel on your allegiance? Should you discover that God's Word rebukes your favorite pleasure or contradicts your cherished convictions, will you forthwith take umbrage and go away? Nay, but if your hearts are right with Christ, you will be prepared to welcome all His teaching, and yield obedience to all His precepts. Only prove it to be Christ's teaching, and the right-minded professor is ready to receive it.

That which is transparent on the face of Scripture, he will cordially accept, as he says, "To the law and to the testimony. If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." As for that which is merely inferred and argued from the general drift of Scripture, the true heart will not be hasty to reject, but patient to investigate, like the Bereans, who "were more noble than the Jews of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures to see whether these things were so."

Oh! that the Word of Christ may dwell in us richly! God forbid that any of us should ever turn aside offended because of Him, His blessed person, His holy example, or His sacred teaching! May we be ever ready to believe what He says, and prompt to do what He commands!

Remember, brethren, that the Gospel commission has three parts to which the minister has to attend. We are to go and preach the Gospel first. "*Go ye, and disciple all nations.*" The second thing is "baptizing them," and the third thing is "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." As willing disciples of Jesus, let us press forward, hearkening to His voice, following in His footsteps, and accounting His revealed will as our supreme law. Far be it from us to go back, to repine, or to desert Him, then, because we are offended at His doctrines.

Others there are who desert the Savior *for the sake of gain*. Many have been entangled in that snare. Mr. By-ends originally went on pilgrimage because he thought it would pay. There was a silver mine on the road, and he purposed to survey that and see whether silver might not be obtained, as well as the Golden City beyond. He came, if I remember rightly, of a family that got its living by the waterman's business, looking one way and pulling another.

He was apparently striving for religion, though he had his eye all the while on the world. He was for holding with the hare, and running with the hounds. So when he came to a point where he must part with one or the other, he considered which upon the whole would be most profitable, and he gave up that which appeared to involve loss and self-sacrifice, and kept to that which would, as he called it, help him in the "main chance," and assist him to get on in the present life.

Sincerely do I trust there is no one among us but what despises Mr. By-ends and all of his class. If you would make money—and there need be nothing sinful in that—do let it be made honestly, never let riches be pursued under the pretence of religion. Sell your wares and find a market for your merchandise, but do not sell Christ, nor barter a heavenly birthright for a worthless bribe. Put what

goods you please into your shop window, but do not put a sanctimonious, hypocritical expression on your face, or “wear a holy leer,” with a view of turning godliness into gain. God save us from that arrant villainy! May it never have a footing in our midst!

*“Neither man nor angel can discern
Hypocrisy, the only evil that walks
Invisible, except to God alone.”*

Does any man join a church for the sake of the respectability it implies, or for the standing it may give him, or for the credit he may get? He will soon find that it does not answer his purpose. Then away he will go. The graver probability is that he will be thrust out with shame.

Some leave Christ and go away *terrified by persecution*. Nowadays it is supposed that there is no such thing. But that is a mistake, for though martyrs are not burned at Smithfield, and the Lollards Tower is now a place for show (a memorial of times long ago), the harass, the cruelty, and the oppression are far enough from being obsolete. Godless husbands play the part of petty tyrants, and will not permit their wives the enjoyment of religion, but make their lives bitter with a galling bondage. Employers full often wreak malice on servants whose piety towards God is their sole cause of offense.

Worse still, there are working men who consider themselves intelligent, who cannot allow their fellow workman liberty to go to a place of worship without sneers, and jeers, and cruel mocking. In many cases, the mirth of the workshop is never louder than when it is turned against a believer in Christ. They count it rare fun to hunt a man who cares for the salvation of his soul. They call themselves, “Englishmen,” but certainly they are no credit to their country.

Look at the base-born, ill-bred cowards. Yonder is an atheist, he is raving about his rights because the magistrate will not believe him on his oath, he claims liberty of conscience to be a heathen, but denies his comrade’s right to be a Christian.

Look at that little party of British workmen, they belong to the Sabbath Desecration Society. They are petitioning Parliament to open museums and theaters on Sundays, and at the same time they are hounding to death a poor fellow who prefers going to chapel. They air their own self-respect by the oaths they utter, while they betray their self-abasement by the scorn they vent on those who presume to sing a hymn. They hail the drunkard as a chum, and scout the sober man as a fiend.

I wonder that there is not more honorable feeling, more good faith, and true fellowship among our skilled workmen than to allow of one man being made the butt of a whole community. God give you grace to bear such persecutions as these! If they cut us to the quick, may we learn to bear them with equanimity, and even to rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for the Savior’s sake!

Some of us have had to run the gauntlet for many years. What we have said has been constantly misrepresented, what we have endeavored to do has been misjudged, and our motives have been misunderstood. Yet here we are, as happy as anybody out of heaven. We have not been injured by any or all the calumnies that have been heaped upon us.

Our foes would have crushed us, but blessed be God, He cheered us often when we were cast down. The Lord give you, in like manner, strength of mind and courage of heart to bear the trial manfully! Then you will care no more for the laughter and the sneers of men than you do for the noise of those migratory birds high overhead, which you hear on an autumn evening as they are making their weary journey to a distant clime.

Take heart, man. Fear God, and face your accusers. True courage grows strong on opposition. Never think of deserting the army of Christ. Least of all should you play the coward because the insolence of some ill-mannered bully. Let not your faith be vanquished by such scoffing. Alas! that so many a craven spirit has gone away for the sake of carnal ease, and deserted Christ, when His dear name had become the drunkard’s jest and the derision of fools.

Anon, there are people who forsake true religion *out of sheer levity*. I know not how to account for some men's defections. If you take up the list of wrecks, you will notice some that have gone down through collisions, and others through striking upon rocks, but sometimes you meet with a vessel "foundered at sea," how it happened no one knows, the owner himself cannot understand it. It was a calm day, and there was a cloudless sky when the vessel sank.

There are some professors who, concerning faith, have made shipwreck under such apparently easy circumstances, so free from trial, so exempt from temptation, that we have not seen anything to awaken anxiety on their behalf, yet all of a sudden they have foundered. We are startled and amazed.

I remember one that fell into a gross sin, of whom a brother unwisely said, "If that man is not a Christian, I am not." His prayers had certainly been sweet. Many a time they have melted me down before the throne of grace, and yet the life of God could not have been in his soul, for he lived and died in flagrant vice, and was impenitent to the last.

Such cases I can only attribute to a sort of levity which can be charmed with a sermon or a play, they take a pew at the chapel or a box at the opera with equal nonchalance, and eagerly follow the excitement of the hour, "everything by turns, and nothing long." "Unstable as water, they shall not excel." At the spur of a moment, they profess Christianity, though they do not espouse it, and then, without troubling themselves to renounce it, they drop off into infidelity. They are soft and malleable enough to be hammered into any shape. Made of wax, they can be molded by any hand that is strong enough to grip them.

The Lord have mercy upon any of you who may happen to be of that genus! You spring up soon, and suddenly you wither. Hardly is the seed sown before the sprout appears. What a wonderful harvest you promise! But ah! no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than, because there is no earth, the good seed withers away. Pray God that you may be ploughed deep, that the iron pan of rock underneath may be broken right up, that you may have plenty of subsoil and root-hold, that the verdure you produce may be permanent.

Want of principle is deadly, but the lack is far too common. Never cease to pray that you may be rooted and grounded, established and built up in Christ, so that when the floods come and the winds blow, you may not fall with a great destruction, as that house fell which was built upon the sand.

And oh! how many leave Christ for *the sake of sensual enjoyments!* I will not enlarge upon this. Certain, however, it is that the pleasures of sin for a season fascinate their minds till they sacrifice their souls at the shrine of sordid vanity. For a merry dance, a wanton amusement, or a transient joy that would not bear reflection, they have renounced the pleasures that never pall, the immortal hopes that never fail, and turned their backs upon that blessed Savior who gives and feeds the tastes for joys unspeakable, for joys of glory full.

In our pastoral oversight of a church like this we have painful evidence that a considerable number gradually grow cold. The elders' reports of the absentees reiterate the vain excuses for non-attendance. One has so many children. The distance is too great for another. When they joined the church their family was just as large, and the distance was just the same. But the household cares become more irksome when the concern for religion begins to flag, and the fatigue of traveling increases when their zeal for the house of God falters. The elders fear they are growing cold.

No actual transgression can we detect, but there is a gradual declension over which we grieve. I dread that cold-heartedness, it steals so insensibly, yet so surely over the entire frame. I do not say that it is worse than open sin. It cannot be. Yet it is more insidious. A flagrant delinquency would startle one as a fit does a patient, but a slow process of backsliding may steal like paralysis over a person without awakening suspicion. Like the sleep which comes over men in the frozen regions, if they yield to it they will never wake again. You must be aroused, or else this supineness will surely end in death. "Grey hairs were upon him here and there, and he knew it not."

Is it so with any of you, dear friends? Are you going aside by slow degrees? He that loses his substance little by little presently becomes a bankrupt, and painful is the discovery when the end comes.

How miserable must a spiritual bankruptcy be to him who wastes by degrees his heavenly estate, if he ever had any! No words can describe it. God preserve us from such a catastrophe!

Some have turned aside, who allege that they did so *through change of circumstances*. They were with us when their means of livelihood were competent, if not affluent. From reverses in business, they have sunk in their social position. Hence they do not like to come into fellowship with us as they were wont to do. Now from my inmost soul I can say if there are any persons that wax poor, I for one, do not think one atom the less of them, or hold them in less esteem, however impoverished they may become.

Do not tell me that you have no clothes fit to come in, for any clothes that you have paid for are creditable. If you have not paid for them, I cannot make excuses for you. Be honest. Frieze or fustian need not shame you, but for fineness or fashion I should certainly blame you. I am always glad to see brethren sitting here, as I sometimes do, in their smock frocks. One good friend is rather conspicuous in that line. The wholesome whiteness of his rural garb is rather attractive. If he has paid for it, he is a far more respectable man than anyone that has run into debt for a suit of broadcloth that he cannot pay for.

And I rejoice to think that I am not expressing my own feeling merely, but that which is shared by the whole community. We all delight to see our poor brethren. If there are any of you suffering from a sensitiveness of your own, or a suspicion of our reflections, the sooner you get rid of such foolish pride, the happier you will be. You are jealous of being thought respectable? Don't you know that a man is respectable for his character, not for the money he has got in his pocket?

Others forsake Christ because they have become rich and increased in goods. They did not scorn the little conventicle when they were plain, plodding people, but since fortune has smiled on them, and they have moved their residence from a terrace to a mansion, and they have taken to keep a carriage, they feel bound to move in another circle.

To their parish church, or to some ritualistic church in their neighborhood, they go once on the Sunday. They patronize the place by their presence, they show themselves among the *elite* of that locality, they bow and bend, and face about to the east, as though they had been to the manner born. They are too respectable to go into the little Baptist chapel. They receive visitors in the afternoon, dine late, and dissipate Sabbatic hours in the frivolous presence of showing off their gentility.

Well, I think their departure is not to be lamented. When gone they are certainly no loss to anybody. We sigh for them as we would for Judas or Demas. They have fallen foul of what they thought their good fortune, but of what has proved to be their ruin. Those who have true principles, when they rise in the world see more reason why they should spend their wealth and their influence in aiding a good cause. Principle would prevail over policy to the end, if in their hearts they believed the truth as it is in Jesus. It were no dishonor to a prince to go and sit down side by side with a pauper, were they both true followers of Jesus Christ.

In old times, when our sires met in caves and dens of the earth, they met the liege and the lowly, the bond and free, or when, in even earlier ages, the Christians gathered in the catacombs, men out of Caesar's household, now a chief, then a senator, anon a prince of the blood, came and sat down in those caves, lighted up with the dim candle, to listen while some unshod but heaven-taught man declared the Gospel of Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit.

That they were illiterate, I am quite sure, for on looking over the monuments that are found in the catacombs it is rare to find one inscription that is thoroughly well spelt. Though it is evident enough that the early Christians were an illiterate company of men, yet those that were great and noble did not disdain to join with them, nor will they if the light of heaven shines and the love of God burns in their hearts.

Unsound doctrine occasions many to apostatize. There is always plenty of that about. Deceivers will beguile the weak, and some have been led aside by modern doubt, and modest infidelity has its partisans. They begin cautiously by reading works with a view to answer scientific or intellectual skepticism. They read a little more, and dive a little deeper into the turbid stream, because they feel well able to stand against the insidious influence. They go on, till at last they are staggered. They do not

repair to those who could help their scruples, but they continue to flounder on till at last they have lost their footing, and he that said he was a believer has ended in stark atheism, doubting even the existence of a God.

Oh! that those who are well-taught would be content with their teaching! Why meddle with heresies? What can they do but pollute your minds? Were I to get black, I imagine that I could wash away all the soils, but I should be sorry to black myself for the sake of washing. Why should you be so unwise as to go through pools of foul teaching merely because you think it easy to cleanse yourself of its pollution? Such trifling is dangerous. When you begin to read a book, and find it pernicious, put it aside. Someone may upbraid you for not reading it all through. But why should you?

If I have a joint of meat on my table of which the smell and the taste at once convince me that it is putrid and unwholesome, should I show my discretion by *fairly* eating it all before giving my judgment that it is not fit for food? One mouthful is quite enough, and one sentence of some books ought to be quite enough for a sensible man to reject the whole mass. Let those who can relish such meat have it, but I have a taste for better food. Keep to the study of the Word of God. If it be your duty to expose these evils, encounter them bravely, with prayer to God to help you. But if not, as a humble believer in Jesus, what business have you to taste and test such noxious fare, when it is exposed in the market?

I will not continue in this strain. It is painful to me, if not to you. I will condense into a few sentences my answer to the second inquiry—

II. WHAT BECOMES OF THEM?

Those who go aside—what becomes of them? Well, if they are God's children, I will tell you what becomes of them, for I have seen it scores of times. Though they go aside, *they are not happy*. They cannot rest, for they are miserable even when they try to be cheerful. After a while they begin to remember their first husband, for then it was better with them than now. They return, but there are scores and scores, to say nothing of the shame which they have to carry with them to their grave, who are never the men they were before. They have to take a second place among their comrades.

And even should sovereign grace so wonderfully bless their painful experience that they are fully restored, they can never mention the past without bitter regret. Their by-path serving for others' beacon, they will say to young people, "Never do as I have done, no good, all mischief, comes of it."

In the vast majority of cases, however, they are not the Lord's people. So this is what comes of it. Those who prove traitors to a profession they once made are the hardest people in the world to impress. Doubtless some of you, when you lived in the country, used always to be punctual at your usual places of worship, but since you have come to London, where your absence from any sanctuary is unnoticed, you rarely enter the courts of the Lord's house, nor would you have been here tonight but for some special inducement—some country cousin or some particular friend having brought you.

Though unknown to me, God scans your path. Well, here you are, and yet it may be to little profit. You have had counsels and cautions in such profusion that it is like pouring oil down a slab of marble to admonish you. May God in His omnipotent mercy break your obdurate heart, or there will be no hope for you!

Such people *frequently lose all conscience*. They can go a deal further in talking against religion than anybody else. They will sometimes venture to say they know so much about it that they could expose it. Their boast and their threat are alike unmeaning, but as boys whistle while they walk through the churchyard to keep their courage up, so do their vain talk and their senseless stories betray their stifled fear. They speak contemptuously of God while they justify themselves in a course of which their own conscience upbraids them. They go back—alas! some of them to prove themselves the most abandoned sinners in the world. The raw material out of which the devil constructs the deadliest fabric is that which was presumed to be the most saintly substance.

There could not have been a Judas to betray Christ had he not first been distinguished as a disciple, who ventured to kiss his Master. You must pick him from among the apostles to make an apostate. As the ringleaders of riotous transgression, when converted, often make the best revivalist preachers, so

those that seem to be the most loyal subjects of Christ, when they become renegades, prove to be the bitterest foes and the blackest sinners. Painful reminiscences rush over one's mind.

Standing here now in the midst of a great church, I call to mind things that have harrowed up my soul. God grant I may not see the likes of them again! They go away!—Ah! me, full many of them go away to die in blank despair. Did you ever read the life of Francis Spira? If you want to sleep tonight, do not take up that memoir. Did you ever read the life of John Child, a Baptist minister of about two hundred years ago? Mr. Keach gives it in one of his works. He was a man who knew the truth, and to a great extent had felt its power, but he went aside from it, and before he came to die his expressions were too terrible to listen to. The remorse and despair of his spirit chased every one away. At last he laid violent hands upon himself.

For a man, after having once looked Christ in the face and kissed Him, to betray Him and crucify Him afresh, to hang himself is not to be wondered at. To eat at the Lord's table, to drink of that cup of blessing, to mingle with the saints, join in their prayers and their hymns, professing to be a disciple of Christ, and then to go back and walk no more with Him, is to venture on a course of no ordinary danger. The swing of the pendulum, if it has been lifted high and let go, is so much the greater on the other side. I marvel not that any man should be precipitated into flagrant sin who willfully renounces his vows of consecration to Jesus.

And oh! when his eyes are opened and his conscience is aroused, how he wishes that he had never been born! Could he terminate his existence and annihilate his anguish-smitten soul, then the direst act of desperation by which he should end a life he could not mend, might be accounted wise. But no, that is impossible. The relief he seeks he cannot find when he takes the dreadful leap from suffering here to an aggravated form of misery hereafter, ten thousand times worse to endure. He seals his doom and makes his own damnation sure as he raises against himself a murdering hand.

Do I address anyone here bereft of every ray of hope and shivering on the brink of cold despair? Hold now! I would cry in your ears, do yourself no harm. You can do yourself no good. Think not to cure your woes by committing another crime—

*“Twere madness thus to shun the living light,
And plunge your guilty soul in endless night.”*

While there is life there is hope. Jesus Christ can forgive you. Return to Him. He can wash you in His blood. He can make you clean, though your sin be as scarlet. But oh! do not trifle, make no delay. Tarry no longer in your present condition, else, may be, you will fill up the measure of your iniquities or ever you are aware, and you may taste, even in this world, some beginning of the wrath to come. If not rescued as a trophy of grace right speedily, you may become a monument of God's wrath, a beacon to deter others from daring to turn aside.

I speak solemnly, but I cannot help it. So intensely do I feel the terror of that woe, and so confident am I that some of you are making light of it, that I would go down on my knees and entreat you with tears to mind what you are at. You have got on the inclined plane, and you are going down, down, down. Your feet are even now on the slippery places from which multitudes have been cast down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! The Lord make haste to deliver you! May He stretch out His hand and receive you! I can only call out to you. You seem to have got where I cannot reach you. Do not venture a footstep further in that dangerous road. Look to Jesus, look to Jesus, He can redeem your life from the pit by His sovereign grace, and He alone. Then as a wandering sheep, brought back to the fold, you shall adore His name. Our third point is this—

III. WHY SHOULD NOT WE GO AWAY AS THEY HAVE GONE?

Were we left to ourselves, I cannot tell you any reason why we should not go, as they have gone. Nor, indeed, could I tell you why the best man here would not be the worst before tomorrow morning, if the grace of God left him. John Bradford, you know, as he saw the poor criminals taken away to Tyburn

to be executed, used to say, “There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God.” Verily each one of us might say the same. To abide with Christ, however, is our only security, and we trust we shall never depart from Him.

But how can we make sure of this? The great thing is to have a real foundation in Christ to begin with—genuine faith, vital godliness. The foundation is the first matter to be attended to in building a house. With a bad foundation there cannot be a substantial house. You require a firm bottom, a sound groundwork, before you proceed to the superstructure. Do pray God that if your religion is a sham, you may find it out now. Unless your hearts are deeply ploughed with genuine repentance, and unless you are thoroughly rooted and grounded in the faith, you may have some cause to suspect the reality of your conversion, and the verity of the Holy Spirit’s operation in you. May the Lord work in you a good beginning, and then you may rely upon it He will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ.

Then remember, dear brethren and sisters, if you would be preserved from falling, you must be schooled in humility and keep very low before the Lord. When you are half an inch above the ground, you are that half-inch too high. Your place is to be nothing. Trust Christ, but do not trust yourself. Rely on the Spirit of God, but do not rely on anything that is in yourself, no, not on a grace you have received, or on a gift you possess. Those do not slide that walk humbly with God. They are always safe whose entire dependence is upon God. Be jealous of your obedience, be circumspect, be careful, take heed to yourselves, your walk and conversation cannot be too cautious.

Many are lost through being too remiss, but none through being too scrupulous. The statutes of the Lord are so right that you cannot neglect them without diverging from the path of rectitude. Watch and pray. God help you to watch, or else you will get drowsy. Never neglect prayer. That is at the root of every defection. Retrogression commonly begins at the closet. To restrain prayer is to deaden the very pulse of life. “Watch unto prayer.”

And I beseech you, dear friends, do shun that company which has led other people astray. Parley not with those whose jokes are profane. Keep right away from them. It is not for you to be seen standing, much less to be found sitting down with men of loose manners and lewd converse. They can do you no good, but the evil they can bring upon you it would not be easy to estimate.

You may have heard the story—but it is so good it will bear repeating—of the lady who advertised for a coachman, and was waited upon by three candidates for the situation. She put to the first one this question, “I want a really good coachman to drive my pair of horses, and therefore, I ask you how near you can drive to danger and yet be safe?” “Well,” he said, “I could drive very near indeed, I could go within a foot of a precipice without fear of any accident so long as I had the reins.” She dismissed him with the remark that he would not do.

To the next one who came, she put the same question. “How near could you drive to danger?” Being determined to get the place, he said, “I could drive within a hair’s breadth, and yet skillfully avoid any mishap.” “You will not do,” said she. When the third one came in, his mind was cast in another mold, so when the question was put to him, “How near could you drive to danger?” he said, “Madam, I never tried. It has always been a rule with me to drive as far off from danger as I possibly can.” The lady engaged him at once.

In like manner, I believe that the man who is careful to run no risks, and to refrain from all equivocal conduct, having the fear of God in his heart, is most to be relied upon. If you are really built upon the Rock of Ages, you may meet the question without dismay, “Will you also go away?” and you can reply without presumption, “No, Lord, I cannot, and I will not go, for to whom should I go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” And may the very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calls you, who also will do it. Amen.

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