

THE TOUCHSTONE OF GODLY SINCERITY

NO. 985

A SERMON
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“Will he always call upon God?”
Job 27:10

WHEN Job resumes his address in this chapter, he appeals to God in a very solemn matter as to the truth of all that he had spoken. No less vehemently does he assert his innocence of any signal crime, or his consciousness of any secret guile, which could account for his being visited with extraordinary suffering. I do not know that his language necessarily implies any culpable self-righteousness.

It appears to me rather that he had good cause to defend himself against the bitter insinuations of his unfriendly friends. Possibly his tone was rash, but his meaning was right. He might well feel the justice of vindicating his character before men, but it was a pity if in so doing he seemed to utter a protest of complete purity in the sight of God.

You may remember how Paul under equal, if not exactly similar, provocation, tempered his speech and guarded against the danger of misconstruction. Thus he wrote to the Corinthians, “With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not my own self. For I know nothing by myself [or of myself, as though he said, ‘My conscience does not accuse me of wrong’]; *yet am I not hereby justified.*”

But the two holy men are very like in one respect, for just as Paul, in the struggles of the spirit against the flesh, faced the peril and mounted a guard against it, “Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself shall be a castaway,” so Job lays bare before his own eyes and points to the view of those who heard him, the features of a hypocrite, lest by any means he should turn out to be such.

In terrible language he describes and denounces the hypocrite’s flattering hope and withering doom. The suspicion that he himself could harbor a vain presence in his own breast or would pretend to be what he was not, was utterly abhorrent to Job’s honest heart. He placed himself at the bar, he laid down the law with rigor, he weighed his case with exactness, and so he forestalled his adversaries’ verdict, by judging himself that he might not be judged.

Who then is this “wicked man,” thus portrayed before us? And what are the first symptoms of his depravity? We ask not the question idly, but in order that we take heed against the uprising of such an evil in ourselves.

*“Beneath the saintly veil the votary of sin
 May lurk unseen; and to that eye alone
 Which penetrates the heart, may stand revealed.”*

The hypocrite is very often an exceedingly neat imitation of the Christian. To the common observer he is so good a counterfeit that he entirely escapes suspicion. Like base coins which are cunningly made, you can scarcely detect them by their ring. It is only by more searching tests that you are able to discover that they are not pure gold, the current coin of the realm.

It would be difficult to say how nearly any man might resemble a Christian, and yet not be “in Christ a new creature,” or how closely he might imitate all the virtues and yet at the same time possess none of the fruits of the Spirit as before the judgment of a heart-searching God.

In almost all deceptions, there is a weak point somewhere. Never is a lying story told but, if you be keen enough, you may from internal evidence somewhere or other detect the flaw. Though Satan himself has been engaged in the manufacture of impostures for thousands of years, yet whether through the lack of skill on his part or through the folly of his agents, he always leaves a weak point. His flattering statements are a little too strongly scented and smell of a lie, and his mimic Christians are so overdone in one place, and slovenly in another, that their falsehood betrays itself.

Now, in discriminating between saints and hypocrites, one great test-point is prayer. "Behold, he prayeth," was to the somewhat skeptical mind of Ananias demonstration enough that Paul was really converted. If he prays, it may be safely inferred that the breath of prayer arises from the life of faith. The process of spiritual quickening has at least begun.

Hence the hypocrite feigns to possess that vital action. If the Christian prays, he will betake himself to the like exercise. If the Christian calls upon God, the deceiver takes care that he will likewise make mention of the name of the Lord. And yet, between the prayer of the truly converted man and the prayer of the hypocrite there is a difference as radical as between life and death, although it is not apparent to everybody.

No one, it may be, at first can be aware of it except the man himself, and sometimes even he scarcely perceives it. Many are deceived by the fine expressions, by the apparent warmth, and by the excellent natural disposition of the hypocrite, and they think when they hear him call upon God that his supplications are sufficient evidence that he is truly a quickened child of God.

Prayer is always the tell-tale of spiritual life. No right prayer, then is there no grace within. Slackened prayer, then is there a decrease of grace. Prayer stronger, then the whole man also is stronger. Prayer is as good a test of spiritual life and health as the pulse is of the condition of the human frame. Hence I say the hypocrite imitates the action of prayer while he does not really possess the spirit of prayer.

Our text goes deeper than the surface and inquires into vital matters. Prayer is a test, but here is a test for the test—a trial even for prayer itself. "Will he *always* call upon God?" There is the point. He does call upon God now and he appears to be intensely devout. He says he was converted in the late revival. He is very fervid in expression and very forward in manner at present. But will it wear?

Will it wear? Will it last? His prayerfulness has sprung up like Jonah's gourd in a night. Will it perish in a night? It is beautiful to look upon, like the early dew that glistens in the sunlight as though the morning had sown the earth with orient pearl, will it pass away like that dew? or will it always abide? "Will he always call upon God?" There is the point.

O that each one of us may now search ourselves and see whether we have those attributes connected with our prayer which will prove us not to be hypocrites, or whether, on the contrary, we have those sad signs of base dissembling and reckless falsehood which will before long discover us to be dupes of Satan, impostors before heaven.

"Will he always call upon God?" This question, simple as it is, I think involves several pertinent inquiries. The first point which it raises is that of CONSISTENCY. Is the prayer occasional or is it constant? Is the exercise of devotion permanent and regular, or is it spasmodic and inconstant? Will this man call upon God *in all seasons of prayer*?

There are certain times when it is most fit to pray, and a genuine Christian will and must pray at such periods. Will this hypocrite pray at all such times or will he only select some of the seasons for prayer? Will he only be found praying at certain times and in selected places. Will he always, in all fit times, be found drawing near to God?

For instance, he prayed standing at the corner of the streets where he was seen of men. He prayed in the synagogue, where everybody could mark his fluency and his fervor, but will he pray at home? Will he enter into his closet and shut the door? Will he there speak to the Father who hears in secret? Will he there pour forth petitions as the natural outflow of his soul?

Will he walk the field at eventide, in lonely meditation, like Isaac, and pray there? Will he go to the housetop with Peter and pray there? Will he seek his chamber as Daniel did or the solitude of the garden as did our Lord? Or is he one who only prays in public, who has the gift of prayer rather than the spirit of prayer, who is fluent in utterance rather than fervent in feeling?

Oh, but this, this is one of the surest of tests by which we may discern between the precious and the vile. Public prayer is no evidence of piety. It is practiced by an abundance of hypocrites. But private prayer is a thing for which the hypocrite has no heart—and if he gives himself to it for a little time, he soon finds it too hot and heavy a business for his soulless soul to persevere in and he lets it drop. He will sooner perish than continue in private prayer.

O for heart searching about this! Do I draw near to God alone? Do I pray when no eye sees, when no ear hears? Do I make a conscience of private prayer? Is it a delight to pray? For I may gather that if I never enjoy private prayer, I am one of those hypocrites who will not always call upon God.

The true Christian will pray in business. He will pray in labor. He will pray in his ordinary calling—like sparks out of the chimney, short prayers fly up all day long from truly devout souls. Not thus is it with the mere pretender. The hypocrite prays at prayer meetings, and his voice is heard in the assembly, sometimes at tedious length, but will he pray with exclamatory prayer?

Will he speak with God at the counter? Will he draw near to God in the field? Will he plead with his Lord in the busy street with noiseless pleadings? When he finds that a difficulty has occurred in his daily life, will he, without saying a word, breathe his heart into the ear of God?

Ah, no! hypocrites know nothing of what it is to be always praying, to abide in the spirit of prayer. This is a choice part of Christian experience with which they do not meddle. But be sure of this—where there is genuine religion within, it will be more or less habitual to the soul to pray. Some of us can say that to be asking blessings from God in brief, wordless prayers, comes as natural to us as to eat and drink and breathe.

We never encounter a difficulty now, but we resolve it by appealing to the wisdom of God—never meet with any opposition, but what we overcome it by leaning upon the power of God. To wait upon the Lord and speak with Him has become a habit with us—not because it is a duty—we have left legal bondage far behind—but because we cannot help it, our soul is inwardly constrained thereto. The nature within as naturally cries to God as a child cries after its mother.

The hypocrite prays in his fashion because it is a task allotted to him. The Christian because it is a part of his very life. Herein is an ever-standing mark of distinction by which a man may discern himself. If your prayer is only for certain hours, and certain places, and certain times, beware lest it turn out to be an abomination before the Lord. The fungus forced by artificial heat is a far different thing from the rosy fruit of a healthy tree, and the unreal devotions of the unspiritual differ widely from the deep inward groans of renewed hearts.

If you pray by the almanac, observing days and weeks, you may well fear that your religion never came from the great Father of Lights, with whom are no changing moons. If you can pray by the clock, your religion is more mechanical than vital. The Christian does not fast because it is Lent. If his Lord reveals His face, he cannot fast merely because a church commands him.

Neither can he therefore feast because it happens to be a festival in the calendar. The Spirit of God might make his soul to be feasting on Ash Wednesday, or his soul might be humbled within him at Easter. He cannot be regulated by the dominical letter, and the new moons, and days of the month.

He is a spiritual character and he leaves those who have no spiritual life to yield a specious conformity to such ecclesiastical regulations. His new-born nature spurns such childish bonds. The living soul prays evermore with groanings that cannot be uttered, and believingly rejoices evermore with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

A second point in debate is that of CONTINUANCE. “Will he always call upon God?” There are trying periods and sifting seasons. Those who hold on through these are the true, but those who suspend prayer at these test intervals are the false.

Now times of joy and sorrow are equally critical seasons. Let us look at them in turn. Will the hypocrite call upon God in times of *pleasure*? No. If he indulges himself in what he calls pleasure, he dares not pray at night when he comes home. He goes to places where he would think it a degradation of prayer to think of praying. The genuine Christian prays always, because if there is any spot where he dares not pray, just there he dares not be found, or if there be any engagement about which he could not pray, it is an engagement that shall never ensnare him.

Someone once proposed to write a collect to be said by a pious young lady when attending a theater and another to be repeated by a Christian gentleman when shuffling a pack of cards. There might be another form of prayer to be offered by a pious burglar when he is breaking open a door or by a religious assassin, when he is about to commit murder.

There are things about which you cannot pray. They have nothing to do with prayer. Many tolerated amusements lead to outrages upon the morals of earth and are an insult to the holiness of heaven. Who could think of praying about them? Herein is the hypocrite discerned. He does that which he could not ask a blessing upon. Poor as is the conscience he owns, he knows it is ridiculous to offer prayer concerning certain actions which, notwithstanding, he has the hardihood to perform. The Christian avoids things which he could not pray about and so he feels it a pleasure to pray always.

Equally trying is the opposite condition of depression and sorrow. There, too, we try the question, "Will he always call upon God?" No. The hypocrite will not pray when *in a desponding state*. He breathed awhile the atmosphere of enthusiasm. His passions were stirred by the preacher and fermented by the contagious zeal of the solemn assembly.

But now a damp cold mist obscures his view, chills his feelings, settles in his heart. Others are growing cold and he is among the first to freeze. He is down-hearted and discouraged. Forthwith, like King Saul, he succumbs to the evil spirit. Were he a Christian indeed, he would follow in the wake of David, and say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

But he has no heart to hope on in ill weather. He built up his hopes tastefully and he admired the structure which was of his own piling. But the rain descended, the floods came, the winds blew, and down it all went. And therefore, being a hypocrite, he said within himself, "Now I have no enjoyment in religion. It has lost its novelty. I have worn out its delights. I have now no comfort from it. I will give it up." Thus in the trying hour the deceiver is laid bare.

Look at the real Christian, when a storm bursts over him which shakes his confidence and spoils his joy, what does he do? He prays more than he ever did. When his mountain stood firm, and he said, "I shall not be moved," he perhaps grew too slack in prayer.

But now, when all God's waves and billows are going over him, and he hardly knows whether he is a child of God or not, and questions whether he has any part or lot in the matter, he proves that all is right within, by crying to God in the bitterness of his soul, "O God, have mercy upon me, and deliver me from going down into the pit." A Christian's despair makes him pray. It is a despair of self. A worldling's despair makes him rave against God and give up prayer.

Mark then, how in the opposite seasons of joy and sorrow, prayer is put into the crucible and tested. All our times of pleasure ought to be times of prayer. Job accounted his family festivities opportune times for calling his children together for special devotion. No less should our periods of despondency become incentives to prayer.

Every funeral knell should ring us to our knees. The hypocrite cannot keep the statutes and ordinances, but the true Christian follows them out. The Christian is alike at home in seeking the Lord, calling upon His name, and asking counsel and guidance at His mercy seat, in any variety of experience and every diversity of circumstances.

"Will he always call upon God?" Here is the question of CONSTANCY. Will he pray constantly? It seems to most men a very difficult thing to be praying always, to continue in prayer, to pray without

ceasing. Yes, and herein again is there a great distinction between the living child of God and the mere pretender.

The living child of God soon finds that it is not so much his duty to pray as his privilege, his joy, a necessity of his being. What moment is there when a Christian is safe without prayer? Where is there a place wherein he would find himself secure if he ceased to pray? Just think of it. Every moment of my life, I am dependent upon the will of God as to whether I shall draw another breath or not. Nothing stands between me and death but the will of God. An angel's arm could not save me from the grave, if now the Lord willed me to depart.

Solemn, then, is the Christian's position—ever standing by an open tomb. Should not dying men pray? We are always dying. As life is but a long dying, should it not be also a long praying? Should we not be incessantly acknowledging to God in prayer and praise the continuance of our being, which is due to His grace?

Brethren, every moment that we live we are receiving favors and benefits from God. There is never a minute in which we are not recipients of His bounty. We are wont to thank God for His mercies as if we thought they came at certain set times—so in truth they do, they are new every morning, great is His faithfulness.

And they soothe us night by night, for His compassion fails not, but there are mercies streaming on in one incessant flow. We never cease to need. He never ceases to supply. We want constant protection and He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. Lest any hurt us, He keeps us night and day.

The river of God rolls on with undiminished volume and unimpeded velocity. How greatly does He enrich us thereby! Should we not be ever careful to secure His gifts, to reap the harvest He provides, and as His people to take these good things from His gracious hands? But oh! let us take heed to mingle prayer with all our thanksgiving, lest He should curse the benefit over which we have asked no blessing, blight the crops of which we have dedicated to Him no first fruits, or smite us with the rod of His anger while the food is yet in our mouth.

Our cravings know no abatement, our dependence on God knows no limit, therefore our prayers should know no intermission. Speak of beggars. we are always beggars. Is it not better for us then to be regular pensioners than mere casuals? Whatever God has given us, we are as needy still. We are always, if taken apart from Him, naked, and poor, and miserable, altogether dependent upon Him, as well for the soul as for the body—for good thoughts, for spiritual aspirations, for holy graces, ay, and for the breath of our nostrils, and the bread of our mouths, always needing temporals, always needing spirituals. If we are always needing, we should be always pleading.

Besides that, dear friends, we are always in danger. We are in an enemy's country. Behind every bush there is a foe. We cannot reckon ourselves to be secure in any place. The world, the flesh, and the devil constantly assail us. Arrows are shot from beneath us, and from around us, while the poison of our own corruption rankles within us.

At any moment temptation may get the mastery over us, or we ourselves may go astray and be our own tempters. Storms may drive us, whirlpools suck us down, quicksand engulfs us, and if none of these accomplish our shipwreck, we may flounder of ourselves or perish of spiritual dry-rot. We need, then, each hour to watch and each separate moment to pray, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

Are you wealthy? Pray God that your silver and your gold bring no spiritual plague with them! Do not let your money stick to your hand or your heart, for in proportion as it glues itself to you, it poisons you. Pray God to sanctify your abundance so that you may know how to abound—a difficult piece of knowledge to attain.

Are you poor? Then ask to be kept from envy, from discontent, and all the evils that haunt the narrow lanes of poverty. Pray that as you are each in danger, one way or another, you may all be kept hour by hour by the constant grace of God. If we knew what poor, weak, helpless creatures we are, we should not want to be told always to pray. We should wonder how we could think of living without

prayer. How can I, whose legs are so feeble, try to walk without leaning on my Father's hand? How can I, who am so sickly, wish to be a day without the Good Physician's care?

The hypocrite does not see this. He does not discern these perpetual needs and perpetual gifts, these perpetual dangers and perpetual preservations—not he. He thinks he has prayed enough when he has had his few minutes in the morning and his few minutes at night. He trots through his form of morning devotion just as he takes his morning wash, and has he not settled the business for the day?

If at evening he says his prayers with the same regularity with which he puts on his slippers, is it not all he needs? He almost thinks that little turn at his devotions to be weariness. As to his heart going up in prayer to God, he does not understand it. If he be spoken to concerning it, it sounds like an idle tale or mere cant.

Dear brethren, “We ought always to pray, and not to faint,” because we are always sinning. If I were not evermore sinning, if I could pause in that constant aberration of mind from the pure, the unselfish, the holy, perhaps I might suspend confession and relax supplication awhile. But if unholiness stains even my holy things—if in my best endeavors there is something of error, something of sin—ought I not to be continually crying to God for pardon and invoking His grace?

And are we not constantly liable to new temptations? May we not fall into grosser sins than we have hitherto committed, unless we are preserved by a power beyond our own? O pray perpetually, for you know not what temptations may assail you. Pray that you enter not into temptation.

If perchance in some favored moment we could imagine ourselves to have exhausted all the list of our needs, were we enjoying complete pardon and full assurance, did we stand upon the mountain's brow, bathing our foreheads in the sunlight of God's favor, if we had no fear, no care, no trouble of our own to harass us, yet we might not therefore cease to pray. The interests of others, our kindred, our neighbors, our fellow creatures might—ah! must—then start up before us and claim that we should bear upon our breasts their memorial.

Think of the sinners around you hardening in transgression, some of them dying, seared with guilt or frenzied with despair. O brethren, how could you cease to intercede for others, were it possible, which it is not, that you should have no further need to supplicate for yourselves? The grand old cause which we have espoused and the Christ who has espoused our cause—both these demand our prayers.

By the truth whose banner waves above us, by the King who has ennobled us, love to whose person fires us this day with ardor for His cross, and zeal for His Gospel, we are constrained to unwavering devotion. So spoke the Gospel of old and so does the Spirit of God prompt us now. “Prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.” O that in our case the prediction might be verified, the promise fulfilled!

Not so the hypocrite. he will not have it on this fashion. Enough for him to have prayers on the Sunday. Enough to get through family prayers at any rate, and if that does not please you, the morning prayer and the evening prayer shall be said by rote at the bedside, will not these suffice? Praying all day long, why he considers that it would be almost as bad as heaven, where they are singing without ceasing. So he turns on his heels and says he will have none of it. Nor shall he, for where God is, he shall not come, but the Lord will tell him, “I never knew you: depart from me, thou worker of iniquity.”

“Will he always call upon God?” The question may be an inquiry as to IMPORTUNITY. Will the hypocrite pray importunately? He will do no such thing. I have heard farmers talk about the way to know a good horse. It will serve me to illustrate the way to tell a good Christian.

Some horses, when they get into the traces, pull, and when they feel the load move, they work with all their might. But if they tug and the load does not stir, they are not for drawing any longer. There is a breed of really good horses in Suffolk which will tug at a dead weight, and if they were harnessed to a post, they would pull till they dropped, though nothing moved.

It is so with a lively Christian. If he is seeking a great favor from God, he prays, whether he gets it or not, right on. He cannot take a denial. If he knows his petition to be according to God's will and

promise, he pleads the blood of Jesus about it. And if he does not get an answer at once, he says, “My soul, wait!”—*wait!* A grand word—“Wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.”

As for the hypocrite, if he gets into a church, and there is a prayer meeting, and he feels, “Well, there is a fire kindling and an excitement getting up”—ah! how that man can pray. The wagon is moving behind him and he is very willing to pull.

But the sincere believer says, “I do not perceive any revival yet. I do not hear of many conversions. Never mind, we have prayed that God will glorify His dear Son, we will keep on praying. If the blessing does not come in one week, we will try three. If it does not come in three weeks, we will try three months. If it does not come in three months, we shall still keep on for three years.

“And if it does not come in three years, we will plead on for thirty years, and if it does not come then, we will say, ‘Let Thy *work* appear unto Thy servants, and Thy *glory* unto their children.’ We will plead on until we die and mingle with those who beheld the promise afar off, were persuaded of it, prayed for it, and died believing it would be fulfilled.”

Such prayer would not be wasted breath. It is treasure put out to interest, seed sown for a future harvest. Rather it is the aspiration of saints kindled by the inspiration of God. The genuine believer knows how to tug.

Jacob, when he came to Jabbok, found that the angel was not easily to be conquered. He laid hold of Him, but the angel did not yield the blessing. Something more must be done. Had Jacob been a hypocrite, he would have let the angel loose at once, but being one of the Lord’s own, he said, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”

When the angel touched him in the hollow of his thigh and made the sinew shrink, had Jacob been a hypocrite he would have thought, “I have had enough of this already. I may be made to shrink all over. I cannot tell what may happen next. I will have no more of this midnight encounter with an unknown visitor. I will get me back to my tent.”

But no, he meant to prevail, and though he felt the pain, yet he said,

***“With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.”***

He did so and became a prince from that night.

Will you take a denial from God, you shall have it. But if you will not be denied, neither shall you. O importunate Christian, you are he whom God loves! Alas for those who only give, as it were, runaway knocks at the door of heaven, like boys in the street who knock and run away—they shall never find the blessing. Oh, to continue in prayer! It is the very test of sincerity. Hence of the hypocrite it is said, “Will he always call upon God?”

A hypocrite leaves off praying in either case. He leaves off if he does not get what he asks for, as I have shown you, and he leaves off if he does get what he asks for. Has he asked to be recovered from sickness when ill? If he gets well, what cares he for praying again? Did he pray that he might not die? Oh, what a long face he drew and what drawling professions of repentance he groaned out!

But when his health is regained, and his nerves braced, his spirits are cheered, and his manly vigor has come back to him, where are his prayers? Where are the vows his soul in anguish made? He has forgotten them all. That he is a hypocrite is palpable, for he leaves off praying if he does not get heard and if he does. There is no keeping this man up to God’s statute or his own promise. He has not the heart for true devotion and soon fails in the attempt to exercise it.

“Will he always call upon God?” Here is the trial of PERSEVERANCE. Will he always continue to pray in the future? Will he pray, in years to come, as he now professes to do? I call to see him, and he is very sick. The doctor gives a very poor account of him. His wife is weeping. All over the house there is great anxiety.

I sit down by his bedside. I talk to him, and he says, “Oh, yes, yes, yes.” He agrees with all I say and he tells me he believes in Jesus. And when he can sit up, he cries, “God be merciful to me.” His dear friends are godly people. They feel so pleased. They look forward to his recovery and reckon upon seeing him a new creature, a disciple of Christ.

Besides, he has told them that when he gets up, how earnest he will be in a life of faith and obedience to the Lord. He will not be a mere professor, he means to throw his whole soul into the Master’s service.

Now mark him. He recovers, and when he breaks forth from that sick chamber, and can dispense with the ministry of those gentle patient women who nursed him and prayed for him, what does the hypocrite do? Oh, he says he was a fool to think and speak as he did. He admits he was frightened, but he disclaims every pious expression as an infirmity of his distracted brain, the delirium of his malady, not the utterance of his reason. And he recants all his confessions like the atheist in Addison’s “Spectator.”

Addison tells us that certain sailors heard that an atheist was on board their vessel. They did not know what an atheist was, but they thought it must be some odd fish. And when told it was a man who did not believe in God, they said, “Captain, it would be an uncommonly good thing to pitch him overboard.”

Presently a storm comes on, and the atheist is dreadfully sick and very fearful. There, on the deck, he is seen crying to God for mercy and whining like a child that he is afraid he will be lost and sink to hell. This is the usual courage of atheism!

But when the coward reached the shore, he begged the gentlemen who heard him pray to think nothing of it, for indeed he did not know what he was saying. He had, no doubt, uttered a great deal of nonsense. There are plenty of that sort—who pray in danger, but brag when they get clear of the tempest.

Hereby the hypocrite is discovered. Once take away from him the trouble and you do away with the motive for which he put on the cloak of religion. He is like a boy’s top, which will spin as long as you whip it. The man will pray while he smarts, but not one whit longer. The hypocrite will pray today in a society congenial for prayer, but he will discard prayer tomorrow when he gets laughed at for it in his business.

Some old friend of his drops in, who has heard that he has been converted and he begins to ridicule him. He asks him whether he has really turned a Methodist? The next thing he expects to hear is that he is dipped. He makes some coarse remarks rather to the chagrin of our courageous friend, till he, who set out so boldly to heaven with his prayers, feels quite small in the presence of the skeptic.

If he were right in heart, he would not only have a proper answer to give to the mocker, but in all probability he would carry the war into the enemy’s country, and make his antagonist feel the folly of his sins, and the insanity of his conduct in living without a God and without a Savior. The meet object of ridicule and contempt is the godless, the Christless man. The Christian need never be ashamed or lower his colors. The hypocrite may well blush and hide his head, for if there is any creature that is contemptible, it is a man who has not his heart where he professes it to be.

Neither will such a one always call upon God if he gets into company where he is much flattered. He feels then that he has degraded himself somewhat by associating with such low, mean people as those who make up the church of God. And if he prospers in business, then he considers that the people he once worshipped with are rather inferior to himself. He must go to the world’s church. He must find a fashionable place where he can hear a gospel that is not for the poor and needy, but for those who have the key of aristocratic drawing-rooms, and the select assemblies.

His principles—well, he is not very particular—he swallows them. Probably his nonconformity was a mistake. The verities which his fathers suffered martyrdom to defend, for which they were deprived of their possessions, driven as exiles from their country, or cast into prison, he flings away as though they were of no value whatever.

Many have fallen from us through the temptations of prosperity, who stood firmly enough under persecution and adversity. It is another form of the same test, “Will he always call upon God?”

Besides, if none of these things should occur, the man who is not savingly converted and a genuine Christian generally gives up his religion after a time because the novelty of it dies off. He is like the stony ground that received the seed, and because there was no depth of earth, the sun could play upon it with great force, and up it sprang in great haste, but because there was no depth of earth, therefore it soon was scorched.

So this man is easily impressible, feels quickly, and acts promptly under the influence of a highly emotional nature. Says he, “Yes, I will go to heaven,” as he inwardly responds to the appeal of some earnest minister. He thinks he is converted, but we had better not be quite so sure as he is.

“Wait a bit, wait a bit.” He cools as fast as he was heated. Like thorns under a pot that crackle and blaze, and die out, leaving but a handful of ashes, so is it with all his godliness. Ere long he gets tired of religion, he cannot away with it—what weariness it is. If he perseveres awhile, it is no more pleasure to him than a pack is to a pack horse. He keeps on as a matter of formality. He has got into it and he does not see how to break away, but he likes it no better than an owl loves daylight. He holds on to his forms of prayer with no heart for prayer—and what a wretched thing that is!

I have known people who felt bound to keep up their respectability when they had little or no income. Their debts were always increasing, their respectability was always tottering, and the strain upon their dignity was exhausting their utmost resources. Such persons I have considered to be the poorest of the poor. An unhappy life they lead, they never feel at ease.

But what an awful thing it is to have to keep up a spiritual respectability with no spiritual income, to overflow with gracious talk when there is no well of living water springing up within the soul. To be under the obligation to pay court to the sanctuary while the heart is wandering on the mountain. To be bound to speak gracious words and yet possess no gracious thoughts to prompt their utterance.

O man, you are one of the devil’s double martyrs because you have to suffer for him here in the distaste and nausea of your hypocritical profession, and then you will be made to suffer hereafter also for having dared to insult God and ruin your soul by being insincere in your profession of faith in Jesus Christ!

I may be coming close to home to some persons before me. I am certainly pressing my own conscience very severely. I suppose there is no one amongst us who does not feel that this is a very searching matter. Well, dear friends, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we peace towards God. But if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

Let us confess to Him all past failures, and though we may not be conscious of hypocrisy (and I trust we are not so), yet let us say, “Lord, search and try me, and know my ways; see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

I was speaking with a gentleman last night, and I said to him, “You are a director of such a Life Assurance Company, are you not?” “Yes,” he said. “Well,” I said, “Yours is a poor society, is it not?” “It is a very good one,” he replied, “a very good one.” “But it is very low down in the list.” “What list is that?” “Why, the list that has been sent around by certain persons to let the public see the condition of the life assurance companies.”

“Well,” said he, “Where is it to be seen?” “Oh, never mind where it is to be seen. Is it true?” “No, it is not true. Our society stands well—admirably well.” “How so?” “Well, you know such a man, he is an excellent actuary and a man of honor.” “Yes.” “Well, when we employed him to go over our accounts, we said just this to him ‘Take the figures, examine them thoroughly, sift our accounts, and tell us where the figures land you. Tell us just that, neither less nor more. Do not shirk the truth in the slightest degree. If we are in a bankrupt state, tell us. If we are flourishing, tell us so.’”

My friend has convinced me that his office is not what I feared it was. I have much confidence in any man’s business when he wishes to know and to publish the unvarnished truth.

I have great confidence in the sincerity of any Christian who says habitually and truthfully, “Lord, let me know the very worst of my case, whatever it is. Even if all my fair prospects and bright ideals should be but dreams—the fabric of a vision. If yonder prospect before me of green fields and flowing hills should be but an awful mirage, and on the morrow should change into the hot burning desert of an awful reality, so be it, only let me know the truth. Lead me in a plain path. Let me be sincere before You, O Thou heart-searching, rein-trying God!”

Let us, with such frank candor, such ingenuous simplicity, come before the Lord. Let as many of us as fear the Lord and distrust ourselves, take refuge in His omniscience against the jealousies and suspicions which haunt our own breasts. And let us do better still, let us hasten anew to the cross of Jesus and thus end our difficulties by accepting afresh the sinners’ Savior.

When I have a knot to untie as to my evidence of being a child of God and I cannot untie it, I usually follow Alexander’s example with the Gordian knot and cut it. How do I cut it? Why, in this way, “You say, O conscience, this is wrong and that is wrong. You say, O Satan, your faith is a delusion, your experience a fiction, your profession a lie. Be it so then, I will not dispute it, I end that matter.

“If I am no saint, I am a sinner, there can be no doubt about that! The devil himself is defied to question that. Then it is written that, ‘Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.’ And to sinners is the Gospel preached, ‘He that believeth on him is not condemned.’ I do believe on Him. If I never did before, I will now, and all my transgressions are therefore blotted out.

“And now, Lord, grant me grace to begin again, and from this time forth let me live the life of faith, the life of prayer. Let me be one of those who will pray always. Let me be one of those who will pray when they are dying, having prayed all their lives.”

Prayer is our very life—ceasing prayer, we cease to live. As long as we are here preserved in spiritual life, we must pray. Lord, grant it may be so with each one here present, through the power of Your Spirit and the merit of Jesus’ blood. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOB 27

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.