

THE TWO BUILDERS AND THEIR HOUSES

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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“Therefore whosoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house. And it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that hears these sayings of Mine, and does them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house. And it fell: and great was the fall of it.”
Matthew 7:24-27.*

THESE were the closing words of our Savior's most famous sermon upon the mount. Some preachers concentrate all their powers upon an effort to conclude with a fine thing called a peroration, which, being interpreted, means a blaze of rhetorical fireworks in the glory of which the *speaker* subsides. They certainly have not the example of Christ in this discourse to warrant them in the practice. Here is the Savior's peroration, and yet it is as simple as any other part of the address. Here is an evident absence of all artificial oratory.

The whole of His hill sermon was intensely earnest, and that earnestness was sustained to the end so that the closing words are as glowing coals, or as sharp arrows of the bow. Our Lord closes not by displaying His own powers of elocution, but by simply and affectionately addressing a warning to those, who, having heard His Words, should remain satisfied with hearing, and should not go forth and put them into practice. As according to usual experience, a preacher warms to his subject as he advances and becomes more intense as he nears his final sentences—so we are bound to give the more earnest heed to the words which are now before us—words with which the Lord of all preachers concluded His memorable discourse.

Jesus had been saying many things, but these are two words to which I think He especially alluded when He said, “Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a wise man.” The first of these words was, “Enter you in” (Matt. 7:13). And the second was, “Beware” (Matt. 7:15). Our Lord had spoken of the “strait gate” of the “narrow way,” and of the few who travel it, and His urgent admonition was, “Enter you in.” not, “Learn you all concerning it, and then be satisfied.” Not, “Find fault with the travelers and the road.” Not, “Seek to enlarge the gate and widen the way,” but, “Enter You in.”

Be obedient to the Gospel—believe its testimony concerning Jesus—enter into fellowship with its mysteries, receive its blessings. Be travelers along its roads. “Enter you in.” He who hears of the way to Heaven, but enters not into it is a foolish man. He, who hearing of the strait gate, presses to enter in, is a wise man.

Afterwards our Lord added the other admonition, “Beware.” “Beware,” says He, “of false Prophets.” And after having dwelt for awhile on that, He added in other words, “Beware of false professions.” Of false Prophets beware, for they may delude you. They may bring before you a salvation which will not save, a mere mirage that looks like the pure, cooling, refreshing stream—but which only mocks your thirst. Beware of all teaching which would lead you away from the one Savior of the souls of men.

And then He adds, “Beware of false professions,” however loudly they make you cry, “Lord, Lord.” You may have in company with these professions the loftiest gifts, Such as casting out devils, and the greatest abilities, such as only Prophets possess. But they shall not avail you anything. In that day when the Master shall only accept into His marriage feast the companions of His warfare on earth, He will say to those who have not done the Father's will, “I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity.” These are two of the sayings of Christ, and they are comprehensive of almost all He ever said—“Enter you in,” and, “Beware.” Take heed that you do them as well as hear them.

I. We shall now proceed to the Master's parable, and will you please notice, first of all, THE TWO BUILDERS. The wise and the foolish man were both engaged in precisely the same avocations, and to a considerable extent achieved the same design. Both of them undertook to build houses. Both of them persevered in building. Both of them finished their houses. The likeness between them is very considerable.

They were equally impressed with the need of building a house. They perceived the necessity of shelter from the heavy rains. They were alike desirous of being shielded from the floods and screened from the wind. The advantage of a house to dwell in was evident to both. Even thus, at this period, we have a large number in the congregation who are impressed with the conviction that they need a Savior. I am delighted to find that there is a stir among my hearers, and I trust it is a movement of God's Holy Spirit.

And as a result very many of you feel deeply that you need a refuge from the wrath to come. You now admit that you must be forgiven, justified, regenerated and sanctified, and your desires are fervent—for all which I am deeply grateful, but also deeply anxious. You are in crowds desirous of becoming builders, and although some are wise and some foolish, up to this present we can see no difference in you. For you seem to be equally convinced that you need eternal life and a good hope for the world to come. Nor does the likeness end here—for the two builders were both alike resolved to obtain what they needed—a house. And their determination was not in words only, but in deeds—for they both resolutely set to work to build.

In the same way there are among us at this hour many who are resolved that if Christ is to be had, they will have Him. And if there is such a thing as salvation, they will find it. They are very earnest, intensely earnest, and though some of them will fail, and some of them succeed, yet up to this point they are all alike, and none but He who searches all hearts can discern the slightest difference. I look with sadness upon the two pilgrims, with their faces zealously turned toward Zion, and I am sad as I wonder which one will find the Celestial City, and which will join with Formalist and Hypocrisy, and perish on the Dark Mountains. We are glad to hear of yearning hearts and resolute determinations, but, alas, all is not wheat that grows in wheat fields, all is not gold that glitters.

Appearances are very, very hopeful, but appearances are often deceptive. There may be a deep sense of need, and there may be a determined resolution to get that need supplied. And yet out of two seekers, one may find and the other may miss—one may be foolish and the other may be wise. These two builders seem to have been equally well skilled in architecture. The one could build a house without receiving any more instruction than the other. I do not find that there was halt or pause on the part of either because he could not turn an arch, or fix a truss. Evidently they were both skilled workmen, well acquainted with their art.

So is it with many here. They know as far as the theory goes, what the plan of salvation is as well as I do. Yet, where the knowledge is the same, the ultimate result may vary. Two men may be equally well instructed in the Scriptures, yet one of them may be wise and the other foolish. To know what faith is, what repentance is, what a good hope in Christ is may all be yours—and yet it may but increase your misery forever. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them. It is not the *hearer*, but the *doer* of the Word, that is blessed. Knowledge puffs up—love alone builds up.

My dear Friends, I am most earnest that those of you who are desiring to find everlasting life in Christ Jesus may not be content with anything short of a true, deep, and real work of Divine Grace in your hearts. For no clearness of head knowledge, no natural earnestness of purpose or eagerness of desire can save you. Without an interest in Christ Jesus you are lost to all eternity. "You must be born again." You must be brought into vital union with the living Savior or your hopefulness will end in overwhelming destruction.

Once more, these two builders both persevered and finished their structure. The foolish man did not begin to build and then cease his work because he was not able to finish, but, as far as I know, his house was finished with as much completeness as the other. And, perhaps furnished quite as well. If you had looked at the two structures, they would have seemed equally complete from basement to roof, and yet there was a great difference between them in a most essential point. Even thus, alas, many persevere in seeking salvation until they imagine that they have found it! They abide for years in the full belief that they are saved.

They cry, "Peace, peace," and write themselves down among the blessed—and yet a fatal error lies at the base of all their religion. All their hopes are vain, and their lifework will prove to be a terrible failure. The builders are much alike up to this point, but yet in reality they are wide as the poles asunder both in work and character. The one builder is wise,

the other foolish. The one superficial, the other substantial. The one pretentious, the other sincere. The wise man's work was honest work where men's eyes could not judge of it. The other's work was only well worked above ground—there was nothing of reality in the hidden parts. And therefore in due time the first builder rejoiced as he saw his house outlive the storm. The other, with his house, was swept away to total destruction.

II. Thus much upon the two *builders*, let us now think upon THEIR TWO HOUSES. One chief apparent difference between the two edifices probably was this—that one of them built his house more quickly than the other. The wise man had to spend a deal of time in excavation work. Luke tells us that he dug deep and laid his foundation on a rock. Now that rock-blasting, that carving and cutting of the hard granite, must have consumed days and weeks.

The foolish builder had not this delay to encounter. The sand was all smooth and ready for him. He was able to commence at once to lay his courses of brick and raise the walls with all rapidity. But all haste is not good speed, and there are some who travel too fast to hold. Unsound professors are often very rapid in their supposed spiritual growth. They were yesterday unconverted—today they become Believers—tomorrow they begin to teach and the next day they are made perfect. They appear to be born of full stature, and equipped at all points, like Minerva, when, according to the fable, she leaped from the brain of Jupiter. They come up in a night, and alas, too often, like Jonah's gourd, they perish also in a night!

Now I raise not a question concerning the genuine character of sudden conversions. I believe that sudden conversions are among the best and truest forms of conversion. Take, for instance, that of the Apostle Paul. But still there are among those who profess to have been suddenly converted a sadly numerous company who answer to the description I have just given. They build very, very quickly—much too quickly for the masonry to be well constructed and lasting. It may be that some mourner is lamenting bitterly that he makes very slow progress in Grace.

"I have been seeking God in prayer," says one, "these months. I have been humbled and broken down under a sense of sin for weeks. And I have only as yet had now and then a glimpse of hope when I have been able to turn my eye to the crucified Savior. I have as yet few consolations, and many doubts. I gladly would have the full light of love in my heart, but the dawning is slow in breaking." Well, Friend, you are building slowly, but if it is *surely*, you shall have no cause to regret that deep digging. Small cause will you have to mourn that it took you longer to arrive at peace than it did your hasty friend, if your peace shall last you to eternity, while his hope shall be a possession in cloudland, driven away by the wind.

Of the two houses, one was built, I doubt not, with far less trouble than the other. Digging foundations in hard rocks, as I have said, takes time, and it also involves labor. Oftentimes did that wise builder pause to wipe the sweat from his brow. Oftentimes did he retire to his bed worn out with his day's work, and yet there was not a stone appearing above the soil. His neighbor, opposite, had run up the walls, had reached the gable, was almost about to put on the roof, before there was scarce a foot above the ground of the wise builder's structure.

"Ah," said he of the sandy foundation, "your toil is needless, and you have nothing to show for it. See how quickly my walls have risen, and yet I don't slave as you do! I take things easily. I neither bore myself nor the rocks, and yet see how my house springs up, and how neat it looks? Your old-fashioned ways are absurd! You dig and hammer away down below there as if you meant to pierce the center of the earth. Why not use your common sense, and go ahead as I do? Away with your sighing and groaning, do as I do, and rejoice at once. Anxiety will kill you."

After this fashion are truly awakened souls like "lamps despised of those who are at ease." One man jumps, as it were, into peace, and boasts himself secure. Whether he is correct or not in his confidence, he does not pause to question—he is too comfortable to have time to enquire into that matter. The estate is fair, why worry about the title deeds? The feast is rich, why tarry for the wedding garments? If a doubt should arise, the carnally secure man ascribes it to Satan, and puts it aside—whereas it is not Satan, but his own conscience and the warning voice of Heaven which bid him take heed and be not deceived.

The prayer for the Lord to search and try his heart and his reins, he never sincerely offers. Such a man does not like self-examination, and cannot endure to be told that there must be fruits meet for repentance. He takes things as guess-work, comes to rash conclusions, and shuts his eyes to disagreeable facts. He dreams that he is rich and increased in goods, whereas he is naked, and poor, and miserable. Alas, what a waking will his be! His more serious companion,

aroused at the same time is, on the other hand, far more diffident and self-distrustful. When he prays his heart groans before God, yet he fears he does not pray aright, and never rises from his knees content with himself.

He is not quite so soon satisfied about the reality of his faith as the other. “Perhaps,” he says, “after all, it is not the faith of God’s elect.” He examines himself whether he is in the faith. He trembles lest he should have the form of godliness without the power. He is afraid of shams and counterfeits, and is for buying gold tried in the fire. “My repentance,” he says, “am I sure it is a real loathing of sin as sin, or did I only shed a tear or two under the excitement of a revival service? Am I sure that my nature is renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit, or is it mere reformation?”

You see, this second man has much exercise of soul. He labors to enter into rest, lest by any means he should seem to come short of it. He has many strivings, many anxieties, many searching of heart because he is sincere and fears to be deceived. From him the kingdom of Heaven suffers violence—he finds the gate strait and the way narrow—and that the righteous scarcely are saved.

Be thankful, dear Hearer, if you are among this second class—for these are the true sons of God and heirs of immortality. Your house costs you more to build, but it will be worth the cost. O beware of wearing the sheep’s clothing without the sheep’s nature! Beware of saying, “Lord, Lord,” while you are the servant of sin! Beware of getting up fictitious religion—borrowing your experience from biographies—picking up godliness secondhand from your parents, friends, and acquaintances! Whatever it may cost you of heartbreak and agony, see to it that the sure foundation is reached, and the house so built that it will endure the trials which will inevitably test it. I would gladly saturate my speech with tears, so weighty and so needful do I feel this caution to be—both to myself and you.

I should think that in the course of time, although the foolish builder built with so much less cost, and so much more rapidly, his walls would be liable to very ugly settlements. For walls that have no foundation—that are but piled up on the sand—would every now and then gape wide with hideous cracks. And stones would move here, and timbers would slip there, and cement and stopping would need much repair. What work for daubers and plasterers to make the ruinous fabric look like decent masonry! Very likely when a settlement crack was covered up in one place, another would happen in the next wall.

For with such a foundation it would be hard to keep the structure together, and in the long run I should not wonder but what it would cost the foolish builder more pains to keep up his wretched edifice than it did the wise builder who labored so hard with his foundation at the first. Mark you well that mere formal religion and hypocrisy in the end become a very difficult affair to maintain. The man has to struggle hard to patch up his reputation, propping it up with new lies and bolstering it with fresh pretences. At one time an unrenewed will rebels fiercely and he has to feign resignation to affliction. Next an unconquered lust demands indulgence, and he has to conceal the sin with more double-distilled deceit.

The form of prayer becomes irksome, and he has to screw himself up to the horrible farce. And meanwhile his outward life is always on the verge of a slip, and he fears detection. One way and another he is continually afraid, like a thief at large who fears that the police will find him. At every puff of wind his habitation threatens to tumble about his ears. He half wishes, after all, that he had taken the trouble of digging a foundation on the rock—but with desperate resolve he puts from him the voice of caution—and will have none of its rebuke.

O dear Hearer, rest assured that Truth, after all, is the cheapest and easiest in the long run. Your gilt, your varnish, your paint, your hypocrisy will soon wear off, while the reality is at no expense for beautifying. Even as a matter of consideration for this life it will be more hard in the long run to keep up the pretentious than to maintain the true. And then in the latter case you have God at your back, and He abhors everything unreal. I beseech you see to it that you daub not your walls with untempered mortar lest they not only come down with a crash when most you need to shelter behind them, but even now begin to show alarming signs of decay.

The higher the foolish man built, the harder work he had to keep it aright. For, of course, every tier of bricks that he laid made the weight the greater and caused the sand to give way. The nearer Heaven the builder went the sooner his wall bowed to its fall. A man who only makes it his aim to be thought a respectable man by attending a place of worship, may manage pretty well to keep up such a low wall even without a foundation. Another man who joins a worldly Church—a Church that makes no pretense of purity—can also succeed with ease. But if he joins a Church of Jesus Christ which carefully seeks to preserve purity in its membership, he has hard work to live up to the standard required of him.

Suppose, yet further, that he should become a deacon or an elder and he is devoid of Grace? His higher aim will cost him more by far—for there are more to look at him, and there is more required of him. Now he prays in public. Now he speaks a word of instruction to enquirers—and what straits and shifts the poor man is driven to—how constantly out of his own mouth is he condemned! “Why,” says he in his heart, “I know nothing about these things in my soul, and yet I have to speak and act as if I were taught of God.” If he becomes a preacher, he is in a still more pitiful plight. What hard work must it be, then, to keep up the character!

When the tower rises tier upon tier upon so frail a base, it leans like the tower of Pisa, and unlike that singular structure it threatens to come down with a crash. By-and-by such a trumpety thing falls in utter ruin, and its elevation helps to hasten the catastrophe. So, dear Hearers, the more spirituality you aim at, and the more usefulness you strive for, the worse for you, unless you have a good foundation to begin with, in true sincerity and real faith. So bad is the course of unsound religion, that the further you go in it the worse it becomes.

The main difference, however, between the two houses did not lay in these cracks and settlements, nor in the cheapness or rapidity of the building—it lay out of sight, *underground*. It was all a matter of the foundation. How many there are who suppose that if a thing is out of sight it may as well be out of mind! Who do you think is likely to dig down and see what the foundations are? “Well,” says one, “I see no need for being over precise. I do not believe in being so particular. What nobody sees cannot mean anything.” Many subscribe to the graceless song —

*“For faith and Grace let foolish zealots fight;
He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.”*

“You pay twenty shillings in the pound, attend a place of worship, take the sacrament, are charitable and say your prayers, and never trouble about anything further”—that is the popular notion. “What is the use of fretting about your heart? That is all transcendental nonsense! What can it signify?” That is how the foolish builder comforted himself. And he doubtless sneered at the wise builder as a poor miserable creature who was overmuch righteous and melancholy. Outward appearance is everything with men, but nothing with God. The essential difference between the true child of God and the mere professor is not readily to be discovered, even by spiritual minds. But the Lord sees it. It is a secret mysterious something which the Lord prizes, “for He knows them that are His.” He separates between the precious and the vile. He puts away the pretenders as dross, but He suffers no sincere heart to be destroyed.

What, then, is this important matter? I answer it is just this—beloved Hearer, if you would be built on a rock, see to it that you have a true sense of sin. I do not say that a sense of sin is a preparation for Christ, and that we ought to pull men back from the Gospel till *they feel their sin*. But I do believe that wherever there is true faith in Jesus there goes with it a deep abhorrence of sin. Faith without contrition is a dead and worthless faith.

When I meet with professors who talk lightly of sin, I am sure that they have built without a foundation. If they had ever felt the Spirit’s wounding and killing sword of conviction, they would flee from sin as from a lion or a bear. Truly forgiven sinners dread the appearance of evil as burnt children dread fire. Superficial repentance always leads to careless living. Faith that was never bedewed with repentance never brings forth the flowers of holiness. Pray earnestly for a broken heart. Remember it is the contrite spirit which God is pleased with. Do not believe that you can have ground for rejoicing if you never saw reason for lamenting. The promised comfort is only secured to those who have been mourners (Matt. 5: 4).

Next to this seek for real faith. Many things which men call faith are not the precious faith of God’s elect. Sincere trust in Jesus Christ is counterfeited in a thousand ways—and often imitated so accurately that only by rigid self-examination can you discover the cheat. You must lie flat upon Christ, the Rock! You must depend entirely upon Him! All your hope and all your trust must be in Him. If you believe with the heart, and not nominally, you are safe, but not otherwise. You must have true repentance and real faith—or you are foolish builders.

Furthermore, seek an inwrought experience of Divine Truth. Ask to have it burnt into you. Why is it that people give up the Doctrines of Grace if they fall in with eloquent advocates of free will? Why is it they renounce the orthodox creed if they meet with a smart reasoner who contradicts it? Because they have never received the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit so as to have it sealed in their hearts. I tremble for our Churches, now that false doctrine is rife, because I fear that many are not established in the Truth. I pray the Lord for you, my dear Flock, that you may know the Truth by being taught of the Lord, for then you will not be led aside. The thieves and robbers will come, but as Christ’s sheep you

will not hear them. It is one thing to have a creed. It is quite another thing to have the Truth engraved upon the tables of the heart. Many fail here because Truth was never experimentally made their own.

Pray, moreover, that your faith may produce personal holiness. Do not believe yourself to be saved from sin while you are living in sin. If you can find pleasure in the lusts of the flesh, you are no child of God. If you are given to drunkenness—and, mark you, many professors are so, only they drink at home and are not seen in the streets—how dwells the Grace of God in you? If you delight in idle songs and frequenting of places of vain amusement, you need not be long in weighing yourself—you are found wanting already. If you were renewed in the spirit of your mind, you would no more love these things than an angel would.

There must be a newborn nature implanted, and where there is not this exemplified in holiness of life, you may build ever so high and prate ever so loudly about your building—it is a poor miserable shanty after all—and will fall in the last hurricane. Want of depth, want of sincerity, want of reality in religion—this is the want of our times. Want of an eye to God in religion, lack of sincere dealing with one's own soul. Neglect of using the lancet with our hearts. Neglect of the search warrant which God gives out against sin. Carelessness concerning living upon Christ—much reading about Him, much talking about Him—but too little feeding upon His flesh, and drinking of His blood—these are the causes of tottering professions and baseless hopes.

Thus have I tried to open up the parable—and I have not designed to discourage any sincere soul. My aim has been to say to you, “Make your calling and election sure. Build on Christ's love, sincerity, desire, the work of the Holy Spirit—and be not deceived.”

III. So now I come, in the third place, to notice THE COMMON TRIAL OF THE TWO HOUSES. Whether your religion is true or not, it will be tried. Whether it is chaff or wheat, the fan of the Great Winnower will surely be brought into operation upon all that lies on the threshing floor. If you have dealings with God, you have to do with a “consuming fire.” Whether you are really or nominally a Christian, if you come near to Christ, He will try you as silver is tried. Judgment must begin at the House of God, and if you dare to come in to the House of God, judgment will begin with you.

By the way, let us note that if there are such trials for those who profess to be Christians, what will become of you who make no profession? If the righteous scarcely are saved, where will the ungodly and the wicked appear? If judgment begin with the House of God, what will the end be of them that believe not? Terrible thought! But to return. Trials will come to profession, whether it is true or false. If I do not mistake the reference in the text to rain, flood, wind—these trials will be of three sorts at least.

The rain typifies afflictions from Heaven. God will send you adversities like showers, tribulations as many as the drops of the dew. Between now and Heaven, O Professor, you will feel the pelting storm! Like other men, your body will be sick. Or if not, you shall have trouble in your house—children and friends will die—or riches will take to themselves wings, and fly like an eagle towards Heaven. You must have trials from God's hand. And, if you are not relying on Christ, you will not be able to bear them. If you are not, by real faith, one with Jesus Christ, even God's rain will be too much for you.

But there will also arise trials from earth—“the floods came.” In former days the floods of persecution were more terrible than now, but persecution is still felt. And if you are a professor, you will have to bear a measure of it. Cruel mockings are still used against the people of God. The world no more loves the true Church today than it did in olden times. Can you bear slander and reproach for Jesus? Not unless you are firmly rooted and grounded. In the day of temptation and persecution the rootless plants of the stony ground are withered away. See you to this.

Then there will come mysterious trials typified by “the winds.” The prince of the power of the air will assail you with blasphemous suggestions, horrible temptations, or artful insinuations. He knows how to cast clouds of despondency over the human spirit. He can attack the four corners of the house at once by his mysterious agency. He can tempt us in many ways at the same time, and drive us to our wits' end. Woe to you, then, unless you have something to hold to better than the mere sand of profession!

Where there is a good foundation trials will do no harm. But where there is no foundation they will frequently bring the man's profession down in ruin, even in this life. How many lose their religion at the very outset! Pliable and Christian both set out for the Celestial City, both aspiring to the crown of gold. But they fell into the Slough of Despond. And

then one of them struggled out on the side nearest his own house, and went back to the City of Destruction. The other strove manfully to reach the further shore—the difference between the wise and foolish pilgrim was made manifest.

After Christians have proceeded further they will be tried in other ways. Infidelities often try Christians. I mean doubts about the essentials of the faith and all its doctrines. And those that are not well cemented to the Rock are easily moved to unbelief. This is the age of infidelities, but they who are on the Rock by a truthful experience are not moved. A Negro was once told by a friend that some man had said the Bible was not true. Now, our poor friend had never thought anybody could doubt the Bible, but his quick way of disposing of the novel difficulty was, “Dat Book not true? Why, I take it into my house and I sit down and read it, and it make my heart laugh. How can it be a lie, dat make my heart laugh? I was a drunkard, a thief, and a liar, and dat Book talked to me and made me a new man—dat Book no lie.” The very best proof in the world surely, at least to the man himself, if not to others.

We who have had our hearts made to laugh by God’s Word cannot be laughed out of our faith. We have lived on the Word and proved its truthfulness by *experience*—and are therefore invulnerable to all attacks—while strangers to such experience are staggered. Where the heart is really grounded upon the Truth, you will find that heresies as well as infidelities have but little effect. The sound Christian is like a stone—if he is thrown into the pool of false doctrine, he may be wet by it—but he does not receive it into his inner self. Whereas the unsound professor is like a sponge, he sucks it all in greedily and retains what he absorbs.

How many there are who are tried by worldliness, and if their religion is but a mere profession, worldliness soon eats the heart of it as does a canker, and they become even as others! If, however, the Christian man’s heart is right with God, he comes out and is separate, and the pride of life does not entrap him. In cases of backsliding, where there is a sound heart towards God, the backslider is soon brought back. But where the heart is rotten, the backslider goes from bad to worse. I was struck with a story of two men who were accustomed to give exhortations at meetings, who had fallen out with each other. One of their Brothers, who grieved to think two servants of God should be at differences with each other, went to reconcile them.

He called upon the first, and said, “John, I am very sorry to find you and James have quarreled. It seems a great pity, and it brings much dishonor on the Church of God.” “Ah,” said John, “I am very grieved, too, and what grieves me most is that I am the sole cause of it. It was only because I spoke so bitterly that James took offense.” “Ah, ah,” said the good man, “we will soon settle this difficulty, then,” and away he went to James. “James, I am very sorry that you and John cannot agree.” “Yes,” he said, “it is a sad thing we don’t, we ought to do so, for we are Brothers. But what troubles me most is that it is all my fault. If I had not taken notice of a little word John said, there would have been an end of it.”

The matter, as you may guess, was soon rectified. You see there was at the bottom a true friendship between them, so that the little difficulty was soon overcome. And so where there is a true union between God and the soul, the backsliding will soon be recovered.

IV. To close. Having thus mentioned the common trials and the effects produced in this life, let me now remind you of the DIFFERENT RESULTS OF THE TRIALS in reference to the life to come. In the one case, the rain descended very heavily, and threatened to wash the house away, but it was built on a rock, and not only did the house stand, but the man inside found great comfort in it. He could hear the pelting torrent beating on the roof, and sit and sing. When the gusts came against the windows he would only be the more happy to think he had such a shelter.

Then came the floods. They would, if they could, have sapped and undermined the foundations, but they took no effect on the granite rock. And though the wind howled round the habitation, every stone was well cemented and all bound as with iron bands to the grand old Rock—and therefore the man was safe and happy within. And above all, he was grateful that he had built on such a Foundation. He could sit down and sing—

*“Loud may the troubled ocean roar,
In sacred peace my soul abides.”*

The Christian rests peacefully upon Christ. Troubles come one after another, but they do not sweep him away—they only endear to him the hope which is based upon Christ Jesus. And when at last death comes, that awful flood which will undermine everything that can be removed—it cannot find anything to shake in the wise builder’s hope!

He rests on what Christ has Done—death cannot affect that. He believes in a faithful God. And dying cannot affect that. He believes in the Covenant signed, and sealed, and ratified, in all things ordered well. He lays hold on the “shalls”

and “wills” of an immutable God, all sealed with the blood of the Redeemer! Death cannot affect any of these. And when the last great trumpet sounds, and the last fire that shall try every man’s work of what sort it is comes forth from the Throne of God, the man who in true sincerity and with real experience has laid hold on Christ is not afraid of the tremendous hour.

What? Though the trumpet sounds exceedingly loud and long, and the dead awake, and the angels gather round the Great White Throne! And the pillars of Heaven tremble, and the earth is dissolved, and the elements melt with fervent heat—the man of God feels that the Rock on which he has built can never fail him, and the hope that Divine Grace has given him can never be removed. He smiles serenely amid it all.

But look at the case of the man whose hope is built on sand! He could hardly endure the trials of *life*. He almost fell under common temptation. He turned his coat during the hour of persecution. But sorer trials now await him. Some hypocrites have been bolstered up even in the last moments, and perhaps have never known that they were lost till they felt they were. Like Dives, of whom it is written, “In Hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.” He had never lifted up his eyes before. He did not know his condition till he actually realized it in all its misery. But the most of men who have come under the sound of the Gospel, and made a profession—if they have been deceivers find it out at death—and it must be a dreadful thing to make that discovery when pain is sharp and parting is bitter.

Ah, dear Friend, if you are mistaken, may you find it out now, and not on your deathbed. May your prayer be, “Lord, show me the worst of my case. If my profession has been a mistake, O let me not build up and prop up a rotten thing, but help me to build aright upon the Rock of Ages.” Pray that prayer, I beseech you. Remember, if death should not teach you the whole Truth of your case, *judgment* will. There will be no mistake there, and no opportunity for repentance. This fallen house was never built again. There was no salvage from the total wreck. Lost, lost, lost—there is no word to follow. For once lost, lost forever! O dear Hearer, I bid you, if you have a name to live and are dead, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you life!

I pray you, if you are a seeker, be not put off with empty hopes and vain confidences. Buy the Truth and sell it not. Lay hold on eternal life. Seek the true Savior and be not content till you have Him, for if lost, your ruin will be terrible! Oh, that lake! Have you ever read the words, “Shall be cast into the Lake of Fire, which is the second death”? The Lake of Fire! And souls cast into it! The imagery is dreadful. “Ah,” says one, “that is a metaphor.” Yes, I know it is, and a metaphor is but a *shadow* of the reality. Then if the *shadow* is a lake of fire, what must the reality be? If we can hardly bear to think of a “worm that never dies,” and a “fire that never shall be quenched,” and of a lake whose seething waves of fire that dash over undying and hopeless souls—what must Hell be in very deed?

The descriptions of Scriptures are, after all, but condescensions to our ignorance—partial revelations of fathomless mysteries. But if these are so dreadful, what must the full reality be? Provoke Him not, my Hearers—tempt not your God! Neglect not the great salvation, for if you do, you shall not escape. Play not with your souls! Be not heedless and careless of the realities of eternity! But now, even now, may God hear your prayer as you breathe it from your inmost souls, and give you truly to be washed in the precious blood, and effectually saved by Him, in Whom there is fullness of Truth and Grace. Amen.

*“My God, I mark with fear
How many hopes decay,
And like the foolish builder’s house
Fall in the trial day.
Perhaps amid this throng
You do a soul espy
Whose towering hopes are built on sand,
I ask, ‘Lord, is it I?’
A thousand doubts arise,
I bring them all to You.
Am I unconsciously deceived?
Lord, search my heart and see.
O teach me deep to dig
Down to the solid Rock,*

*That when tornadoes round me sweep
My house may bear the shock.
Jesus, You only are
The sure foundation stone,
Firm as the eternal hills are You,
I build on You alone.
Cemented fast to You
No stone is laid in vain,
My hope defies the assaults of Hell,
The flood, the wind, the rain.”*

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