

WHY MEN DO NOT BELIEVE

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“How can ye believe, who receive honor one of another?”
John 5:46

THE Pharisees in our Lord's day were very fond of high-sounding titles. They had their diplomas, like our modern doctors of divinity, and they took good care to pride themselves upon them. Some were called “Rab,” others “Rabbi,” others “Rabbini.” They had their various degrees of respect—degrees which signified the respect due to them, and the attainments to which they had reached.

In fact, they would not listen to a teacher unless he came with the title of “Rab,” or “Rabbi,” or “Rabbini.” He must be one who had about him a great air of self-importance. He must be a witness of himself and that very abundantly too, or else the confraternity of the Scribes and Pharisees turned away from him.

Now our Lord asked no testimonials from anybody. He stood up and spoke very simply, but very earnestly the truth, and He did not quote, as these old Rabbis did, authors far gone back one upon another, and make glosses upon them. He took the authority derived from God and constantly said, “Verily this is the case,” and “Verily I say unto you that this other is the case.”

And when these mighty Scribes and Pharisees turned upon their heels and would not receive Him, He replied to them, “It was not at all likely that you would. You gentlemen are so given to complimentary phrases and to grandiloquent titles, that there was no likelihood that you would listen to a man who came with truth on His lips, and still further, in His heart.”

Perhaps there could be nothing more clear than that the position which the Scribes and Pharisees occupied was most dangerous. They were prejudiced. They considered that they had the key of knowledge. They knew already by far too much to be taught anything more, and consequently while publicans and harlots heard Christ and rejoiced to listen to Him, out of all those who were continually caviling and finding fault, how few ever won the blessing.

Now this is an illustration of a general rule upon which I wish to speak tonight. The moral character has a great effect upon the faith. These men, through being proud, stilted, and fond of titles, were unable to believe in Christ, and there are other faults more common than these which effectually prevent men from becoming the disciples of our blessed Master.

Of some of these I intend to speak this evening. And when I have so done I shall have a few words to address to the individuals here who cannot believe in Christ because there is a something within their hearts that very effectually prevents their coming to the faith of God's elect.

First, then, it is very clear that—

I. IT IS NOT BECAUSE A TRUTH IS PLAIN THAT, THEREFORE, ALL MEN SEE IT.

There are some men in such a condition of mind, of such a blinding sort, that even if the truth could be plainer still, it would be the most unlikely thing in all the world that they should receive it. We will suppose for a moment that teetotalism is based upon the surest truth and cannot for a moment be disputed.

Some earnest brother is endeavoring to convince a man. He belabors him with the most potent arguments—he brings before him the most astonishing facts, and some of those wonderful “statistics”

which the more we look at the less we believe, but after bringing all these to bear upon the man, he still remains unmoved.

You are surprised, but somebody whispers in your ear, “He keeps a gin palace,” and now you are not surprised at all. It would be a very unlikely thing that he should be convinced of the propriety of total abstinence while he himself gets his gain by selling the pernicious evils. But take another case of the same sort.

A young gentleman, in conversation with a bishop, was endeavoring to show his lordship the unscriptural character of the Episcopal body as now held in the Church of England. His lordship was observed to smile and when he was asked the reason, he replied, “Why, I wonder at the courage of this young gentleman that he should imagine he could ever convince me out of £3,000 a year.”

And indeed, it was not very likely that he would be converted from the errors of Episcopacy, if these are errors, any more than our friend of the gin palace was likely to be converted to anti-alcoholic principles. There is a something in both instances about the position of the men which renders them, probably, impervious to the truth. These two illustrations just bring that point before your mind’s eye.

Now there are some men who do not believe in Jesus. They have godly parents. They have lived to see others who have believed and though, perhaps, they have never been quite able to cast away the recollections of their early days, yet for all that, they are almost and would be quite infidels, if it were not for a slender thread which is still held in the hand of God.

Now the question comes to us—Why are not these people believers? Under so many good influences, why are they not decidedly believers in Christ? The answer may be found by the light of the truth which I have brought to your minds. There may be a something about their characters which renders it impossible for them to be believers in Christ, nay, which even reflects credit upon the Gospel of Jesus, that they should not be able to believe it, for if, being as they are, they could receive it, it might prove that Gospel to be a thing devoid of the power of God.

Let me just mention some of the things which effectually prevent men from believing in Christ, and one is *a self-righteous idea of one’s self*. Exceedingly common this! The man thinks that he is not as other men are, and though he does not say so, he is rather proud of himself. Though he is so humble as not to say it, yet at the bottom of his heart he is convinced that nobody is worthy of greater respect than he is.

He has been scrupulously honest and has brought up his family to the best of his knowledge in the ways of integrity. He is a good fellow, generous to the poor, and if he should have a fault or two, yet who has not his faults? As for himself, if the world were picked, he would at least take his place somewhere near the first.

Now you cannot expect that man to believe the Gospel, for that Gospel tells him that he is fallen, that his sins have been so many that God has condemned him forever, that he must escape from that condemnation or, if not, he must sink forever into misery, that for him there is no salvation except upon the footing of pure grace apart from merit. The Gospel denies that he has any merit. It pulls off from him all those finely woven raiments of his, in which he boasted himself, and makes him stand naked before the bar of God—and the man does not like that. “No,” he says, “I will not be treated so. The Gospel gives me so ill a character that I will e’en run my chance—not believe the Gospel, but still hope to be saved by my own natural goodness.”

Well, dear hearer, if this be your case, I should not advise you to run the risk, for if you are to look at yourself you will find many omissions, and above all, this glaring omission—that you have not loved the God that made you and you have not served Him. He supplies you with life, but you do not reverence Him. If it had not been for His will, you had long ago been among the dust that sleeps in the grave, or amongst the lost that howl in the pit, and yet, despite His longsuffering goodness, you have not thanked Him, but gracelessly gone up and down the world with no more thought of your Maker than the brute that dies and so comes to its end.

I do pray you look at yourself in the light of God's law, that spiritual law which judges your thoughts, which comes home to your imaginations. What if your outward life be pure, yet can you stand such a test as that? You know you cannot. Believe not, then, yourself to be rich and increased in goods, for you are poor, you are penniless in the presence of God.

Oh! that you could feel this! Then would you come to Jesus and put your trust in Him, but alas! this self-righteousness of yours is that which holds you back from Christ. How can ye believe while you take honor to yourselves and flatter yourselves? You must be humbled. You must be brought low, or else faith in Christ can never reside in your bosoms.

A second remark may come closer home to others and I do desire to come very close home to you. There are men who never will believe in Jesus *because their very idea of religion is a mistake*. You ask them what their religion is, and if they spoke very plainly, they would say that they like good music, excellent music, and they like the best of architecture, and they like floral decorations, and they like millinery, and some of them like images on altars, and I know not what other devout and admirable things besides.

They take religion to be simply the indulgence of their tastes, the pleasing of the eye, the gratification of the senses, and if they can sit while the pealing organ pours forth floods of music and they are charmed thereby, they call that adoration. True, as excellent music might be heard at the theater or the opera, but that would be an abomination. The ears are tickled with the same sounds, precisely the same, and yet in the one case it is sin and in the other case it is holiness.

I confess I cannot quite see the difference—I can perceive none whatever. The gratification of the senses, of the ear and the eye cannot be devotion. It is for the heart to draw near to God. It is to learn that God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. It is to learn that the broken heart is the best sacrifice, that the tear stealing down the cheek is that which is received by the great Father who is in heaven.

That to come humbly and confess our sins, to come with lowly reverence and trust in the great Lamb of God is acceptable worship, not the mere chanting or singing of the lips, or the bending of the knee, or the joining in a liturgical service, but for the inner man to bow itself before the unseen God—the vital part of our nature to come into contact with Him who lives and that hears prayer.

Now, you cannot expect a man who has imbibed his notions of religion from a thing that is theatrical and full of show, to accept the simple teaching of Jesus Christ. How can they believe while they are duped by these gewgaws? How can they believe in Jesus while they are taken up with these mere externals, these fancies, these sweet perfumes and sounds which can never be acceptable to the great God who is in heaven? There is something greater, something deeper about salvation than this.

There are not many here who will come under that head, but they will come under another. There are many who cannot believe in Jesus because—now let them themselves estimate the force of this—they cannot believe in Jesus *because they have a besetting sin that they cannot give up*. There is the bottom of most men's doubts.

They would not doubt if they did not sin. If they could have their sins and be believers, they would be believers fast enough, but there is that company that must be given up, that company which, instead of sanctifying the soul, depraves it. There are those amusements which are not merely recreations which might invigorate the jaded mind, but which are in truth a sort of debauchery which turns aside the mind from its true force and vigor.

Oh! how many things there are in this great London that we know nothing of, and which it were better not to know, which are the secret source of the doubts and skepticism that come up on the surface of society. It were a very curious thing to follow these men home, to follow those home, I say, who say they doubt this and doubt that.

Yes, when you see them drunk, you do not wonder that they doubt a sober Gospel—it were a pity but what they did. When you see them cheat, you do not wonder that they doubt an honest Gospel—it were a great pity that they should believe it. When you hear them swear, you do not wonder that they

doubt a sacred Gospel. Why, to keep up any appearance of consistency, not to say sanity, they must doubt it.

There is a kind of honesty about this professed doubt which I like, for it is better for a man to doubt those things which contradict his life than that he should be such a damnable hypocrite as to pretend to believe in them—better than that he should stand to them in theory, and yet deny them in his life.

But to return to the subject, there lies the secret spring that makes up the non-belief in Jesus in many hearts. It is because they feel that His service is too hard, and exacts too much, too great a self-denial, too much of coming out from the world, and so they cannot believe in Him. And yet Jesus asks us to give up nothing that is really for our good.

Jesus, I say, takes away from us no pleasure that is a true pleasure, no enjoyment that exalts the mind, or that makes a man truly blessed. 'Tis true He takes away that poisoned cup. Who would permit you to drink it who had a care for you? 'Tis true He takes away from you that dagger of sin, that poisoned viper that is only nestling in your bosom to destroy you. Who that loved you would let you have these dangerous things about you?

Jesus Christ asks us only for such self-denial as shall promote our everlasting welfare. Ah! men and women, you will find your sins won't pay you when you come to die—and I suppose you intend to do that. I hope you think not that you shall live forever. Then that little drink will seem sour enough when you come to have it for the last time.

Then the giddy merriment of this world will seem foolishness enough when the curtain begins to be drawn and you look from side to side on the river of death into an eternity that is dark, unlit by a single star of hope. You know that you will not perish like brutes. You know, for God has put a trembling conscience within you, that you will start upon a voyage that is never to end. Oh! sirs, how is it that you thus wreck your vessels for a little joy, and for a paltry pleasure give up the welfare of your souls forever?

There are some men, too, who are kept from believing in Jesus Christ *because they are lovers of gain*. How could they believe in Jesus when their whole life is spent in money-grabbing? Mammon, “the least erect of spirits,” says Milton, but he is the god of London. Does not Mammon rule and reign abundantly, and do not men fall down and say their prayers to him? “All hail, thrice glorious Mammon! Fill our pockets full and help us to blow out our bubble-companies and cheat the public!” Are not these the prayers offered by many?

Ay, and among those in sober trade, how many spend their whole lives in getting and scraping for themselves alone—no consideration for the church of Christ, or for the poor and needy, but only for themselves? Now when Christ comes and says, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal,” you do not wonder that they do not like that.

“No,” they say, “it is contrary to social economics.” When He tells them that this world will pass away, and the fashion of it, and bids them seek another and a better portion, where things endure without end, they will not have it. This world is quite enough for them and they are gone from Christ. How can they believe in Him if they live for gain?

So, too, there are some others who never can believe in Jesus *because they are so downright cowardly that it would be very difficult for them to believe in anything which involves the slightest opposition*. Yes, many a man and many a woman has been influenced by that mean thought, “I should be laughed at. I should be ridiculed if I became a real believer in Jesus Christ. Why, how could I meet my old companions? What would they say to me if they heard that I had become *a saint*? How could I stand the sneers of the commercial room? How could I run the gauntlet down that long workshop where all the benches are?” “How,” says the young woman, “could I have it known in that book-folding room that I have been baptized?”

And among your upper circles it is just the same. How men are afraid of one another, afraid of poor worms, afraid of poor sinners like themselves who shall wither before the face of the terrible Judge of all the earth! Oh! that men should be so afraid of men, and not afraid of God, that they will consent to be His enemies and lose His good opinion. But the good opinion of a drunken set or of an arrant fool is thought to be of more weight to them than the good opinion of their God!

Sirs, I scarcely like to talk to you on this subject, because it is not manly for you to be ashamed of your convictions. If you do love Christ, say so, and if the world hiss, what does it matter to you if you get Christ's smile? Are we the sons of those brave old sires who at Edgehill met sword with sword and feared not? What have we to do to cringe before the world's frown or to court its smile? God grant it may be otherwise, and may you rise into the full stature of spiritual manhood, and be not ashamed to follow Jesus through good report and through ill-report.

Now I might enlarge, but I shall not. You clearly see that there are many moral faults which keep men back from believing in Jesus.

Now for—

II. A FEW PLAIN, EARNEST WORDS WITH THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE NOT BELIEVED.

There have been many arguments which have been used at different times to bring over the skeptical to the faith. I will just tell you what has often strengthened my own mind, so that, my dear friends, if God inclines you to overcome the moral difficulty you may not have a mental difficulty.

In the first place, *the doctrine that we are called upon to believe* is, that having sinned we are condemned, but that God, full of mercy, had pity upon us, and that His Son, God Himself, came down on earth to suffer what was due on account of our sins. In order that the justice of God might not even seem to be robbed of its due, Jesus, God's only-begotten Son—

*“Bore that we might never bear
His Father's righteous ire.”*

Now I have turned that over, and it looks to me as if it must be true, because I cannot conceive where else it came from but from the realm of facts. A God condescending to bleed and die for His own enemies out of respect to justice, and moved by love—where in all heathen mythology is there anything like it? Where have the most refined of men ever hit upon anything that at all approaches to it? Their gods are usually lustful and the highest honors of their gods are crimsoned with blood.

But if this is not true, it ought to be, for it is the grandest conception that ever flashed upon the human mind. The superlatively Just, the superlatively Great must suffer sooner than that His creature should suffer, and sooner than that the laws of His kingdom should for a moment be dishonored? I do not know how it is, but I never want arguments about it my own self. It seems to me so plainly a divine thing, so standing out of all conceptions of poetry, so distinctly rising out of all the realms of philosophy that it must be true.

Then, again, another thing which often helps me is this—*ever since I have trusted in the Son of God to save me, I have been conscious of a very remarkable change that has passed over my entire nature.* Now I desire to speak very soberly and I claim to be believed. I have as good a claim to be believed as any other man. I do not wish to distort the truth, but now this I know, I look up to the starlit sky at night and I think, “The God who made this great universe and orders it all, I really love. I would not do a thing contrary to His will if it were not for my poor infirmities. I would do and I would wish to be whatever that great invisible God would wish me to do and to be. I feel I would.”

Now I know there was a time when I did not think about Him at all, or if I did, I never could say, “I am reconciled to Him. I am one with Him. His will is my will and I desire to do whatever He bids me do.” Now I know that that same thing that has made me love God has made me desire to be truthful, to be honest, to be kind, to be generous—and when I have not done right, I feel a pricking within my heart

that I did not feel once, so that I do know that there is set up in me a wonderful standard which was not there before.

Now a thing that makes me love God, and makes me live and feel so, cannot be a lie. If so, it is a very wonderful kind of lie which produces holiness and goodness. And indeed, my brother, if you would try this for yourself, you would get the same evidence—it would produce in you the selfsame change. There would be your old nature, and you would have to grapple with it, to your own shame and sorrow, but still there would be a new nature with better desires and feelings—and with this new nature within me I am convinced, for myself at any rate, that this thing is true.

Moreover, knowing a great many of those who have believed in Jesus, I am obliged to say of them that they are all imperfect—I wish they were not. I wish they were what God Himself is for purity, and gentleness, and love—but for all that, if I had to pick the people I should like to live with, I would choose them. And with all their faults, I am persuaded that you would sooner have the world full of them than you would of any other sort.

If you were going down a dark lane tonight, and you did not know what sort of people were going along it, I would be bound to say it would be a wonderful consolation to you to be told that they were believers in Christ—you would feel pretty safe, and though there are professors, rotten professors who are a very stench both to the church and to the world—it is but natural that there should be hypocrites. There never was a good thing in the world but what people did make shams of it.

When people say, “They are all hypocrites,” I say, “Then I suppose all our sovereigns are bad ones.” Why, if there were no good sovereigns, people would not make bad ones, for it is the good ones that pass off the bad ones. And if there were not some real, genuine children of God, people would not pretend to be so—it would not pay.

It is because the world, after all, knows that faith in God makes men happier and nobler that men make pretense of having what they have not. Now when I see the effects of the Gospel upon God’s people, making them patient under pain, joyful in the hour of trouble, making them pray to God and receive answers as indisputable facts, I am able to receive JEHOVAH’s word and believe the Gospel of Jesus as sent from God.

Now a word with regard to you, dear friend, who are still a doubter. We are driven to believe two things about you and about everybody like you, namely, that you will never come to know Christ unless the Holy Ghost deals with you, for all the arguments in the world do not convince the human heart unless the Spirit of all grace shall come and change the nature.

And we believe another thing of you, that you must first give up that belief in yourself before you are ever likely to believe in Jesus. How simple it all seems! God has punished Jesus, His dear Son, instead of those that trust Him. Those who trust Him are forgiven. That trust, that sense of forgiveness operates upon the mind, leads the mind to gratitude, influences it to love. The man loves God, chooses what he once rejected, and runs now in the ways of God which were once tedious to him. There is the whole theory of salvation and the experientially acting of it out.

It does seem to me hard that you turn from it. If it were a Gospel full of superstitions, like Romish teachings—if we asked you to believe in certain miracles that were so strange, so weirdlike, that you could not conceive them to be true, I could well excuse your unbelief, but when it is simply to trust the incarnate God who did hang on Calvary and bleed for sinners, a thing which looks so true, and which to tens of thousands has been proved to be true in their lives and in their hearts—oh! I would that you would doubt no longer, but close in with Christ and find safety in Him!

These reflections will do to close with, namely, that—

III. IF WE DO NOT BELIEVE IN JESUS, OUR NON-BELIEF WILL NOT CHANGE THE FACTS.

If a man says, “I am no sinner,” he remains a sinner. If he says, “I do not believe that God will punish sin,” the punishment will be just as sure. If he shall say, “There is no hereafter,” the future will not end for him. If he shall doubt as to the punishment of the wicked, his skepticism shall not mitigate

God's wrath. The facts remain. Oh! think not, when you have blotted out your own recollection, that you have blotted out God's determination. There it stands.

And then think again—*those facts are coming nearer every hour*. We shall soon be into another year. How these years do fly! How the multitudes of men fly too! They were dying last year when the snowflakes fell upon their tombs. They died while the sweet flowers were blossoming from the sod as though to remind us of resurrection. They fell when the mower's scythe laid the grass in the meads—and they are dying now, dying fast now while the sere leaves are descending and heaping up their sepulchres.

How is it that we presume that we shall not die? Persons well a week ago are gone, and our own hearts are merely like muffled drums which beat sad funeral marches to the tomb, and here are still the facts—the fact of sin and a tortured conscience. The fact of punishment and no forgiveness. The fact of eternity and no hope. The fact of hell and no escape.

Oh! you that have doubted, if you push these off by your doubting, let alone annihilating them, there might be some excuse for you—but they come, they come, like some huge express train thundering down the line, and there are you like children playing on the tracks, and you tell us that your games are full of merriment and there is time enough, and you will think of it.

Or you do not believe the express is coming, though there it is with its great red eyes and its great mouth of fire, and it comes rushing on and crushing everything that shall be in its pathway. Fly, in God's name, man! This may be the last hour you may have in which to fly. Think not that you can postpone it, or that you can stop it. Over you with a crash will the divine vengeance go. He shall tear you in pieces and there shall be none to deliver you.

But this is not yet! And meanwhile be wise and escape! Lay hold on eternal life. Trust Jesus and the infinite mercy of God shall blot out the past and secure the future, and you shall be saved in Christ Jesus with an everlasting salvation.

I talk thus somewhat strongly because I feel strongly, and I often puzzle myself with this question—why do I feel concerned about some of your souls when you are not concerned about them at all? Why, you come and hear me tonight, and it only seems like a little kind of music. Well, it may be sport to you, but it is none to me. I have to answer for this, and if I speak not so that you understand, and speak not earnestly, I know I shall have to account to my Master.

I would not be some that occupy the pulpit for all the worlds that God ever made if they were threaded on one string. To get a sermon and read it coldly, to read out statements which do not concern your hearers, and deliver them as if it did not matter whether they were true or not—to be an iceberg in the midst of an assembly—how will God call us to account if such is our way of ministry!

But I beseech you, men and women, if you have not believed in Christ, to remember that that is the only door of safety according to God's own revelation. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, Jesus Christ, the righteous." To deny Him, to neglect Him, is to perish. To trust Him, to accept Him, is to be saved. May God's blessed Spirit move you to trust Him this very night, and as there will be on earth, so will there be joy in heaven, and God's shall be the glory world without end. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOHN 3:1-21

We can scarcely find a chapter in which the Gospel lies so compact and so plainly stated.

1. *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:*

Christ's door is open at all hours. You may come to Christ by day. You may come to Christ by night. There is never a time when Christ is from home. He that seeks finds, and to him that knocks, it shall be opened. "The same came to Jesus by night." Perhaps he was timid. It is just as likely that he was prudent and did not wish to commit himself till he had seen what it was that Jesus taught. Perhaps, too, he was

busy and had no time except at night. Better come at night than not come at all. “The same came to Jesus by night.”

2. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou does, except God be with him.

The miracles were accepted as a proof of Christ’s mission, and if they do not seem to be such a proof to us at this distance, they were a most marvelous and necessary proof at the first. Perhaps they have ceased because, that first work being done, the testimony can now stand upon its own strength, and men reading it may judge it to be of God if they will. But to Nicodemus it was quite clear that Christ could not have worked His miracles, except God were with Him.

3. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Here is a greater miracle than I have wrought in the outside world. Here is a spiritual miracle. This is what you must receive as well as others. You cannot even understand My kingdom, and know what it means—you cannot see it, except you are born again.

4. Nicodemus said unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?

Thus do men interpret Christ’s figures literally, and this has been the basis of much mischief and false doctrines. When He is using metaphors to make the thing plain, they straightway use the metaphor rather as a cloak to hide the meaning than as a glass through which to see it. This is the reason why the doctrine of transubstantiation has come up. Because our Savior said, “This is my body,” men have not been able to understand that He meant, “This represents my body. This is a figure.” Truly “the letter killeth.” It is the inner spirit that gives life.

5. Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

He cannot be Christ’s professed disciple except he receive the Spirit and except he be baptized—if the water here relates to baptism at all, which we judge it does not. He must be renewed, and washed, and purified. That must be the water—and he must have the Holy Ghost dwelling in him, or else, as he cannot see, so he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6. That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

A man may have the best parents that ever lived, but all that is born of the flesh is flesh, at the very best. Your father may be a saint and your mother a saint, but you are born in sin, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and unless you be born of the Spirit, you cannot understand or see spiritual things—and you cannot enter into the spiritual kingdom, for you have no spiritual capacity.

“The carnal mind discerneth not the things that are of God, for they are spiritual, and must be spiritually discerned.” Therefore we must be born-again so as to receive that Spirit by which spiritual things are discerned and entered into.

7-8. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

There are mysteries in nature. There are mysteries in grace. Every new-born soul is a mystery. He cannot explain himself. He can scarcely understand himself.

9-10. Nicodemus answered, and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

These simple things—these elementary principles—these rudiments of the school book of believers.

11. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen: and ye receive not our witness.

This was an additional hint to Nicodemus of the unbelief that still lingered in him. “Ye receive not our witness.”

12. If I have told you earthly things,

Things that have to do with men while here below.

12. *And ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?*

If I lift the veil and talk to you about greater mysteries still, if you do not believe about regeneration, where will you be if I begin to talk of My Godhead and of all the inner secrets?

13. *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.*

A riddle, doubtless, to Nicodemus, which in later days he understood.

14-15. *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.*

Oh! that blessed “whosoever”! Hear it, you sons of men, and tell it to your neighbors—“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

16-18. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned:*

He may be very faulty. His conscience may accuse him, but he is not condemned.

18. *But he that believeth not is condemned already.*

Hear that “condemned already”—not in a state of probation. Never was there a greater mistake than to say that men are in a state of probation. That probation has passed long ago. They have been proved in the world and if they are unbelievers, they are condemned already. “Condemned already.”

18-19. *Because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation,*

The condemnation—the head and front of it.

19-20. *That light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*

This is the secret of infidelity. This is the reason of all opposition to Christ. It is love of sin. Trace it home to its den and lair, and you shall find that it is love of sin that breeds hatred of Christ. Men do not see because they do not want to see. They do not want to see too much lest they should be uneasy in their present state of life. So they kick against Christ and try to put out the light of His Gospel, lest they be reproved by it.

21. *But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

God give us the heart that seeks the light, and sooner or later we shall find it. We shall find it in Christ.

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