

THE MINISTER'S STOCK-TAKING NO. 516

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.”
Acts 28:24

THIS is the only proper way to calculate the results of our ministry. We just want the account book ruled with two columns. On one side we must put down the long list of the some that believe not, and on the brighter side we may enter what is too often, the far less number of the some that believe. This is the only true method, I repeat it, by which we can hold a stock-taking so as to ascertain the net profit of the preaching of the Gospel.

We must not estimate the good that is done by the number of those who listen. It is a very pleasant thing to see the house of prayer filled to overflowing. It is intensely delightful to reflect that often on the Sabbath evening in London now the theatres are full, St. Paul's Cathedral is full, and multitudes of churches and chapels are crowded with willing listeners.

Still it is not all pleasure. Instead of its being of any advantage for the persons who have heard the Gospel but have not believed, it will rather increase their doom. If they have only heard, and the truth has penetrated no deeper than the natural ear, then alas for the preachers who have spent their strength for nought! and alas for the multitudes who, having ears, have heard as though they heard not!

Nor ought we to calculate the result of our work by the persons who have been pleased with our ministry. What man is not gratified when he hears that the people have been pleased with his preaching? It were not in flesh and blood for a man to be uncheered by applause. The love of praise is ingrained in human nature.

*“The proud to gain it toils on toils endure,
The modest shun it but to make it sure.”*

But still, it were a miserable thing if all that a man effect be just to win the ear and to strike the people with wonder at the amazing way in which he could utter forth the words of truth. Shall God's servants live upon the breath of men's nostrils? Can the approbation of the crowd be nutritious enough to constitute the solid food of a God-sent herald of the cross? Never!

When a man has to die, this shall give him no comfort. To have preached faithfully, though some were angry, will always be consolatory. To have preached unfaithfully, or to have held back any part of the truth, though he may have won universal acclaim, would be but a passport to perdition at the last. No, no, if our ministry has only pleased people, it is good for nothing.

A sermon often does a man most good when it makes him most angry. Those people who walk down the aisles and say, “I will never listen to that man again,” very often have an arrow rankling in their breast. Smarting from a wound that never will be healed till God heals it—they will come again right enough.

Others, alas, who are quite pleased and delighted, will come and go from the place of the holy, unimpressed and unimpressible as slabs of marble—adown which the oil runs without producing the slightest impression.

Nor even dare we hastily to calculate the effect of our ministry by the number of persons impressed with serious convictions. Of course, it is a hopeful sign to see the people weep under the Word, especially if it is the Gospel that moves them to weep and not the pathos of the preacher. I do not think it

does anybody much good spiritually, when tears are excited simply by the description of a funeral, or by being reminded of one's childhood, or of one's parents. Some preachers appeal much to the passions, and think when the congregation is weeping, good is being done.

I do not see the use of it at all. When the preacher can make these natural emotions a platform upon which to stand and work upon the conscience, then it is well and good, but if he has only succeeded in drawing briny tears from mortal eyes, they may flow until the floor be watered with them without any salutary result.

We must go deeper than the eye. We want to make the heart weep. We want tears of penitence for sin, not tears of regret for departed husbands and wives. We want emotions which spring from a startled conscience, and not those which come from a want of resignation to the divine will. No, dear friends, we have done nothing after we have preached a thousand times unless we can write down that some believe on the Lord Jesus.

I. Turning to our text a little more closely, let us remark in the first place that, UNDER THE BEST MINISTRY IN THE WORLD THE RESULTS WILL BE DIVERSE, AND THAT YOU WANT TWO COLUMNS TO WRITE THE ACCOUNT IN.

There will always be the some that believe and the some that believe not. This is not altogether the minister's fault. It is the custom of the age to blame ministers very much, and I dare say we deserve it. But still the blame in this matter does not lay entirely with us, for even when Paul preached—a model preacher, he!—there were “some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.”

Did I say that Paul was a model preacher? Let me prove it. Was he not a model preacher as to *matter*? There are some persons who greatly admire a doctrinal preacher. They like a man who will lay down the doctrines as a master-builder would put the stones—one here, another there—each one in its proper place.

When they go up to the house of prayer they say they want really to learn something, to get some thought, to get a deeper insight into some great Biblical truth, and they are not satisfied unless their understandings are provided for. Mere appeals to the passions they do not care about. They want to have their minds enlightened.

Well, a doctrinal preacher is an exceedingly useful man, especially if he do not degenerate into endless controversy, preaching Christ of envy and strife. I have heard it said that while a course of some twelve lectures by any ordinary lecturer on geology would give you a pretty clear idea of the science, you might sit and listen to twelve hundred sermons upon Christianity by some ministers, and never get an idea of what are its fundamental doctrines.

If it be so, it is a crying evil and grievously will the church have to answer for it in the ill that will come upon her. It may be so in some cases, but I am sure it was not so with the apostle Paul. Who could preach doctrine more clearly than he did? If you want the very highest doctrine, read the ninth chapter of Romans. If you would have a clear system of truth, read the epistle to the Ephesians. If a young man wants to get a body of divinity in miniature, he has only to read that epistle.

The apostle is full of the most weighty matter and the most important truths. He keeps back nothing that is profitable for the people. He can say, “I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God.” To him it never was a question as to which part of the truth would best please the people. He gave them the whole of it in due season.

But yet even under the apostle Paul there were some that believed not! And you, young man, if you have been listening to the Gospel under any minister, if you have not been converted, neither would you have been if you had heard Paul. Having Moses and the prophets with you at this day, if you believe not them, neither would you be converted, though an apostle should rise from the dead.

I think I hear one observe—“Well, I do not care for a doctrinal preacher myself. I like an *experiential preacher* best.” Be it so, dear friend, and I can fully approve your choice. I like an experiential preacher, because he can get inside a man's heart and see what is there. He knows just what I am and what I feel.

If I am distressed, he has been distressed too, and he can talk of my temptations and of my trials, because they have been his own. If I am full of comfort or full of joy he has been up on the mountain too, and he tells me of my ecstasy and of my delights. If I find some knotty passage in my inner life, he can translate it for me, for he has been through it all himself.

Perhaps of the three orders of preachers—the doctrinal, the experiential, and the practical—the experiential preacher is the most useful. I think if one had to choose which should be his pastor, he should prefer such a man as this, for a ministry without any experience in it must be a very poor, miserable, savorless thing to the people of God.

But do you not think that in this respect the apostle Paul himself was a perfect model? Would you understand the conflicts of the human heart? Does not Paul paint them to life as he says—“When I would do good, evil is present with me; to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not”? And again, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” Does he not express the sighing and longing of all the children of God who have been vexed with contests within?

On the other hand, if you have high and glorious frames, the apostle can go with you, and beyond you, and tell you of times when he was caught up to the third heavens, and heard things which it is not possible for a man to utter. Are you full of assurance and confidence? Then Paul preaches to you from this text—“I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Are you full of apprehensions? Then he fears and trembles with you—“Lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” Paul had his doubts and fears, and was afraid that he might perish after all. Yet he had his high flights and glorious confidences, and knew that the believer in Christ could never be cast away.

But mark you, if you have listened to the preaching of the Gospel, and have remained an unbeliever under it, neither would you be converted though the apostle Paul's deep experiential knowledge should be brought to bear upon your conscience. For even under him there were some that believed not—and so I suppose it would be even were he here now.

Then there is *the practical preacher*, and some men greatly admire him. So do I if he does not become legal and if he does not degenerate into a preacher of mere morality. If he shall urge holiness upon the people of God, from evangelical motives, he may be very useful. But if upon legal terms he strives to stir the people of God to good works, he will do more harm than good.

Yes, the practical preacher is very useful. The man who tells me precisely what my duty is in my sphere of life, talks to me as a husband, a master, a servant, or as a son—who when I come after the cares of the week and sit down in my pew—just refreshes my memory about my week's faults, and tells me how to behave myself during the week that is to come—such a man is useful.

But who ever did this as well as the apostle Paul? That same epistle to the Ephesians, which is an epitome of doctrinal theology, also contains the practical precepts of the Gospel fully written out. Children, parents, fathers, husbands, wives, servants, masters—the apostle has a word to every one. He is pre-eminently practical, generally basing his appeals for righteous conduct upon some divine motive.

Yet, dear friends, if you have not been converted, I have no reason to believe it is because your ministers fail on the practical points, for even had you heard the apostle, who was a pattern in this respect, neither would you have been converted, for under him some believed not.

Now put the practical, the experiential, and the doctrinal together, and you get the model exhibited in the apostle Paul. Would that we had such preachers in all pulpits and such ministers to preside over all flocks. But even if such were given to us, there would still be some that believed not.

“Yes, yes,” says one, “I do not doubt that the *matter* was right enough. But you know there is more required of a preacher than matter. It is *manner* we want.” Well now, I hold that the apostle Paul was a model preacher as to manner. He was a *bold* preacher. He never feared the face of man, but preached

just what the Lord told him, in the Lord's own words, whether men would hear or whether they would forbear.

He was an *eloquent* preacher. Barnabas was no mean speaker, but Paul was a better speaker than he was. For at Lystra they called Paul "Mercury," and Mercury was their god of eloquence. Perhaps the concluding part of the eighth chapter of Romans is the most remarkable piece of human language ever known. He who wrote it was a master, able to soar with eagle-wing to any height, yet willing for the most part to keep near the ground.

"Not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but with simplicity and godly sincerity he ordered his speech." He was a profound thinker, capable of the deepest argument or the finest allegory, but withal an easy talker, who loved to tell of the grace of God. When occasion required, as an impassioned orator, his thunders could make Festus tremble, and his persuasive appeals could wring confessions from Agrippa.

But as a teacher in the church of God, he was proverbially plain spoken. He spoke like a child, and babes in grace were fed under his ministry as with pure milk. This is just the style we want, not the simplicity of ignorance, but the dignified simplicity of the man who has really the highest intellect, if he cared to show it, but who rather chooses to instruct the poor and ignorant.

Then the apostle *was very affectionate* with his boldness and simplicity. He loved the souls of men. He felt sometimes such a passionate longing to save souls, that he was almost ready to lose his own soul, if he might but save others. "Oh," you say, "but that was an extravagant thing for him to say." Yes, love is often extravagant, and I will never believe that a man has any love at all if he speaks in a cold, calculating way.

Love must sometimes speak in rapturous phrases, which in its cooler moments it would not endorse. When I hear the apostle say, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren according to the flesh," I understand what his love means. He feels as if his own personal interest in Jesus he would fain give up, if he might but see his own kindred saved. It is in a spirit akin with that of Moses, when he said, "If not, blot my name out of the book of life."

Dear, dear! how critics and commentators have stumbled over these two passages! They cannot make it out. They cannot understand it. But I tell you Paul meant exactly what he said. I have felt the same strong emotion boiling in my own soul, till when I have looked upon some immense congregation, and my heart has yearned after their conversion, I have felt that if I could die as a substitute for them I would do it.

Of course, in more sober moments no man would ever barter his own soul's salvation on any account, nor were it possible that such a ransom could be accepted. Still, love makes one feel as if even that were less than the evil that threatens our people, and we exclaim, with Esther, "How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

The apostle, thus full of eloquence, of love, and of holy boldness, seeking after souls, pressing them home with blessed arguments, pleading with them night and day with many tears—was a faithful and a perfect minister—as nearly so as mortal can be. "Oh!" says one, "I wish I sat under such a minister!" Yes, but are you converted to God? For if you are not, I am not sure that you would be saved if you had Paul himself for a pastor.

If at your wish he could leave his grave, start up, unwrap his cerements, and address you from this pulpit, I have no reason to believe that his voice would have any more power over you than another man's voice. Paul would plant in vain where others have not been successful, and if you have not believed on Jesus with this Book in your houses, with your Sabbaths repeated hundreds of times, with earnest, affectionate parents, and with loving friends, neither would you be converted though Paul rose from the dead.

II. I now proceed to notice, in the second place, THE TWO SORTS OF PEOPLE, AND THE REASON WHY SOME BELIEVED, AND WHY SOME BELIEVED NOT.

There were some that believed. Shall I describe them? So far as one young man is concerned, I will just give a little sketch of his history, and that sketch will suffice for all. He dropped in one Sunday

morning to hear the preacher. He stood in the aisle, for he did not intend to stay all the time, but the place was full and he could not get well out.

He listened. He thought it very common-place. It did not attract his attention much, but all of a sudden—yes, it was so—the truth dropped right into his heart. He listened with greater interest than he had done before. He gathered himself up. Another sentence came. When he came in, he was like a man in armor. All the shots fell upon his armor and were repelled then. But now something had got in between the joints.

He listened again. The preacher went on to discourse of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, and the young man felt as if there was no one else in the place. The minister's eyes were on him. He began to tremble. "What must I do to be saved?" was the language that was in his heart, though he could not utter it with his lip.

He walked out of that aisle a calm and quiet man. He went home. There was no talking on the way. He went into his chamber. Well, I will not say he prayed the first time, but it was something like it, for he breathed out words like these, "Oh! ah! would that!" He began to have living desires after the living God.

In the evening he went to the house of God again. It seemed that night as if the preacher prepared a most terrible sermon on purpose for him. The whole sermon through, the great hammer of God seemed to be breaking his flinty heart smaller and smaller, till there was not a single piece of it that was not ground to powder.

He could not help feeling that there was no hope for him—that mercy would never reach his case. He had thought that morning that he was about as good as most people, and that if it did not fare well with him, it would fare ill with all the world. But now he felt himself to be the vilest of the vile. He could not understand it, nor could his friends either.

They thought he had been taken with a fit of melancholy. They hoped it would wear off, but it did not wear off. He was very quiet that week. He could not go out with his friends to places of amusement as he had been accustomed to do. One of them did get him to one place, but he was so miserable that he came out when it was half over and said, "I have no taste for such things now. I cannot stay."

Well, I do not know how long it was that this went on—in some cases it is only a few minutes, in others it is a long, long time. I knew one young man with whom it lasted for five years—and he stands here today to tell of that long period of affliction. That young man went in a state of sadness and grief on account of sin, seeking rest and finding none, till one morning the preacher lifted up Christ upon the cross and said—this is the import of the words he used—"You see the Hebrew prophet raise the brazen serpent high upon the cross. Look, look, you who that are bitten with serpents! Turn hither your eyes—however swollen you are, do but look! There is life in a look at the brazen serpent for any of you, for all of you."

And then the preacher said, "See Jesus hanging there on His cross! His wounds are streaming. His head is bowed down with grief. There is life in a look at the Crucified. Sinner, there is life this moment for you." He explained that to look was simply to trust Christ, and to put one's confidence in the blood and merits of the Lord Jesus.

Well, the young man had heard that a great many times, but he had never heard it with his conscience before. It had never sunk deep down into his heart. Now it came home to him. Standing there in the aisle just as he was, conscious of his guilt and ruin, he turned his eyes to Jesus. He looked. He lived. He went his way like a man who had received a new life. He was blessed, happy, joyful. A tremendous burden had rolled into the deep sepulcher. The chains had been snapped from his manacled wrists. He was free. And whereas he could not creep before, he now ran and danced for joy and gladness of heart.

That is how it all came about. The conversion was so wrought by his simply hearing his ruin and learning the remedy. The young man waited awhile in prayer and silent meditation, and matured the piety which God had given him, and he then came forward and made a profession of his faith. It was a

happy day when he saw the pastor and told his experience, when he was joined to the church and separated from the world. From that day all that knew him could but marvel at the change.

And now comes the question, "*Why did some believe?*" Well, it was not any difference in the preacher, for the same preacher addressed both. It was not any difference in the sermon, for the same sermon was preached to all the people, and yet some believed and some did not. It could not be the power of persuasion, for there were some who were persuaded and some that were not by the very same address.

Nor can we attribute it to a difference of constitution, for that were to make salvation of works and not of grace. Were we to bring up the old legal covenant again, and thus preach another gospel, then we should be accursed. I only know of one answer to this question, "*Why did some believe?*" And the answer is this—*because God willed it.*

"He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion." "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." If any man is saved, it is not because he willed to be saved. If any man be brought to Christ, it is not of any effort of his, but the root, the cause, the motive of the salvation of any human being, and of all the chosen in heaven is to be found in the predestinating purpose and sovereign distinguishing will of the Lord our God.

I know some Christians do not hold this as a doctrine, but I believe there is no Christian alive who does not believe it as a matter of experience. I was once with a good Christian man who was a little blind in both eyes, and he laid down this theory—if God gave grace to one, He was bound—just listen to this—He was bound to give it to all. God, he said, was no respecter of persons, which I interpret to mean that He did not owe anything to anybody, but did just as He liked with them. But he understood it to mean that God gave alike to all, and that if He gave anything to one, He must give the same to another. You see, however, that if it is a matter of debt to anybody, then it is not a matter of grace any longer.

Well, after that, we had prayer, and my friend prayed for his own family, and his unconverted relatives—yes, actually prayed to God to give *more grace* to them that they might believe and be saved! When he had done, I said, "Well now, that would have been a very proper prayer for me to offer, because I think it just for God to give more to one than He does to another, but it was a very improper prayer for you, and completely subversive of your own theory.

"In fact, you have no right to make a distinction, and to pray for your own child more than for anybody else's child. According to your scheme you believe that God ought to serve all alike, whereas I believe that no man has any claim on God—that if He pleases to save anyone He has a right to do it, and that if men perish, they perish because they deserve to perish, and I, therefore, can present special petitions to God for special persons."

I remember hearing of a case where a very high Calvinistic brother never would believe that a Wesleyan could have the grace of God in him, so bigoted was he to his own views. One night there was a prayer meeting and the gas would not light. They could not get it to light anyhow, and at last it was proposed to hold the meeting in the dark.

A Wesleyan prayed first. He was at the far end of the room and he prayed, oh! so sweetly! Our Calvinistic friend said—"What a delightful prayer! What a depth of doctrinal knowledge! What a blessed character that person must be!" So he watched for him when he came out—he stood at the door to find him, and to his surprise discovered who had been offering the prayer that was so full of grace and the truth.

I believe that if once we came to real, experiential godliness, we should not find a child of God anywhere that would not in some form or other subscribe to the substance of what I have asserted—that it is God who quickens the souls of those who believe, and that if men be saved all the glory must be unto God from first to last, and not an atom nor a particle can be attributed to the goodness, or the power, or the will of the creature.

This is a doctrine which some people have not learned very fully yet, but they will have to learn it if they are God's people. Jonah, you know, had never learned it from the schools, but when the Lord got him in the whale's belly, at the bottom of the mountains, with the weeds wrapped about his head, then it was that he said, "Salvation is of the LORD." And often some sore trials and terrible afflictions are necessary schoolmasters to teach us this lesson—that salvation is of the Lord alone.

Now let me change the note and speak *a few words respecting the some that believe not*. They are of different characters. Some of you were brought up at a Sunday school. You have attended a place of worship nearly all your lives, and yet you have not believed in Christ. There are others who do not often go to the house of God—in fact they have got into the habit of spending their Sundays in dissipation or frivolity.

These are among the some that believe not, and some of them try to quiet their conscience by pretending that they do not believe the Bible to be true. They set up for Atheists, or Deists, or Freethinkers, and when they can get some fools to applaud them, they vent out their spleen against the saints and their blasphemy against God—albeit they do not believe their own blasphemies.

Their consciences are uneasy. Atheism affords no rest for the sole of man's foot. Let a man go to the utmost extent in abandoning moral restraints and disowning religious obligations, there is still an aching void within him which even hell itself cannot fill. The man feels that he needs something, he knows not what, but it is the cross of Christ and faith in a crucified Savior that alone can supply the cravings of man's inner nature.

Some of these people that believe not are very moral. There is that young lady yonder, amiable and admirable in her degree, but she does not believe, hence the crudeness of her tastes, the lack of harmony in the colors that vary her disposition.

There is that young man over there who is full of commercial integrity, his employer would trust him with a bag of untold gold. But he is among the some that believe not. And with strange inconsistency he relies on one virtue which procures him respect among men, to cover a thousand vices which proclaim his alienation from God.

On the other hand, there are a great many of them who are debauched and who go very far astray. We must put you all down together. There are no third parties. You either believe or you do not. If you have believed in Jesus, bless and praise almighty grace, but if you have not, listen a moment while I try to answer the question—

Why do you not believe? There are some people who will be ready to say, "Hear what contradictory doctrine is preached!" I cannot help it. The only reason why you do not believe in Christ is because you will not. The reason why you are an unbeliever at this hour is your own will, and nothing but your own will.

It is not that you have not heard the Gospel, you have heard it. It is not because it is unworthy of your credence—it is the most reliable intelligence in all the world. It is not because it does not deserve your faith. It claims and demands it. It is not because you have never been aroused—you have had impressions without number.

You know when you had that fever? You know there was a something striving with you that would have brought you to the cross, but you would not come. The reason why you have not come to Jesus is contained in Christ's own words—"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." Give me not back an answer that would excuse yourself and charge God foolishly. It is not God's fault that you are not a believer. It is your own fault and your own fault alone.

I know there are some very wicked persons, and some on the other hand, who claim to be very orthodox, who lay the damnation of men at God's door—but God forbid that your soul or mine should have any sympathy with such blasphemy as that!

I will suppose a case. There is a woman who has stabbed her own child, reddened her hands with the blood of her own offspring. She is brought up to the court to be tried for murder and she makes use of a singular defense. Her counsel bids her be silent, but she will speak. She says, "My lord and gentlemen of

the jury, I am not guilty. I did stab my child, 'tis true, but I did it as the agent of God. I was decreed to do it. I could not help it. I was predestinated to do it, and the fault, therefore, lies not with me, but with God."

Now the impression made in the court would be this—that a person whose moral sense was so depraved would be quite capable of murder or any other crime. A state of heart which would allow a person to give utterance to such a saying against God would allow murder to be thought of without any compunction whatever. I should not wonder at such a remark being made by the culprit.

But suppose the lawyer himself, the woman's counsel, should get up and claim the attention of the judge and the jury, and should say, "Gentlemen, really, this woman is not guilty, when you come to think of it, for it was fore-ordained from before the foundation of the world that she should do this. She was predestinated to it, and therefore, my lord, moral culpability does not rest with her."

Can you think what the judge would say—such a man as the late good Lord Chancellor Campbell. Why, I think I see him rise from his seat and exclaim, "Hold your tongue, sir, or else change your line of argument. For as long as I am one of the judges of this realm, I will never sit in this court to hear God openly and publicly blasphemed. If you do not change your line of argument the usher shall put you out." And I am sure every Englishman in the court would applaud a judge for so saying. Verily you would hold your breath and feel your blood chilled in your veins at the very idea of murder being laid at the door of God.

What then shall I say of those men, calling themselves ministers of Christ, but who become the devil's advocates, and preach that the ruin of men's souls is the result of divine sovereignty, that God's decree damns men, and not their own sins? O my soul, come not you into their secret—with their confederacy be not you joined.

This is sewing pillows to all armholes. This is, indeed, stuffing beds with down for sinners to sleep on, till at last they wake up in damnation! Sinner, you know it is a lie. It is a gross lie to say that God is responsible for your damnation. If your soul shall perish, it shall perish as a suicide, for you will have ruined yourself. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself."

If the damned in hell could be made to believe that they did not deserve to be there, why hell would be no hell to them. But this is the sting of perdition—"I deserved this!" You will see written in lines of fire—"You knew your duty, but you did it not!" And when you cry for mercy, this shall be God's answer—"I called and ye refused, I stretched out my hand and no man regarded it; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."

Do I hear someone say, "Why, that is Arminianism!" Precisely so. But some people say the truth lies between Calvinism and Arminianism. It does not. There is nothing between them but a barren wilderness. If you are asked why a man is saved, the only Scriptural answer is—"Sovereign grace." Grace—unmoved by anything in the creature, flowing spontaneously from the mighty depths of the divine heart.

But if you are asked why are men damned? Answer this—"It is their own sin. Their own wicked, carnal, sensual, devilish nature—that they even dare to trample on the blood of Christ, to despise Jesus, and to turn aside from Him that speaks from heaven." Never be frightened because one man says it is too high, or because another says it is too low. Take the truth of God as you find it. Take it as it is in the Bible.

"Well but," I hear one say, "are the two things consistent? Can you reconcile them?" I do not want to reconcile them. They never fell out. They are good friends. They are both true, and truths never quarrel. "Well," says one, "but I cannot see that they are quite straight." Have you ever been rowing in a boat on the water and remarked that your oars look bent? Are they bent? No. If you had an oar that was bent, and put it in a certain position it would look straight, but if it were a straight oar that you put in, and now that it should look bent is a mere optical illusion. Why is this?

Well, we are told it is because the rays of light pass through two different mediums—through the air and through the waters. These mediums are of different density, and therefore the ray of light is refracted and the thing looks bent, though it really is not.

Now part of the truth is divine—that part which has to do with divine sovereignty—and part of the truth is human—that which has to do with human responsibility. A great truth in passing through two such different media must look bent, and if it did not look bent, it would be strange indeed.

You may look at two lines. They are almost parallel, but not quite, and they do not meet anywhere that you and I can see, but they do meet somewhere that God can see. When we get to heaven we shall see where these two lines meet, and we shall find, perhaps, that where we thought they were the farthest apart, was just the place where they touched each other.

Of this, however, I am absolutely sure, man's conscience bears witness—it is one of the instinctive apprehensions of every enlightened man's mind—that if he be saved it is of God's mercy, and that if he be lost it is his own fault. I only want the witness of your own conscience to this point. In vain you drug conscience with nauseous doctrines.

You may go and listen to something that is not pure Gospel, but a spurious compound. You never can stifle the deep conviction, that if you rebel against God you perish as the result of your own act and deed. The worm that never dies would cease to gnaw at your vitals if you could lay your ruin at God's door, and the fire that never can be quenched would have no meet fuel in your body and soul, if your own sins were not the cause of your own destruction.

And what does all this lead to? Why, it comes to this, dear friends, that I must close *by dividing this house*. Sometimes, in the House of Commons, you know, when a person has been speaking and has been very prosy, and another man gets up to speak whom they do not want to hear, they will cry out, "Divide, divide." Then the House divides, and the "Ayes" go out on one side, and the "Noes" on another.

Well—I have not a convenient place here for some of you to go on one side of the house and some another—I do not suppose we could carry it out. But suppose this aisle now to represent the great division, and that the some that believe had to stand on this side, and the some that do not believe on that side. There would soon be a change of seats, I expect.

But do you know, I am afraid there would be a great number of you that would say, "Well, I cannot go on this side. I dare not say I do believe in Christ. And yet I cannot go to the other side. I dare not go there, it is such an awful thing to go with those that do not believe. Let me stand here in the aisle." No, no, there are only two places—heaven and hell—and there are only two sorts of people, the righteous and the wicked.

The priests of Christian idolatry have been preaching about purgatory for hundreds of years, but we do not believe in that doctrine, except as a means of filling their coffers, while they make merchandize of souls. We know that all the people who have died have either gone to hell because they did not believe, or have gone to heaven because they did, and we know that there has never been a cross-breed between a believer and an unbeliever.

A man must be either dead or alive. There is no neutral ground. You must either be on one side with those who are alive, or on the other side with those who are dead and need to be quickened. Think not to halt between two opinions. For the most part those who are said to be halting between two opinions are really of one opinion—they do not intend to serve the Lord, and they say in their hearts, "Who is the LORD that I should serve him?"

Now will you do me this favor? I asked it once and it was blessed to the conversion of several. Will you take a little time alone, perhaps this evening. Take a paper and pencil, and after you have honestly and fairly thought on your own state, and weighed your own condition before the Lord, will you write down one of two words—if you feel that you are not a believer, write down this word—"Condemned." And if you are a believer in Jesus, and put your trust in Him alone, write down the word, "Forgiven."

Do it, even though you have to write down the word condemned. We lately received into church fellowship a young man, who said—"Sir, I wrote down the word condemned, and I looked at it. There it

was. I had written it myself—“*Condemned.*” As he looked, the tears began to flow, and the heart began to break, and ere long he fled to Christ, put the paper in the fire and wrote down, “Forgiven.”

This young man was about the sixth who had been brought to the Lord in the same way. So I pray you try it and God may bless it to you. Remember you are either one or the other—you are either condemned or forgiven. Do not stand between the two. Let it be decided, and remember if you are condemned today, you are not yet in hell. There is still hope.

Blessed be God, still is Christ lifted up, and whosoever believes on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. The gate of glory is not closed. The proclamation of mercy is not hushed. The Spirit of God still goes forth to open blind eyes and to unstop deaf ears, and still preached to you, to every creature under heaven—Whosoever believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned. Believe.

God help you to believe. Trust Jesus. Trust Him now. And may the Lord grant that your name may be written among the some that believe, and not among the some that believe not.

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.