

1 Timothy Sermons - C H Spurgeon

1 Timothy 1:16 Paul As Pattern Convert

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

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Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should here. After believe on him to life everlasting — 1 Timothy 1:16.

IT is a vulgar error that the conversion of the apostle Paul was an uncommon and exceptional event, and that we cannot expect men to be saved now-a-days after the same fashion. It is said that the incident was an exception to all rules, a wonder altogether by itself. Now, my text is a flat contradiction to that notion, for it assures us that, instead of the apostle as a receiver of the long-suffering and mercy of God being at all an exception to the rule, he was a model convert, and is to be regarded, as a type and pattern of God's grace in other believers. The apostle's language in the text, "for a pattern," may mean that he was what printers call a first proof, an early impression from the engraving, a specimen of those to follow. He was the typical instance of divine long-suffering, the model after which others are fashioned. To use a metaphor from the artist's studio, Paul was the ideal sketch of a convert, an outline of the work of Jesus on mankind, a cartoon of divine long-suffering. Just as artists make sketches in charcoal as the basis of their work, which outlines they paint out as the picture proceeds, so did the Lord in the apostle's case make, as it were, a cartoon or outline sketch of his usual work of grace. That outline in the case of each future believer he works out with infinite variety of skill, and produces the individual Christian, but the guiding lines are really there. All conversions are in a high degree similar to this pattern conversion. The transformation of persecuting Saul of Tarsus into the apostle Paul is a typical instance of the work of grace in the heart.

We will have no other preface, but proceed at once to two or three considerations. The first is that:—

I. In The Conversion Of Paul The Lord Had An Eye To Others, And In This Paul Is A Pattern.

In every case the individual is saved, not for himself alone, but with a view to the good of others. Those who think the doctrine of election to be harsh should not deny it, for it is Scriptural; but they may to their own minds soften some of its hardness by remembering that elect men bear a marked connection with the race. The Jews, as an elect people, were chosen in order to preserve the oracles of God for all nations and for all times. Men personally elected unto eternal life by divine grace are also elected that they may become chosen vessels to bear the name of Jesus unto others. While our Lord is said to be the Savior specially of them that believe, he is also called the Savior of all men; and while he has a special eye to the good of the one person whom he has chosen, yet through that person he has designs of love to others, perhaps even to thousands yet unborn.

The apostle Paul says, "I obtained mercy, that in me foremost Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe." Now, I think I see very clearly that Paul's conversion had an immediate relation to the conversion of many others. It had a tendency, had it not, to excite an interest in the minds of his brother Pharisee? Men of his class, men of culture, who were equally at home with the Greek philosophers and with the Jewish rabbis, men of influence, men of rank, would be sure to enquire, "What is this new religion which has fascinated Saul of Tarsus? That zealot for Judaism has now become a zealot for Christianity: what can there be in it?" I say that the natural tendency of his conversion was to awaken inquiry and thought, and so to lead others of his rank to become believers. And, my dear friend, if you have been saved, you ought to regard it as a token of God's mercy to your class. If you are a working man, let your salvation be a blessing to the men with whom you labor. If you are a person of rank and seat/on, consider that God intends to bless you to some with whom you are on familiar terms. If you are young, hope that God will bless the youth around you, and if you have come to older years, hope that your conversion, even at the eleventh hour, may be the means of encouraging other aged pilgrims to seek and find rest unto their souls. The Lord, by calling one out of any society of men, finds for himself a recruiting officer, who will enlist his fellows beneath the banner of the cross. May not this fact encourage some seeking soul to hope that the Lord may save him, though he be the only thoughtful person in all his family, and then make him to be the means of salvation to all his kindred.

We notice that Paul often used was narrative of his conversion as an encouragement to others. He was not ashamed to tell his own

life-story. Eminent soul-winners, such as Whitefield and Bunyan, frequently pleaded God's mercy to themselves as an argument with their fellow-men. Though great preachers of another school, such as Robert Hall and Chalmers, do not mention themselves at all, and I can admire their abstinence, yet I am persuaded that if some of us were to follow their example, we should be throwing away one of the most powerful weapons of our warfare. What can be more affecting, more convincing, more overwhelming than the story of divine grace told by the very man who has experienced it? It is better than a score tales of converted Africans, and infinitely more likely to win men's hearts than the most elaborate essays upon moral excellence. Again and again, Paul gave a long narrative of his conversion, for he felt it to be one of the most telling things that he could relate.

Whether he stood before Felix or Agrippa, this was his plea for the gospel. All through his epistles there are continual mentions of the grace of God towards himself, and we may be sure that the apostle did right thus to argue from his own case: it is fair and forcible reasoning, and ought by no means to be left unused because of a selfish dread of being called egotistical. God intends that we should use our conversion as an encouragement to others, and say to them, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul." We point to our own forgiveness and say, "Do but trust in the living Redeemer, and you shall find, as we have done, that Jesus blotteth out the transgressions of believers."

Paul's conversion was an encouragement to him all his life long to have hope for others. Have you ever read the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans? Well, the man who penned those terrible verses might very naturally have written at the end of them, "Can these monsters be reclaimed? It can be of no avail whatever to preach the gospel to people so sunken in vice." That one chapter gives as daring an outline as delicacy would permit of the nameless, shameful vices into which the heathen world had plunged, and yet, after all. Paul went forth to declare the gospel to that filthy and corrupt generation, believing that God meant to save a people out of it. Surely one element of his hope for humanity must have been found in the fact of his own salvation; he considered himself to be in some respects as bad as the heathen, and in other respects even worse: he calls himself the foremost of sinners (that is the word); and he speaks of God having saved him foremost, that in him he might show forth all long-suffering. Paul never doubted the possibility of the conversion of a person however infamous, after he had himself been converted. This strengthened him in battling with the fiercest opponents—he who overcame such a wild beast as I was, can also tame others and bring them into willing captivity to his love.

There was yet another relation between Paul's conversion and the salvation of others, and it was this:—It served as an impulse, driving him forward in his life-work of bringing sinners to Christ.

"I obtained mercy," said he, "and that same voice which spake peace to me said, I have made thee a chosen vessel unto me to hear my name among the Gentiles." And he did bear it, my brethren. Going into regions beyond that, he might not build on another man's foundation, he became a master-builder for the church of God. How indefatigably did he labor! With what vehemence did he pray! With what energy did he preach! Slander and contempt he bore with the utmost patience. Scourging or stoning had no terrors for him. Imprisonment, yea death itself, he defied; nothing could daunt him. Because the Lord had saved him, he felt that he must by all means save some. He could not be quiet. Divine love was in him like a fire, and if he had been silent, he would ere long have had to cry with the prophet of old, "I am weary with restraining." He is the man who said, "Necessity is laid upon me, yea woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." Paul, the extraordinary sinner, was saved that he might be full of extraordinary zeal and bring multitudes to eternal life. Well could he say:—

"The love of Christ doth me constrain

To seek the wandering souls of men;

With cries, entreaties, tears to save,

To snatch them from the fiery wave.

My life, my blood, I here present,

If for thy truth they may be spent;

Fulfil thy sovereign counsel, Lord!

Thy will be done, thy name adored!"

Now, I will pause here a minute to put a question. You profess to be converted, my dear friend. What relation has your conversion already had to other people? It ought to have a very apparent one. Has it had such! Mr. Whitefield said that when his heart was renewed, his first desire was that his companions with whom he had previously wasted his time might be brought to Christ. It was natural and commendable that he should begin with them. Remember how one of the apostles, when he discovered the Savior, went immediately to tell his brother. It is most fitting that young people should spend their first religious enthusiasm upon their brothers and sisters. As to converted parents, their first responsibility is in reference to their sons and daughters. Upon each renewed man, his

natural affinities, or the bonds of friendship or the looser ties of neighborhood should begin to operate at once, and each one should feel, "No man liveth unto himself."

If divine grace has kindled a fire in you, it is that your fellow-men may burn with the same flame. If the eternal fount has filled you with living water, it is that out of the midst of you should flow rivers of living water. You are blessed that you may bless; whom have you blessed yet? Let the question go round. Do not avoid it. This is the best return that you can make to God, that when he saveth you, you should seek to be the instruments in his hands of saving others. What have you done yet? Did you ever speak with the friend who shares your pew? He been sitting there for a long time, and may, perhaps, be an unconverted person; have you pointed him to the Lamb of God? Have you ever spoken to your servants about their souls? Have you yet broken the ice sufficiently to speak to your own sister, or your own brother? Do begin, dear friend.

You cannot tell what mysterious threads connect you with your fellow-men and their destiny. There was a cobbler once, as you know, in Northamptonshire. Who could see any connection between him and the millions of India? But the love of God was in his bosom, and Carey could not rest till, at Serampore, he had commenced to translate the Word of God and preach to his fellow-men. We must not confine our thoughts to the few whom Carey brought, to Christ, though to save one soul is worthy of a life of sacrifice, but Carey became the forerunner and leader of a missionary band which will never cease to labor till India bows before Immanuel. That man mysteriously drew, is drawing, and will draw India to the Lord Jesus Christ. Brother, you do not know what your power is. Awake and try it.

Did you never read this passage: "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him"? Now, the Lord has given to his Son power over all flesh, and with a part of that power Jesus clothes his servants. Through you, he will give eternal life to certain of his chosen; by you, and by no other means, will they be brought to himself. Look about you, regenerate man. Your life may be made sublime. Rouse yourself! Begin to think of what God may do by you! Calculate the possibilities which he before you with the eternal God as your helper. Shake yourself from the dust and put on the beautiful garments of disinterested love to others, and it shall yet be seen how grandly gracious God has been to hundreds of men by having converted you.

So far, then, Paul's salvation, because it had so clear a reference to others, was a pattern of all conversions. Now, secondly:—

II. Paul's Foremost Position As A Sinner Did Not Prevent His Becoming Foremost In Grace, And Herein Again He Is A Pattern To Us.

Foremost in sin, he became also foremost in service. Saul of Tarsus was a blasphemer, and he is to be commended because he has not recorded any of those blasphemies. We can never object to converted burglars and chimney-sweepers, of whom we hear so much, telling the story of their conversion; but when they go into dirty details, they had better hold their tongues. Paul tells us that he was a blasphemer, but he never repeats one of the blasphemies. We invent enough evil in our own hearts without being told of other men's stale profanities. If, however, any of you are so curious as to want to know what kind of blasphemies Paul could utter, you have only to converse with a converted Jew, and he will tell you what horrible words some of his nation will speak against our Lord. I have no doubt that Paul in his evil state thought as wickedly of Christ as he could—considered him to be an imposter, called him so, and added many an opprobrious epithet. He does not say of himself that he was an unbeliever and an objector, but he says that he was a blasphemer, which is a very strong word, but not too strong, for the apostle never went beyond the truth. He was a downright, thorough-going blasphemer, who also caused others to blaspheme. Will these lines meet the eye of a profane person who feels the greatness of his sin? May God grant that he may be encouraged to seek mercy as Saul of Tarsus did, for "all manner of sin and blasphemy" does he forgive unto men.

From blasphemy, which was the sin of the lips, Saul proceeded to persecution, which is a sin of the hands. Hating Christ, he hated his people, too. He was delighted to give his vote for the death of Stephen, and he took care of the clothes of those who stoned that martyr. He baled men and women to prison, and compelled them to blaspheme. When he had hunted all Judea as closely as he could, he obtained letters to go to Damascus, that he might do the same in that place. His prey had been compelled to quit Jerusalem and fly to more remote places, but "being exceeding mad against them, he persecuted them unto strange cities." He was foremost in blasphemy and persecution. Will a persecutor read or hear these words? If so, may he be led to see that even for him pardon is possible. Jesus, who said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," is still an intercessor for the most violent of his enemies.

He adds, next, that he was injurious, which, I think, Bengel considers to mean that he was a despiser: that eminent critic says—blasphemy was his sin towards God, persecution was his sin towards the church, and despising was his sin in his own heart. He was injurious—that is, he did all he could to damage the cause of Christ, and he thereby injured himself. He kicked against the pricks and injured his own conscience. He was so determined against Christ that he counted no cost too great by which he might hinder the

spread of the faith, and he did hinder it terribly, lie was a ringleader in resisting the Spirit of God which was then working with the church of Christ. He was foremost in opposition to the cross of Christ.

Now, notice that he was saved as a pattern, which is to show you that if you also have Been foremost in sin, you also may obtain mercy, as Paul did: and to show you yet again that if you have not been foremost, the grace of God, which is able to save the chief of sinners, can assuredly save those who are of less degree. If the bridge of grace will carry the elephant, it will certainly carry the mouse. If the mercy of God could bear with the hugest sinners, it can have patience with you. If a gate is wide enough for a giant to pass through, any ordinary-sized mortal will find space enough. Despair's head is cut off and stuck on a pole by the salvation of "the chief of sinners." No man can now say that he is too great a sinner to be saved, because the chief of sinners was saved eighteen hundred years ago. If the ringleader, the chief of the gang, has been washed in the precious blood, and is now in heaven, why not I? why not you?

After Paul was saved, he became a foremost saint. The Lord did not allot him a second-class place in the church. He had been the leading sinner, but his Lord did not, therefore, say, "I save you, but I shall always remember your wickedness to your disadvantage." Not so: he counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry and into the apostleship, so that he was not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles. Brother, there is no reason why, if you have gone very far in sin, you should not go equally far in usefulness. On the contrary, there is a reason why you should do so, for it is a rule of grace that to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much, and much love leads to much service.

What man was more clear in his knowledge of doctrine than Paul? What man more earnest in the defense of truth? What man more self-sacrificing? What man more heroic? The name of Paul in the Christian church stands in some respects the very next to the Lord Jesus. Turn to the New Testament and see how large a space is occupied by the Holy Spirit speaking through his servant Paul; and then look over Christendom and see how greatly the man's influence is still felt, and must be felt till his Master shall come. Oh! great sinner, if thou art even now ready to scoff at Christ, my prayer is that he may strike thee down at this very moment, and turn thee into one of his children, and make thee to be just as ardent for the truth as thou art now earnest against it, as desperately set on good as now thou art on evil. None make such mighty Christians and such fervent preachers as those who are lifted up from the lowest depths of sin and washed and purified through the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace do this with thee, my dear friend, whoever thou mayest be.

Thus we gather from our text that the Lord showed mercy to Paul, that in him foremost it might be seen that prominence in sin is no barrier to eminence in grace, but the very reverse. Now I come to where the stress of the text lies.

III. Paul's Case Was A Pattern Of Other Conversions As An Instance Of Long-Suffering.

"That in me foremost Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a cartoon or pattern to them which should hereafter believe." Thoughtfully observe the great long-suffering of God to Paul: he says, "He showed forth all long-suffering." Not only all the long-suffering of God that ever was shown to anybody else, but all that could be supposed to exist—all long-suffering.

"All thy mercy's height I prove,

All its depth is found in me,"

as if he had gone to the utmost stretch of his tether in sin, and the Lord also had strained his long-suffering to its utmost.

That long-suffering was seen first in sparing his life when he was rushing headlong in sin, breathing out threatenings, foaming at the mouth with denunciations of the Nazarene and his people. If the Lord had but lifted his finger, Saul would have been crushed like a moth, but almighty wrath forbore, and the rebel lived on. Nor was this all; after all his sin, the Lord allowed mercy to be possible to him. He blasphemed and persecuted, at a red-hot rate; and is it not a marvel that the Lord did not say, "Now, at last, you have gone beyond all bearing, and you shall die like Herod, eaten of worms"? It would not have been at all wonderful if God had so sentenced him; but he allowed him to live within the reach of mercy, and, better still, he in due time actually sent the gospel to him, and laid it home to his heart. In the very midst of his rebellion the Lord saved him. He had not prayed to be converted, far from it; no doubt he had that very day along the road to Damascus profaned the Savior's name, and yet mighty mercy burst in and saved him purely by its own spontaneous native energy. Oh mighty grace, free grace, victorious grace! This was long-suffering indeed!

When divine mercy had called Paul, it swept all his sin away, every particle of it, his blood shedding and his blasphemy, all at once, so that never man was more assured of his own perfect cleansing than was the apostle. "There is therefore now," saith he, "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God." "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" You know how clear he was about that; and he spoke out of his own experience. Long-suffering had washed all his sins away. Then that long-suffering reaching from the depths of sin lifted him right up to the apostleship,

so that he began to prove God's long-suffering in its heights of favor. What a privilege it must have been to him to be permitted to preach the gospel. I should think sometimes when he was preaching most earnestly, he would half stop himself and say, "Paul, is this you" When he went down to Tarsus especially he must have been surprised at himself and at the mighty mercy of God. He preached the faith which once he had destroyed. He must have said many a time after a sermon, when he went home to his bed-chamber, "Marvel of marvels! Wonder of wonders, that I who once could curse have now been made to preach—that I, who was full of threatening and even breathed out slaughter, should now be so inspired by the Spirit of God that I weep at the very sound of Jesus' name, and count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Oh! brothers and sisters, you do not measure long-suffering except you take it in all its length from one end to the other, and see God in mercy not remembering his servant's sin, but lifting him into eminent service in his church. Now, this was for a pattern, to show you that he will show forth the same long-suffering to those who believe. If you have been a swearer, he will cleanse your blackened mouth, and put his praises into it. Have you had a black, cruel heart, full of enmity to Jesus? He will remove it, and give you a new heart and a right spirit. Have you dived into all sorts of sins? Are they so shameful that you dare not think of them? Think of the precious blood which removes every stain. Are your sins so many that you could not count them? Do you feel as if you were almost damned already in the very memory of your life? I do not wonder at it, but he is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. You have not gone farther than Saul had gone, and therefore all long-suffering can come to you, and there are great possibilities of future holiness and usefulness before you. Even though you may have been a street-walker or a thief, yet if the grace of God cleanses you, it can make something wonderful out of you: full many a lustrous jewel of Immanuel's crown has been taken from the dunghill. You are a rough block of stone, but Jesus can fashion and polish you, and set you as a pillar in his temple.

Brother, do not despair. See what Saul was and what Paul! became, and learn what you may be. Though you deserve the depths of hell, yet up to the heights of heaven grace can lift you. Though now you feel as if the fiends of the pit would be fit companions for such a lost spirit as yourself, yet believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall one day walk among the angels as pure and white as they. Paul's experience of long-suffering grace was meant to be a pattern of what God will do for you. Scripture says,

**"Where sin abounded,
There did grace much more abound';
Thus has Satan been confounded,
And his own discomfit found.
Christ has triumph'd
Spread the glorious news around.
Sin is strong, but grace is stronger;
Christ than Satan more supreme;
"Yield, oh, yield to sin no longer,
Turn to Jesus, yield to him—
He has triumph'd!
Sinners, henceforth him esteem."**

V. The Mode Of Paul's Conversion Was Also Meant To Be & Pattern, and with this I shall finish.

I do not say that we may expect to receive the miraculous revelation which was given to Paul, but yet it is a sketch upon which any conversion can be painted. The filling up is not the same in any two cases, but the outline sketch. Paul's conversion would serve for an outline sketch of the conversion of any one of us. Now was that conversion wrought? Well, it is clear that there was nothing at all in Paul to contribute to his salvation. You might have sifted him in a sieve, without finding anything upon which you could rest a hope that he would be converted to the faith of Jesus. His natural bent, his early training, his whole surroundings, and his life's pursuits, all lettered him to Judaism, and made it most unlikely that he would ever become a Christian. The first elder of the church that ever talked to him about divine things could hardly believe in his conversion. "Lord," said he, "I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem." He could hardly think it possible that the ravening wolf should have changed into a lamb. Nothing favorable to faith in Jesus could have been found in Saul; the soil of his heart was very rocky, the ploughshare could not touch it, and the good seed found no root-hold. Yet the Lord converted Saul, and he can do the like by other sinner, but it must

be a work of pure grace and of divine power, for there is not in any man's fallen nature a holy spot of the size of a pin's point on which grace can light. Transforming grace can find no natural lodgment in our hearts, it must create its own soil; and, blessed be God, it can do it, for with God all things are possible. Nature contributes nothing to grace, and yet grace wins the day. Humbled soul, let this cheer thee. Though there is nothing teed in thee, yet grace can work wonders, and save thee by its own might.

Paul's conversion was an instance of divine power, and of that alone, and so is every true conversion. If your conversion is an instance of the preacher's power, you need to be converted again; if your salvation is the result of your own power, it is a miserable deception, from which may you be delivered. Every man who is saved must be operated upon by the might of God the Holy Spirit: every jot and tittle of true regeneration is the Spirit's work. As for our strength, it warreth against salvation rather than for it. Blessed is that promise, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." Conversion is as much a work of God's omnipotence as the resurrection; and as the dead do not raise themselves, so neither do men convert themselves.

But Saul was changed immediately. His conversion was once done, and done at once. There was a little interval before he found peace, but even during those three days he was a changed man, though he was in sadness. He was under the power of Satan at one moment, and in the next he was under the reign of grace. This is also true in every conversion. However gradual the breaking of the day, there is a time when the sun is below the horizon, and a moment when he is no longer so. You may not know the exact time in which you passed from death to life, But there was such a time. if you are indeed a believer. A man may not know how old he is, but there was a moment in which he was born. In every conversion there is a distinct change from darkness to light, from death to life, just as certainly as there was in Paul's. And what a delightful hope does the rapidity of regeneration present to us! It is by no long and laborious process that we escape from sin. We are not compelled to remain in sin for a single moment.

Grace brings instantaneous liberty to Chose who sit in bondage. He who trusts Jesus is saved on the spot. Why, then, abide in death? Why not lift up your eyes to immediate life and light?

Paul proved his regeneration by his faith. He believed unto eternal life. He tells us over and over again in his epistles that he was saved by faith, and not by works. So is it with every man; if saved at all, it is by simply believing in the Lord Jesus. Paul esteemed his own works to be less than nothing, and called them dross and dung, that he might win Christ, and so every converted man renounces his own works that he may be saved by grace alone. Whether he has been moral or immoral, whether he has lived an amiable and excellent life, or whether he has raked in the kennels of sin, every regenerate man has one only hope, and that is centered and fixed in Jesus alone. Faith in Jesus Christ is the mark of salvation, even as the heaving of the lungs or the coming of breath from the nostrils is the test of life. Faith is the grace which saves the soul, and its absence is a fatal sign. How does this fact affect you, dear friend? Hast thou faith or no?

Paul was very positively and evidently saved. You did not need to ask the question, Is that man a Christian or not? for the transformation was most apparent. If Saul of Tarsus had appeared as he used to be, and Paul the apostle could also have come in, and you could have seen the one man as two men, you would have thought them no relation to one another. Paul the apostle would have said that he was dead to Saul of Tarsus, and Saul of Tarsus would have gnashed his teeth at Paul the apostle. The change was evident to all who knew him, whether they sympathize in it or not. They could not mistake the remarkable difference which grace had made, for it was as great as when midnight brightens into noon. So it is when a man is truly saved: there is a change which those around him must perceive. Do not tell me that you can be a child at home and become a Christian, and yet your father and mother will not perceive a difference in you. They will be sure to see it. Would a leopard in a menagerie lose his spots and no one notice it? Would an Ethiopian be turned whiter and no one hear of it? You, masters and mistresses, will not go in and out amongst your servants and children without their perceiving a change in you if you are born again. At least, dear brother or sister, strive with all your might to let the change be very apparent in your language, in your actions, and in your whole conduct. Let your conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ, that men may see that you, as well as the apostle, are decidedly changed by the renewal of your minds.

May all of us be the subjects of divine grace as Paul was: stopped in our mad career, blinded by the glory of the heavenly light, called by a mysterious voice, conscious of natural blindness, relieved of blinding scales, and made to see Jesus as one all in all. May we prove in our own persons how speedily conviction may melt into conversion, conversion into confession, and confession into consecration.

I have done when I have enquired, how far we are conformed to the pattern which God has set before us? I know we are like Paul as to our sin, for if we have neither blasphemed nor persecuted, yet have we sinned as far as we have had opportunity. We are also conformed to Paul's pattern in the great long-suffering of God which we have experienced, and I am not sure that we cannot carry the parallel farther: we have had much the same revelation that Paul received on the way to Damascus, for we, too, have learned that Jesus is the Christ. If any of us sin against Christ, it will not be because we do not know him to be the Son of God, for we all believe in his deity, because our Bibles tell us so. The pattern goes so far: I would that the grace of God would operate upon you, unconverted friend, and complete the picture, by giving you like faith with Paul. Then will you be saved, as Paul was. Then also you

will love Christ above all things, as Paul did, and you will say, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." He rested upon what Christ had done in his death and resurrection, and he found pardon and eternal life at once, and became, therefore, a devoted Christian.

What sayest thou, dear friend? Art thou moved to follow Paul's example? Does the Spirit of God prompt thee to trust Paul's Savior, and give up every other ground of trust and rely upon him? Then do so and live. Does there seem to be a hand holding thee back, and dost thou hear an evil whisper saying, "Thou art too great a sinner"? Turn round and bid the fiend depart, for the text gives him the lie. "In me foremost hath Jesus Christ showed forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on his name." God has saved Paul. Back, then, O devil! The Lord can save any man, and he can save me. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is mighty to save, and I will rely on him. If any poor heart shall reason thus, its logic will be sound and unanswerable. Mercy to one is an argument for mercy to another, for there is no difference, but the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

Now I have set the case before you, and I cannot do more; it remains with each individual to accept or refuse. One man can bring a horse to the trough, but a hundred cannot make him drink. There is the gospel; if you want it, take it, but if you will not have it, then I must discharge my soul by reminding you that even the gentle gospel—the gospel of love and mercy has nothing to say to you but this, "He that believeth not shall be damned."

"How they deserve the deepest hell,

That slight the joys above;

What chains of vengeance must they feel

Who break the bonds of love."

God grant that you may yield to mighty love, and find peace in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 4:10

Trust in the Living God

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"We trust in the living God."-1 Timothy 4:10.

IF we are inclined to grieve because everything around us changes, our consolation will be found in turning to our unchanging God. If we lament the ills of mortality, it will be wise for us to turn to him "who only hath immortality." If our earthly joys fade and die, it is a blessed thing for us to be able to go to the fountain of undying joy, and there to drink deep draughts of bliss, which shall cause us to forget our misery.

Without any further preface, I ask you to follow me while, first, in a very simple manner, I speak upon the great truth of the existence of the living God, and then, secondly, while I draw practical inferences from that existence. Before I close my discourse, I shall have a question to put to you.

I. First, for a little while, let us think of The Great Truth Of The Existence Of The Living God.

Paul wrote to Timothy, Therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God."

He meant, by that expression, first, that God is truly existing, and not like the dead gods of the heathen, which are no gods at all, — which, in fact, have no existence as gods. Vast multitudes have bowed down before images of wood, or stone, or ivory, or gold; but of them all it might truly be said, "Eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not; noses have they, but they smell not; they have hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not; neither speak they through their throat." It is a sure sign that a man's understanding is dead when he can worship a dead god; but you and I, beloved, "trust in the living God." He is the God who made heaven and earth, and all that is in them; he is the God who supports the whole universe by the power of his almighty arm; he is the God who rules and over-rules in nature, providence, and grace; he is the true God, the only real God; — no

dream God, no phantom or myth conjured up by imagination, but a real God, the only living and true God. May we worship him, then, with real worship, real adoration, and true sincerity of heart! What a blessing it is for us that we are able to worship the true God! We might have been left, as our remote ancestors were, to seek after God, if haply we might find him, or to worship gods that are no gods, and be lost in the mazes of superstition, unable to find the Most High. But “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” and, therefore, “we trust in the living God,” the real God.

A second meaning of this expression, I have no doubt, lies in the fact of God’s self-existence and independence: “We trust in the living God,” who is “living” in a very emphatic sense. You and I are living, but our existence is entirely dependent upon the will of God. Although he has given us immortal spirits, yet that immortality only comes to us by reason of the divine decree; and the glorious immortality of believers comes to them by virtue of their vital union with their ever-living head, their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We have no independent immortality; it is not inherent in us, and it must be sustained by perpetual emanations of the divine power it is a fire, which could not maintain its own glow; it must be fed, or it would go out. But God is self-existent, the great I AM; and if all his creatures could cease to be, he would be just as completely God without them as with them.

“He sits on no precarious throne,

Nor borrows leave to be.”

His is a fire which burns without fuel, — a sun which scatters light without itself diminishing. God is independent, self-existing, the only really “living” being in the entire universe in the fullest and most emphatic sense of the word “living.”

What a joy it is to worship such a God as this, because nothing can diminish his life, his forge, his power! If his courts are sustained, not by the tribute of men, but by his own wealth; if his sovereign state stands, not by the might of armies, but by his own omnipotence; and if he himself is all-sufficient, not because he gathers up all things into himself, but because all things are from him, and are all in him in their germ and seed; is he not a God whom we all ought to worship; — in whom, worshipping, we may joyfully trust; — and relying on whom we may to perfectly at rest, for he cannot fail us, neither can he fail himself in any respect or degree?

A third meaning of the expression “living” in Paul’s declaration, “We trust in the living God,” I have no doubt is to be found in the fact of the existence of God through all eternity. There was a time when you and I, who are now alive, were not alive; and there will be a time when, as far as this world is concerned, we shall be numbered with the dead. But there never was a period in which God did not live. He always was, and always is, and always will be “the living God.” Let your thoughts fly back to eternity if you can, — for, mark you, all our ideas of eternity are very shallow and superficial. We cannot form any clear notion of what “eternity” means; and the very fact that we speak of a “past” eternity proves that we have to bring it down to our finite apprehension, and to us inaccurate words to express our imperfect and incorrect ideas. But far back, when the sun, and moon, and stars, and the whole universe slept in the mind of God, as a forest sleeps within an acorn cup, even then God was “the living God.” Before the first ray of light had broken in upon the pristine darkness, — ay, before there was any darkness, — ere anything was created, — God was “the living God”, and was just as great and as glorious as he is now. Without an angel to sing his praise, or a human being to look up to him with holy reverence or with tearful repentance, — yet still independent of them all, he was “the living God” then. What, a blessing it is for us that it was so! There was never a period, in which Satan could plot and plan against us, but what God had existed before him eternally. That evil spirit is but the infant of a day compared with God, the Eternal of all the ages, the everlasting Father, who was always able to anticipate everything that could possibly occur, knowing beforehand all that might be detrimental to us, countermining every mine of the arch-enemy, and baffling all the old serpent’s cunning in such a way as, in the end, to add still more to his own glory.

And as he was “the living God” in the past, so he is “the living God” in the present, and just as truly living as he was ten thousand millions of years ago, — to speak of eternity after the fashion of men. Dr. Watts hit the mark when he sang, —

“He fills his own eternal NOW,

And sees our ages pass.”

Ages and years are past, or present, or future to us; but they are all present to him. When a man looks upon a map, he can cover a whole country with his hand; but a traveler has to journey many weary miles before he can cross that country from one end of it to the others; but on the map your hand covers it all; and all eternity is under the hand of God like that country on the map covered by a human hand. God is “the living God” now as much as ever he was; — as powerful, as wise, as loving, as tender, as strong as ever he was, blessed be his holy name.

And so he will be throughout the whole of the future. We cannot tell all that will yet happen in this world, but one thing we know, — God will always be “the living God.” It is probable that once powerful nations will be utterly destroyed, and that there will be terrible disasters beyond anything that has yet been experienced; we know that the present dispensation will utterly pass away, and that “the

mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed:" but this fact is sure, that he, who has been their dwelling-place of his people in all generations, will be the dwelling-place of his people in all the generations that are yet to come. There will never be a funeral knell to tell us that our great Lord is dead. There will be no need for weeping amongst the blessed spirits above because he, who was their Creator, Protector, Preserver, and Friend, has ceased to be, for he ever will be "the living God." So, because of his eternal existence, he is right worthy to bear this title, — ay, and to monopolize it, for it belongs to him alone.

"Great God! how infinite art thou!

What worthless worms are we!

Let the whole race of creatures bow,

And pay their praise to thee.

"Thy throne eternal ages stood,

Ere seas or stars were made;

Thou art the ever-living God,

Were all the nations dead.

"Eternity, with all its years,

Stands present in thy view;

To thee there's nothing old appears;

Great God! there's nothing new."

The fourth meaning of the text seems to me to be this. God is called "the living God" as being always himself really and truly God in the full capacity of his being. Sometimes we say of a man that he is "all alive." At another time, he does not appear to be fully quickened; he has life to some extent, but not in its fullness. We say of the man, by-and-by, that he is dead; — not that he has ceased to exist, for man will no more cease to exist than will God himself, but we speak of him as dead because his body, which is part of his being, lies mouldering in the tomb. But God is all life, and only life. No portion of him, (I must use human language, though the words are incorrect which I am using, as our words always must be when we speak of God,) no faculty, no power, no attribute of God, can be smitten by any paralysis, or can, in any degree, or in the slightest measurer, be subject to any failure which is at all akin to death. God is all alive, and altogether life, and nothing but life. God's wisdom is always infallible, his power is always almighty, his energy is at all times efficacious for everything that needs his attention. There never can come a time when he will be bowed down with age, or wearied with toil, or affected by suffering. "The living God" is the whole God, or, as the holy beings in heaven call him, — and it means the same thing, — "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." He is the whole God. Whatever the word "God" means, — and we do not know, nor shall we ever know, all that it means; it is too vast to be conceived by anyone but God himself; — but, whatever that is, that is what God always is to the full measure, never in any degree diminished by what we call death. He is evermore "the living God."

I like to think of this truth, because God himself speaks of it again and again. The Lord said to Moses in the wilderness, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" In the prophecy of Isaiah we read, "Thus saith the Lord; Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver?" And, a little, later, this prophet was inspired to write, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save;" and, to-day, he is as mighty as he was in these glorious days when, in the van of Israel's host, he led his people in safety through the depths of the sea, and delivered them for ever from the iron bondage of Pharaoh. Ay, blessed be his holy name, he is still "the living God" as full of life and power as ever he was.

Another meaning of this expression is, that God is active and energetic, and not a mere name. There are plenty of people who are willing to believe in a god of a certain sort, but I hardly know how to describe their god. They are not atheists; — they would be horrified if we called them by that name; — but their notion is that everything is regulated by what they call "the laws of nature." If you ask them what "nature" is, they give you some curious answers. One man says, "I do not go into your places of worship, and sit there, and hear you talk about God; I like to walk about, and worship nature." If it is in London that a man balks like that, I should like to ask him what he calls "nature." Does he mean these miles of brick walls, and the dark lanes and alleys at the back of them? If he means that, I should not like to worship his "nature." Or does he mean the grass in the meadows and the flowers of the field? If so, I hardly think that I should like to worship what cattle eat; it seems a degradation for a man to stoop as low as that. But they will say and do anything to get rid of the idea of the living and true God. "Nature" — "providence" — and so on, are the expressions they use, just as if "God" did not enter into their calculations, — or as if he had gone out of the business, and left the whole concern to go on by itself. I should not like to be the child of a father who, the moment I was born, had me washed and dressed by machinery, and

had a cradle ready for me to be rocked by machinery, and fed me by machinery, — who, all the while that I was under his roof, dressed me by machinery, and fed me by machinery, and taught me by machinery, but I never saw him; — in fact, I only knew that there was some mysterious force about somewhere, but I never saw him or it, — and never knew anything about his personality. That is the kind of dead force that many men call “God.” But our God, in whom we trust, is a God with a great, warm, loving heart, a thinking God, an active God, a working, personal God, who comes into the midst, of this world, and does not leave it to go on by itself. Although he is a stranger in the world, even as his people also are strangers and foreigners by reason of the revolt that men have made against their liege Lord and Sovereign, yet it is still his world, and he is still in it.

I like to think of “the living God” being in this world which he created; for, now, when I look at the cowslip or the daffodil, I know that it is God who paints these flowers of the spring so delicately. When I gather the geranium or the fuchsias, I know that it is God’s pencil which has been at work, and I love to look at the blossom, and feel that I am near to God, — just as I should feel if I were to go into a friend’s studio, and see, there some of his sketches and paintings. I know that he has been there, and that no other hand than his could paint that picture so well. And, in like manner, I know that no other hand but that of my God could paint these pictures of nature so beautifully, thus I am brought very near to “the living God.” O dear brethren and sisters, it is such a joy to me to remember that God is not a mere dead force, — an abstract something or other which gives energy to the world, or which did give energy to it ages ago, but has now gone away, and left the old energies to work till they wear themselves out! Oh, no; I believe that the Lord God still walketh among the trees of this garden, — that the Lord God, like a shepherd, still watcheth over his sheepfold, — that the Lord God still speaks to us in the thunder, smiles upon us in the sunlight, scatters his blessings down in the dew and the rain, — that he gives us the fruitful fields of harvest, and the golden days in which the sheaves can be gathered into the garner, — ay, and that he is just as truly at work for us in the winter months, sweetening the clods by the winds and the frost, and so preparing the earth to bring forth food for man and grass for the cattle. We delight to think that, in all these ways, God is still “the living God.”

Yet once again, God is “the living God” in that he is the Source of life, the Giver of life, and the Sustainer of life. We are living creatures, but he is the living Creator. We are living dependent, but he is “the living God” upon whom we all depend. He spoke us out of nothing, and he could speak us back to nothing if he pleased to do so. We are just the creatures of his will, living on his estates as tenants who may, at any moment, be dismissed at his pleasure, receiving the very breath that is in our nostrils at his absolute discretion. But God is life itself, and after all the streams which have flowed from him to his creatures, there is as much life in him as at the first; and when he saith, “Return, ye, children of men,” and we go back to him, he will have no more life than he has now; but he will be, as he always has been, “the living God.”

“Let them neglect thy glory, Lord,

Who never knew thy grace;

But our loud songs shall still record

The wonders of thy praise.

“’Twas he, and well adore his name,

That form’d us by a word;

’Tis he restores our ruin’d frame:

Salvation to the Lord!”

Now, in the six ways, I have brought out only one thought, which I want to impress on your minds, because it has been such a sweet thought to me. I have, in imagination, looked upon all whom I know upon the earth, and I have said of them all, “They are dying creatures.” This is always true, but it is often forgotten. Yet, when one is taken away who has been very precious to us, we begin to realize this truth. Thinking over this matter, I seem to see a procession going past me. I can remember many of those who have passed me. They have gone by while I have remained here, and I shall never see them here any more, — a long array of my Master’s servants, some of them bearing his banner aloft, and others marching with their swords drawn, because of fear in the night. Some of them were weak and feeble folk, who had to be guarded on both sides by sturdy champions. And now, those of you who are before me as I speak, are also passing away; and there are more coming on, but they are only coming that they may go. I said, just now, that I was looking on at this procession, but that was a mistake, for I am in the procession, and I am passing on with the rest! What shadows we all are! What fleeting things! What mists, — what paintings on a cloud! We can scarcely say that we live, for, the moment we begin to live, that moment we begin to die, and —

“Every beating pulse we tell

Leaves but the number less.”

This earth is not “the land of the living.” This world is a dying world; the living world is beyond death’s cold river. Here are graves innumerable. What part of the globe is there that has never yet been a cemetery? Every particle of dust, which is blown in your face in the street, may once have formed a portion of some living being? O death, thou rulest over all! No, thou dost not, for there is One who rules over even thee, O death! Thou canst have no power over “the living God”; but thou art his servant, permitted to work out his purpose, for it is through death that we pass into life. By the death of our redeeming Lord, we have been redeemed from destruction; and, therefore, we can turn away from everything that wears the aspect of death and change, and turn to him who is ever the same, and of whose years there is no end, — the Eternal, in whom we trust.

II. Thus have I set forth, as best I could, the great truth of the existence of “the living God.”

Now, in the second place, Let Us Draw Some Practical Inferences From This Great Truth.

And the first inference is this, — an inference of reverential awe and holy trembling. What a great God he is whom we have professed to worship! When a poor pagan bows down before his wooden god, I should not wonder if what little sense he has should make him loathe and ridicule himself; but we have gathered here to worship “the living God.” Moses tells us, in Deuteronomy 5:26, that the Israelites said, when the law was given to them, “Who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?” Well might they stand there trembling because “the living God” had come down, and touched the mountains, so that they smoked like great altars of incense. This is the God whom we worship. Far hence be all trifling! Vain thoughts, begone! Before “the living God” we should prostrate ourselves in the very dust. O you, who profess to serve the Lord, mind that you serve him faithfully, for it is “the living God” whom you serve, the God who is not to be mocked with hypocritical service! O you, who know that you are not reconciled to him, remember that it is to “the living God” that you are not reconciled; and recollect that solemn and true declaration, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” and that other, “Our God is a consuming fire.” So I say that our first inference should be that of reverential awe and holy trembling.

The next should be, to God’s people, an inference of holy courage. Are we on the Lord’s side? Then, my brethren and sisters, let us never fear, for we are on the side of “the living God.” Who can successfully defy him? Who dares to throw down the gage of battle against him? You remember what young David said to Saul concerning Goliath of Gath, “Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.” It was grandly put, as though he had said, “This big fellow is only the servant of a dead god, and he and his god may both come out against me, and I, little as I am, yea, to than nothing in myself, will go to him in the name of the living God, and bring back his head as the trophy of victory. Let no man’s heart fail because of him.” So now, if the biggest Goliath that ever lived at Rome or anywhere else should come stalking out against us, let us say, “Who is he, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” If the God of Israel is not now living, all is over with the cause of truth and righteousness; but we may say, as David did on another occasion, “The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock.” As long as he liveth, we may boldly say, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

This, too, should be our great security in time of danger. I like to recall that incident in the life of Hezekiah when he took that abominable Assyrian letter, “and spread it before the Lord.” Do you ever take your letters to the Lord, brother? That is the best thing in the world to do with them when they are very evil ones. Hezekiah spread his letter before the Lord, and said, “Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, Lord, thine eyes, and see: and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God.” That was the point, and the king felt quite sure that Sennacherib would be overthrown because he had defied the living God. If God had been a dead god, Sennacherib might have done with him as he did with other idol gods. He asked, “Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed?” He did not realize that they were all broken to pieces because they were mere idols; but, this time, he was defying “the living God.” If, brother, “the living, God” is on thy side, “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.” If you, beloved, are walking before “the living God” in all sincerity, even if Sennacherib with a mighty host should come against you, the Lord your God would send his holy angel, and smite your foes, and you should surely be delivered. Have no doubt or fear, if your God is “the living God.”

And this truth, brethren, should always make us fearless of men; for, after all, what are men? Remember what the Lord said to his servant, the prophet Isaiah, “Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?” The most powerful and most cruel man, who ever dares to threaten you, is only a man that shall die, and the Lord Jesus says to you, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” Herod is soon eaten of worms. Persecuting monarchs soon disappear when God condemns them. Therefore, while “the living God” is your God, never be afraid of a dying man.

Fear him, ye saints, and you will then

Have nothing else to fear

Another inference from this truth is this. It should bring relief to us in times of bereavement. Sorrow is natural to us, but to push sorrow to an extreme is wrong. I have heard of a good woman, who had lost her husband, and who continued sorrowing over her loss for a very long time. Her little boy saw her weeping day after day, and, at last, plucking her by the gown, he, said to her, "Mother, is God dead?" "No, dear," she said; "but your father is." But that question made her stay her grief, as it well might; for, if God is not dead, our best Friend still lives, so let us be of good cheer. If people had to come here, and say, "That good woman, whom God so greatly blessed in the church's work, is dead; and that dear brother, whom we all loved, is dead; and the Pastor, too, is dead;" who could help sorrowing? But even then it would still be true that "the Lord liveth." Always get back to that great fact, "the Lord liveth." We shall have to put our beloved ones into the grave, but "the Lord liveth," blessed be his name; and as long as God lives, we need never ask, "What shall we do?" It is true that we shall not do much, but God will. We must never say, "Oh, there is such a great gap, it cannot be filled." God is alive, and he can fill it, so you must not give way to despondency or despair. We may grieve, for even Jesus wept, but let us never distrust the Lord; for, as surely as he takes away one worker, he knows how to raise up another; and if the Lord should take from thee thy husband, he will himself be thy Husband; if he should let thee be fatherless, he will be thy Father; and if he should leave thee childless, good woman, he will say to thee, "Am I not better unto thee than ten sons?" He can fill up every gap; yea, and make your soul to overflow with supreme content.

'Lo, I am with you,' saith the Lord,

'My church shall safe abide;

For I will ne'er forsake my own,

Whose souls in me confide.'

"Through every scene of life and death,

This promise is our trust;

And this shall be our children's song,

When we are cold in dust.

This truth ought also to keep us from grieving too much over our losses and crosses in business. You have had a great loss to-day, friend, and your face looks very long over it; or you have heard of someone who was the means of bringing you much business, who has removed or is dead. Well, but "the Lord liveth." "Trust in the living God." There have been times, in the little business I have had to do for the Lord in connection with the Orphanage and the College, when the funds have been very short, and sometimes have run quite out I have scraped the bottom of the meal barrel a good many times, and I have had to squeeze the cruse to get a drop more oil out of it; but we have trusted in the living God; and, up till now, we have always found him worthy of being trusted, and we believe we always shall. There have been failures and mistakes on our part, and on the part of our friends, but never any on God's part. We must all bear that testimony; let us, therefore, all "trust in the living God." If an ill wind blows upon us, let us believe that, somehow or other, it will blow us some good; and if a rough tide comes up, let us believe that it will in some way or other, wash us nearer to our desired haven.

Once again, "we trust in the living God," and this gives us the richest consolation concerning our departed Christian friends. As "the Lord liveth," and he is their God, they are not dead. You remember Christ's argument, with the Sadducees, it was this, — God has said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living;" so that the dead saints are not really dead. Whenever there cometh out a new error, it generally breeds another, for errors are very prolific. Some people started the notion that the soul of man is not immortal, — that the soul of the wicked would die. I was quite sure that, when they got as far as that error, they would go still further; and so the next notion was that every part of us will die when we die, — that there is no soul that is immortal, or no soul at all, and that the righteous dead are all in their graves, souls and bodies and everything. That is the beautiful materialistic notion that, after having received Christianity, we are expected to imbibe; but we are not such idiots, whatever they may think of us. We shall never believe that all our beloved friends, who, according to the Scriptures, have been with Jesus these many years, have never been with Jesus at all; in fact, do not exist at all, except whatever may be found of them in their coffins or in their graves. How could that be if God was their God, and if Christ's words are true, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." "They are alive, brethren, — as much alive as they were alive here, with the exception of that mortal part which they have left behind to be prepared for immortality, as Dr. Watts truly wrote, —

"Corruption, earth, and worms

Shall but refine this flesh

Till my triumphant spirit comes

To put it on afresh.”

We go down to our graves, as Esther went to her bath of spices, to be prepared for the embrace of the great King; and, in the morning of the resurrection, this poor body of ours, all fair and lustrous, shall be reunited with our glorified spirit, and we shall behold the face of the King in his beauty, and be with him for ever and ever. “God is not the God of the dead:” and, therefore, those of whom he is the God will never die. The inference is clear and forcible. Believe in it, hold to it, and rejoice in it, for it will comfort you to know that, as he is your God you will never die. “God is not the God of the dead:” then, blessed be his holy name, I am not dead, though once I was dead, for he has quickened me into life; and I never shall be dead any more, for Jesus said, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” “The living God” is not the Father of dead souls, but he has an innumerable host of living children to be his heirs, and to dwell with him for ever. Did you ever notice that passage where Joshua tells the people to be ready to go over the Jordan, and says that, when the priests’ feet shall touch the river, it shall divide, and the ark shall be carried across? “And then,” said he, “hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites.” The joyful triumphs of believers in death, when they metaphorically cross the Jordan, are proofs to us that God is with his people, that he will drive out all our enemies before us, and give us a triumphant entrance into the promised land above. Glory be to the name of “the living God” for ever!

III. Now I finish with the question which I said I might ask: it is this, — IS “The Living God” Your God?

If so, then remember how near he is to you, for Paul tells us, in 2 Corinthians 6:16, “Ye are the temple of the living God.” I will not dwell on that sentence, though I am tempted to do so; but what a wonderful thing it is that “the living God” should be willing to dwell inside our bodies! Oh, let us keep these bodies pure, and let us see to it that we never fall under that terrible curse, “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy;” but may our body, soul, and spirit be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

And, dear brethren, if “the living God” be, really ours, let us thirst after him, let us say, as did the writer of the 42nd Psalm, “As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.” He is “the living God”, so thirst after him, and keep on thirsting after him, and do not be content to try to live without him; for, to live without “the living God” is to have death in life, and not truly to live at all. Think, child of God, “the living God” dwells within you; seek to realize his presence, long and pant to realize it more and more.

Are any of you obliged to answer my question truthfully by saying, “No, the living God is not mine”? Then, I must repeat to you those two texts that I quoted earlier in my sermon: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” “for our God is a consuming fire.” That latter text has often been spoilt by being misquoted. I have many times heard it quoted, “God, out of Christ, is a consuming fire.” That is not the text at all; it is “our God” — the Christians God — God in Christ “is a consuming fire”; and if he is a consuming fire to his own people, what will he be to the ungodly? That is a wonderful question that is asked in Isaiah 33:14: “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” And the answer is, “Nobody can, except the man that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly,” and so on. The prophet goes on to describe the man who has been renewed by grace, for he is the only man who can live in the everlasting burnings of the divine majesty and purity. He can live there because the devouring fire will only burn up everything in him that is unlike to God; but the new life that is in the Christian, the grace that the Holy Spirit puts into us, will endure the fire. Everything that appertains to man and to man’s work must be tried by fire; and if God has built into us the gold, and silver, and precious stones of his grace, and if we have built upon them our life work, both we and our work will endure the trial by fire.

But, sinner, you also will have to go through that fire; and seeing that there is nothing in you but the wood, and hay, and stubble of self and sin, — nothing in you but that which is foul and obnoxious to God, unholy and unrighteous, — or self-righteous, which is really unrighteous, — the fire will consume it. All your glory, your peace, your happiness, everything that makes life to be life, will be taken from you, and there shall remain for you nothing but existence, and this is the description of that existence, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment.” Oh, may the Lord, who alone can give you life, give it to you now; for, if not, there will remain nothing but an everlasting death to be your portion. From that may you now be delivered, of his infinite mercy, through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

1 Timothy 5:22 Accomplices in Sin

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"Neither be partaker of other men's sins." — 1 Timothy 5:22.

WE have all abundant reason to look at home, and see about our own sins. Nothing can be more absurd than for a man to take his hoe, and weed everybody else's garden, and leave all the thorns and thistles to flourish on his own plot. The old parable of the man who carried two bags, one behind and one in front, and who put other people's faults into the one in front, and his own into the one at his back, is a very correct representation of the folly of those who have their eyes widely open to see the faults of their neighbors, but are totally blind to their own imperfections. If, as our proverb puts it, "Charity begins at home," so should criticism; and criticism concerning character had better stop there. There is so much dirty linen in our own house needing to be washed that none of us need to take in our neighbor's washing. "Mind your own business," is a command that might have been spoken by Solomon himself, and the apostle Paul was inspired to write to the Thessalonians, "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business;" and he and Peter very sternly condemned those who were "busybodies in other men's matters."

So it is not my intention to bid any of you to cease to look to your own affairs; but, at the same time, I want to remind you that we cannot, in this world, live altogether to ourselves. He who is most bent upon minding his own business cannot help knowing that his next-door neighbor has something to do with his garden. Even if he looks diligently after his own plot, thistle seeds from the left and the right may blow over into his garden, and trouble will come to him from the very fact that he has neighbors. Our dwelling-houses, in this life, are not all detached; many of us have to live in streets; and if our neighbor's house is on fire, it is not at all unlikely that the flames may spread to our dwelling. Let us never be so concerned about our own interest as to be selfish; for, even if we try to be wholly wrapped up in ourselves, we shall be compelled to notice the actions of others, with whom we are more or less intimately linked, whether we wish to do so, or not. Hence, the message of the text is necessary, not to take us away from our own duty, but to help us to see that we are not "partakers of other men's sins."

The connection in which this text stands must be noticed. Timothy was exhorted by Paul to "lay hands suddenly on no man." There were certain upstarts who wrongly thought that they could preach, and there were others who thought that they could rule in the churches. These persons probably gained a few or many partisans to support their claims. There were some of their relatives, in the church, who thought a great deal of their sons, or brothers, or uncles, or cousins, or there were friends who heard some man speak, on a certain occasion, with considerable fluency, and being unwise, they judged him to be man of master-mind, and would have put him into the front rank of the army at once if the power to do so had rested with them. Paul tells Timothy, whom he had sent to exercise a general oversight over the officers and members of the church, not to be in a hurry to lay his hands upon these men, so as to endorse their claim, but to let them wait awhile until they were tried and tested; because, if he allowed them to take office in the church, and they committed faults or follies, he would be responsible for them, and everybody would say, "We wonder that Timothy should have sent out such men as these." So he was bidden to be cautious, lest he should become, in any way, "a partaker of other men's sins." None of us are exactly in Timothy's position; so we are not likely to fall into the fault against which Paul warned him, at least, not in precisely the same form; yet the text has a message to us, and we may say to one another, "Be not partakers of other men's sins."

I. I shall first try to show you How We Can Be Partakers Of Other Men's Sins; and, in doing that, I am afraid that the various ways in which we can do this will seem to be very many; and that, if I am not very careful, you will think that my sermon is like Ezekiel's valley of vision, in which the bones were, "very many" and "very dry." I will not be more prolix than I can help; but, at the same time, I must deal with the subject somewhat in detail.

As to how we can become accomplices in other people's sins, — the preacher must first say to himself that he will be such a man if he is not true to his trust. If he shall teach false doctrine, or if, teaching the true doctrines, he shall teach them erroneously; — if he shall keep back unpalatable truths; — if he shall allow sin to pass without reproof; — if he shall see a great deficiency of spiritual life and service, and not point it out; — if, in brief, he shall be an unfaithful servant of Christ, and his hearers shall thereby be kept in a low state of grace, inconsistent with their profession, and the unconverted shall be hindered from coming to Christ, he will become a partaker in other men's sins. Indeed, I know of no man who is more likely to fall into the fault indicated in the text than a minister of the gospel is. Oh, what grace we need, and what help from on high lest, if we fail in faithfulness to God and our hearers, the doom of souls should be laid at our door, and we should be partakers of other men's sins! Brethren, pray for us that this may not be our unhappy lot.

'Tis not a cause of small import

**The pastor's care demands;
But what might fill an angel's heart,
And fill'd a Saviors hands.
“They watch for souls for which the Lord
Did heavenly buss forego;
For souls which must for ever live
In raptures or in woe.
“May they that Jesus, whom they preach,
Their own Redeemer see;
And watch THOU daily o'er their souls,
That they may watch for THEE.”**

That piece is specially intended for myself and my brother-ministers; the rest of my discourse will be for you as well as myself. So, next, I must remind you that we can all of us be partakers of other men's sins by willfully joining with them in any act of sin, and doing as they do, like those sinners, mentioned by Solomon in the Book of Proverbs, who said, “Cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse.” We must have nothing to do with such men; God forbid that we should! If we sin alone, it is bad enough; but if we sin in company, we have not only to answer for our own sins, but also for the sins of others, at least in part. If hand joins with hand in sin, there is a multiplication of its guilt; for each man who has helped to lead a fellow-creature into iniquity will have his own transgression increased by the transgression of that other sinner. By their combination, the two will become capable of even greater guilt than they would have committed individually. God save us all from being accomplices in the sins of others by uniting with them in their sinful acts and deeds!

Further, we may be partakers in other men's sins by tempting them to sin. This is a most hateful thing, and makes the man who practices it to become the devil's most devoted drudge, servant, and slave. I have known such tempters of others, — old men who, from their youth up, had sinned in such a shameful way that their very looks were full of lechery. There was a leer about their eyes that was almost enough to destroy all chastity that came beneath their glance; and their speech was full of the double entendre, insinuations, and innuendoes, which were almost worse than open profanity. I have known one such walking mass of putrefaction defile a whole parish; and when I have seen a boy walking with such a demon incarnate, or sitting down with him in the public-house, I knew that the boy's character would be ruined if that vile doctor in devilry could only instruct him in the vices with which he is himself so shamefully familiar. There are such fiends in London, and we could almost wish to have them all buried straight away, for they are Satan's servants spreading wickedness all around them. I do not suppose I am addressing one such dreadful creature; yet I know that some great sinners of that sort do come within these walls, and they will, of course, be very angry because of my allusion to them; yet I never knew a thief who was fond of a policeman, and I do not expect or wish to secure the approval of scoundrels whose evil character I am exposing. If, sir, I have described thee, and thou wilt not repent of thy sin, I tell thee that the hottest place in hell is reserved for thee, for thou hast led young men to the alehouse, and taught them to drink the devil's drugs, and to repeat thy foul blasphemies, and to imitate thy scandalous lasciviousness. Yet, ere it is too late, I beseech thee to repent of thy sin, that it may be blotted out by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, which cleanseth from all sin; for, if not, “other men's sins” will cry out against thee for judgment at the bar of the Almighty. I solemnly charge all of you, who have not committed this iniquity, never to do so; take care that you never say a word which might stain the innocence of a child's mind, and that you never let fall an expression which might, in any way, be the means of leading another person into sin, for it is an easy thing for us to become partakers of other men's sins by tempting them to commit iniquity.

If there is any evil worse than that, I think it is that of employing others to sin. It was one of the basest parts of David's great sin that, when he wanted to have Uriah killed, he did not slay him himself, but got Joab to expose him in a position where he was certain to be killed. It is horrible when a man is determined to be dishonest, yet gets someone else to commit the sin for him. It is a shameful thing that there are professedly “religious” employers, who try to get their young men to say across the counter what they know is not according to truth. Are there not some of these so-called “Christian” employers who want young men who are not “too particular”? Do I not hear, every now and then, of young men who have been found to be too scrupulous, and who have been told that they had better get situations somewhere else. They objected to describe the goods as their employer wanted them to do, because they knew it would be a lie. They were told, “It is the custom in the trade, and therefore must be so here;” that is to say, because other persons were liars and cheats, these young men must be knaves, and their master must make money by their lying

to his customers. Now, if I meant to thief or deceive, I would do it myself, I would not employ young men and women, or old ones either, to lie and cheat for me. If any of you have done so, I pray God that he may lead you to repent of such abominable wickedness, for the sin is not one half theirs and the other half yours; it is partly theirs, but it is far more yours, if they are doing wrong at your bidding. God save us all from being “partakers of other men’s sins” in that way!

Some commit this great crime by driving other men into sin, by the fears which they have inspired, or by oppressing them in their wages, or by setting them to do what must involve them in sin. I remember the case of a man who was employed where it was well known that some of the parcels which he collected on his way, and carried to their destination, would never be booked by him, but the price paid for the carriage would be secretly dropped into his own pocket. The man’s wages were so small that nobody, unless an idiot, ever believed that he lived on them; so, tacitly, the understanding was that the man would be sure to pilfer on his own account, so his wages were cut down below the point at which he could earn an honest living. I fear that there are many men who are dishonest for this reason; I will not excuse them, but I hope that, if they are ever sent to prison for stealing, their masters will be sent with them, for they are equally guilty.

Yet again, we may become partakers of the sins of others by a misuse of our position over them. This is especially the case with parents. When a father is a man of loose habits, if his son follows his evil example, who is to blame? If a drunken father sees his child become a drunkard, whose fault is it? If he is a swearer, and his son uses profane language, who taught the boy those oaths? Is not the guilt of that swearing largely the father’s? “Oh!” say some of you, “we would not teach our children either drunkenness or profanity.” Yet you are not yourselves Christians; you may be moral and truthful, and so on, but you are not Christians; and if your children are not converted, will they not say, “Our father never was converted, so why should we be?” “But we always take them to a place of worship.” I know you do, and your children say, “Father goes to a place of worship, but he does not believe in Christ, and he never prays;” so, if they grow up in the same way, who is to blame? You say that you trust they will not do so; then ask the Lord to make you a Christian, for then it will be more likely that your children also will be Christians. When you blame your children for wrongdoing, you ought to blame yourselves even more; for, after all, what are they doing but what you yourself are doing? Plato, the philosopher, one day saw a boy in the street behaving in a very shameful manner, so he walked straight into the house where the boy’s father lived, and began to beat him. When he said to Plato, “Why do you beat me?” the philosopher replied, “I found your boy doing wrong; I did not beat him, but I beat you, for he must have learnt it from you, or else it was your fault because you did not exercise proper discipline upon him at home.” Have you never felt, when you have seen the faults of your own children, that you ought to lay the rod on your own back because, in some way or other, you were an accomplice in your children’s sins? How much of the ruin of many children’s souls lies at their parents’ door! How sad it is that, in many cases, the influence of the mother and father is damning to their children! Men and women, who have boys and girls at home who are very dear to you, can you bear the thought that you may, one day, have to say, “Our unchristian example has ruined our own children”?

“Oh, but we are members of the church,” say some. Yes, I know you are; yet I speak to you as well as to others, for there are some of you who are bringing up your children in an improper manner. I do not see how they can be expected to love religion when they see your own household ordered so badly, or not ordered at all. The professor of religion, who does not live consistently with his profession, does more injury to the cause of Christ than a non-professor does. There are some who hang out the sign of “The Angel”, but the devil keeps the inn. Someone has truly said that many a man’s house is like Noah’s ark in that it is pitched within and without with pitch. There is pitch in the dining-room, — gluttony and drunkenness; and pitch in the bed-chamber, — lasciviousness and wantonness; pitch in the drawing-room, — talk which is not even fit for the stables; and pitch in the shop, for much that is “dirty” goes on there; how can anyone expect good children to come out of such a house as that? May none of us, like Eli, be accomplices in our children’s sins through neglecting to rebuke them, or like David, through our evil example leading them into sin! On the contrary, let us pray for them, as Abraham cried to the Lord, “O that Ishmael might live before thee!” I like to present to God the petitions and pleas which are so well worded in that hymn in “Our Own Hymn Book” which is attributed to Rowland Hill,

“Thou, who a tender Parent art,

Regard a parent’s plea:

Our offspring, with an anxious heart,

We now commend to thee.

“Our children are our greatest care,

A charge which thou hast given:

In all thy graces let them share,

And all the joys of heaven.

**“If a centurion could succeed,
Who for his servant cried;
Wilt thou refuse to hear us plead
For those so near allied?
“On us thou hast bestow’d thy grace,
Be to our children kind;
Among thy saints give them a place,
And leave not one behind.”**

The injunction of the text of course applies, in a measure, to the teacher of a class as well as to the parent of a family. If the teacher is inconsistent, and his scholars imitate him, the guilt of their wrong-doing will, at least in part, rest upon the teacher. The same principle applies to all persons who are in positions of influence in the land. If I were preaching to the House of Commons and the House of Lords, I should probably have to say some things which they would not wish to hear again. Certain “honorable gentlemen” and “noble lords” talk very glibly about the necessity for the nation to be religious, yet their lives are not remarkably religious, so their talk is all hypocritical, and great sin lies at their door. God will certainly punish princes and so-called “nobles” if their example is not such as the common people can safely follow.

But even though we may not be of royal or exalted rank, all of us will become “partakers of other men’s sins” if we set them bad examples. If they can quote us as having done certain wrong things which they have imitated, we must share in the guilt of their sin; yet it is always a bad thing to follow a bad example. If I see anyone’s example to be bad, it, ought not to be a temptation to me; and I am a partaker of that man’s sins if, knowing that he has done amiss, I also do amiss simply because he has done so first. If I know that his course is wrong, I ought to shun the rock on which his bark has been wrecked.

We can also be “partakers of other men’s sins” by countenancing them, and there are many ways in which that may be done; — for instance, by associating with ungodly men, as though we did not think there was much harm in them; and, worst of all, by laughing at and with them when their mirth is not pure fun. I fear that many a wicked man has been hardened in his sin because a professing Christian has laughed at his filthy jests.

We may also be “partakers of other men’s sins” by joining a church that holds unscriptural doctrines, or that does not act according to apostolic precedent. Some people say, “We belong to such-and-such a church, but we don’t approve of its teaching or its practice.” What! you belong to it, and yet you do not approve of its principles? Out of your own mouth you are condemned. If I unite with a church, whose creed and catechism I do not believe, and whose ordinances I do not practice, I am guilty of my own share in all the error that is there. It is no use for me to say, “I am trying to undo the mischief;” I have no business to be there. If I join a pirate’s crew, I shall be responsible for all that is done by the whole crew. I have no business to be on that vessel at all, and I must get out of it at the first opportunity, or even fling myself into the sea, rather than have a share in the pirates’ wrongdoing.

But supposing you have joined a church whose doctrines are scriptural, you may be “partakers of other men’s sins” if the discipline of the church is not carried out as it should be. If we know that members are living in gross sin, and do not deal with them either by way of censure or excommunication, in accordance with the teaching of Christ and his apostles, we become accomplices in their sin. I often tremble about this matter, for it is no easy task where we count our members by thousands; but may we never wink at sin, either in ourselves or in others! May you all, beloved, exercise a jealous oversight over one another, and so help to keep one another right! And let each one pray Charles Wesley’s prayer which we have often sung, —

**“Quick as the apple of an eye,
O God, my conscience make!
Awake, my soul, when sin is nigh,
And keep it still awake.”**

Further, we may be “partakers of other men’s sins” by not rebuking them for sinning, if it be our duty to do so, or by not doing all we can towards their conversion; for instance, by living in a certain neighborhood, and never trying to bring the gospel to the people in that neighborhood, or by not maintaining our consistent Christian walk as the separated people of God. In brief, let each one sing, from the heart, the rest of that hymn from which I began to quote just now, —

“I want a principle within
Of jealous godly fear;
A sensibility of sin,
A pain to feel it near.
“I want the first approach to feel
Of pride, or fond desire;
To catch the wandering of my will,
And quench the kindling fire.
That I from thee no more may part,
No more thy goodness grieve,
The filial awe, the fleshy heart,
The tender conscience give.
“If to the right or left I stray,
That moment, Lord, reprove;
And let me weep my life away,
For having grieved thy love.
Oh may the least omission pain
My well-instructed soul;
And drive me to the blood again,
Which makes the wounded whole!

II. I must not say more upon this part of the subject, lest I should weary you; so I pass on to ask, in the second place, Why Should We Seek To Avoid Being Partakers Of Other Men’s Sins?

This will be a sufficient answer, — Because we have more than enough sins of our own, and cannot also carry other people’s; and also because, if we are partakers in their sins, we shall also partake in their plagues; and also because we do other men an injury by being accomplices with them; we steel and harden them in their sins.

The weightiest reason, of all is this, — we should not be “partakers of other men’s sins” because, by so doing, we should grieve our holy and gracious God, and no true lover of Christ ought ever to do that. Remember what Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus, “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.”

III. My next question is, — How Can We Avoid Being Partakers In Other Men’s Sins?

And I reply, — Only by the help of God’s Spirit. First, be very jealous about other men’s sins. I wish all parents acted as wisely as Job did concerning his children; they went to one another’s houses, and feasted, so Job “rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” O parents, do likewise, for that is the way to keep yourselves from participation in your children’s sins.

Next to being thus jealous with a holy jealousy, be always on the watch lest you should be “partakers in other men’s sins.” The man who wants to avoid certain diseases will take care not to go to an infected house. So, go not where sinners go, lest you should catch the infection of their sin. Remember how careful Abraham was not to take anything from the king of Sodom, “from a thread even to a shoelatchet,” even, though it was his lawful share of the spoils of war. Be ye equally careful concerning even the least sin.

The next way to keep from being an accomplice in sin is by prayer. Augustine used to offer a short prayer which I commend to you

all, "O Lord, save me from mine other men's sins!" Put this down among your other confessions, "O Lord, I confess unto thee mine other men's sins! I mourn over mine other men's sins, I repent of mine other men's sins, I grieve on account of my participation in other men's sins." This will be a good way of keeping from committing them.

I think I had better close by saying that I do not think we have any of us escaped from the meshes of this sermon; if we have done so, it is either my fault or the fault of our own consciences. I have tried to fire red-hot shot in all directions, not omitting myself; and most of us have felt that there was a shot specially meant for us. What had we better do then? I will call to your minds a verse which we often sing, and which we will again sing almost immediately, —

**"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains."**

We are all stained with at least splashes from other men's sins as well as our own; so let us all go to the fountain, and wash, let us renew our faith in the precious blood of Jesus; for, if we never had any faith in it before, may God graciously grant it to us now! If we had rebelled against the Queen, and had been at last subdued by force, and if there had been an Act of Oblivion passed for all who wished to claim an interest in it, perhaps some would say to themselves, "We do not know that we took any great part in the rebellion, yet it may be that we did; and the safest thing for us all to do is, to put down our names, and so secure the benefit of the Act of Oblivion." So I, as one of the guilty ones, confessing that it is so, desire to say to the great King, "My Lord, I am guilty of sins of my own, and sins of my children, and sins of my servants, and sins of my neighbors, and sins of my church, and sins of my congregation; — but thou hast said, 'I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' Thou hast promised to blot out all sin from those who believe in Jesus Christ thy Son. Lord, I believe in him, so I claim the benefit of that Act of Oblivion." Dear hearer, will not you say the same? Will not you now obey that divine command, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth"? Though you have gone to the ends of the earth, yet God says to you, "Look unto me, and be ye saved." Look! Look! LOOK! It is little that you have to do; indeed, it is nothing that you have to do, for God gives you grace to do all that he requires of you. So trust in him, rest in him; the Lord help you so to do, and then, whatever your sins may have been, though they may have been "as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;" though they may have been "red like crimson, they shall be as wool." God bless you, and save you, for his name's sake! Amen.

Now let us all sing the verse that I quoted just now, —

**"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains;" —**

and let all who can sing it from the heart join in the well-known chorus, —

**"I do believe, I will believe,
That Jesus died for me;
That, on the cross, he shed his blood
From sin to set me free."**

Exposition on 1Timothy by C H Spurgeon 1Timothy 1

1Ti 1:1. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope;

Christ is our hope; we have not a shadow of a hope apart from him. I remember, when on the Continent, seeing on a cross the

words "Spes unica," the unique, the only hope of man; and that is true of the cross of Christ, and of Christ who suffered on it, he is our hope.

1Ti 1:2. Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Notice the apostle's triple salutation, "Grace, mercy, and peace." Whenever Paul writes to a church, he wishes "grace and peace"; but to a minister he wishes "grace, mercy, and peace." Ah! we want mercy more than the average of Christians; we have greater responsibilities; and, consequently, might more readily fall into greater sin, so to a minister Paul's salutation is, "grace, mercy, and peace."

1Ti 1:3, 4. As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.

You see, the apostle, in his day, had to contend against those who ran away from the simplicity of the gospel into all manner of fables and inventions. Such, in our day, are the doctrine of evolution, the doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God, the doctrine of post-mortem salvation, the doctrine of the final restitution of all men, and all sorts of fables and falsehoods which men have invented.

1Ti 1:5-7. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from, which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

There were some who put the law into its wrong place. They made it a way of salvation, which it never was meant to be, and never can be. It is a way of conviction. It is an instrument of humbling. It shows us the evil of sin; but it never takes sin away.

1Ti 1:8. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully;

In its own place it has its own uses, and these are most important.

1Ti 1:9-13. Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled Me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer,

Paul must have written this verse with many tears. What a wonder of grace it was that he should be put into the sacred ministry, to bear testimony for Christ, when he had been before a blasphemer!

1Ti 1:13. And a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

He almost thought that, if he had done all this wilfully, he might not have been forgiven; but he felt that here God spied out the only extenuating circumstance, namely, that he was mistaken: "I did it ignorantly, in unbelief."

1Ti 1:14, 15. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am, chief.

He spoke from his heart, from deep experience. This indeed was to him the glorious gospel of the blessed God, that had saved him, the very chief of sinners. He could therefore with confidence commend it to others as worthy of all acceptance.

1Ti 1:16. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

The case of Paul is not a singular one; it is the pattern one. If there are any here who feel that they have sinned like Saul of Tarsus, they may be forgiven like Paul the apostle. He is a pattern to all who should thereafter believe in Christ to life everlasting. Just as we often see things cut out in brown paper, and sold as patterns, so is the apostle Paul the pattern convert. What God did for him, he can do for thousands of others.

1Ti 1:17. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul could not help this outburst of praise. He must put in a doxology. When he remembered his own conversion and pardon, and his being entrusted with the ministry of the gospel, he was obliged to put down his pen, and lift up his voice in grateful thanksgiving to God. So may it be with us, be with us, as we remember what great things the Lord hath done for us!

I NEED HELP WITH MY CASH FLOW

Robert Morgan

On this Labor Day weekend, I'd like to begin a series of messages on the subject: "I Need Help ASAP." Everywhere we turn, there are cries for help; and each of us needs help in some form or fashion every day. The Bible says that God is a very present help in trouble, and that we should come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in times of need. Psalm 54 says, "Behold, God is my helper." As the hymnist said, God is our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.

So for the next eight week, I'd like to speak on four subjects relevant to our lives: I Need Help with my Finances, with My Feelings, with My Faith, and with my Family. I'm going to devote two messages to each of those themes.

Today's message is the first of two messages on the topic of finances, and today I'd like to speak on the subject: "I Need Help with My Cash flow."

We live in the most affluent generation in history, yet Americans are spending money at record levels, and our outflow is exceeding our income. Someone once told me, "If your output exceeds your income, your upkeep will be your downfall."

Well, that's happening to Americans today at record levels. Low interest rates and the universal availability of easy credit means that millions of Americans are struggling with back-breaking loads of personal debt.

One article I read reported that the average amount of personal debt in the United States (excluding mortgages) amounts to nearly \$20,000 per family. Furthermore, the average family in America has credit card debt amounting to over \$8000. But I know a lot of people whose debt load is much greater. And when you add school loans, car loans, and home loans into the mix, it becomes very, very stressful.

I know that many people in our church are facing financial struggles, and it isn't always our faults. Sometimes, even when we do the best we can, we just have more expenses than we have income, and that causes a lot of problems.

I obviously can't solve these problems with one sermon. But it does seem to me that this is an issue that should be addressed in the Bible and in the pulpit. The Scripture is packed with guidance and wisdom regarding money management; and some of our difficulty comes because we ignore what the Lord Himself says about this important area of life.

Today I'd like to suggest five questions to ask before making a purchase of any significance. If you're thinking about buying a car or a suit or a stereo or a sofa or anything of any worth, I want to give you five questions from the Bible. If we'd learn to ask these five questions, it would go a long way toward solving our problems with cash flow. These questions are found in 1 Timothy 6.

Introduction

Paul begins this chapter, 1 Timothy 6, by warning Timothy to watch out for false teachers and perfidious prophets. He says that some people are in the so-called ministry just for the sake of money. Look at how he begins in verse 3:

If anyone teaches otherwise [if anyone teaches and preaches anything other than the pure Gospel doctrine I am giving you] and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Notice that phrase: "...a means of gain." These charlatans thought that preaching and ministry was a nice little scam for making money. In our own day and time, great damage has been inflicted on the church by spurious and perfidious television evangelists, who beg for money, make outlandish claims and promises, and very often teach questionable doctrines and promote heretical views.

In the first century, there were televangelists, too. They didn't have televisions yet, of course; but it was simply a first century version of it. They discovered they could tell pitiful stories of human need, ask for financial assistance, and thousands of people would pull

out their checkbooks and give them a gift. They were motivated by money. They supposed that godliness was a means of gain. Paul told Timothy to disassociate himself from them.

Now in the next paragraph, Paul is going to shift gears and say that the love of money is not a problem limited to false teachers and spurious televangelists. Sometimes all of us who are Christians are too greedy and too money-conscious. It's something against which we all have to guard. He devotes the rest of the chapter to this subject of cash flow.

His primary point is this: Some things in life are truly permanent, and some things are truly passing. The world treats the passing things as though they were permanent, and it treats the permanent things as though they were passing. Christians, on the other hand, are unique in that they treat passing things as though they were passing, and permanent things as though they were permanent. And the essence of worldliness in the church is when we begin treating passing things as permanent and permanent things as passing.

Some things are vanishing; some things are valuable. The essence of worldliness is when we ourselves reverse these values. We get reversed in our thinking, spending most of our time, money, attention, and affection on things that are vanishing; and forgetting or ignoring the things that are really valuable.

Now based on what Paul wrote here in 1 Timothy 6, I'd like to give you these five questions to ask yourself before making any significant purchase. Suppose you are going out to buy a television, a car, a piece of electronics, a new wardrobe, a new piece of furniture, a boat, a new tool or toy—almost anything of any significance. What determines whether we buy something or not?

Usually it's determined by whether we have money in our pocket or a piece of plastic in our billfold. But I want to give you a different set of criteria for making those decisions. Five questions. Here's the first one:

1. Have I Been Bitten By the Buy-It Bug? (Vv. 6-8)

Let's study these next few verses, and I think this will become clear. Look at verses 6ff: Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

The word godliness is εὐσέβεια—eusebeia, a good, solid, righteous, holy life that reflects the moral purity of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But notice that he adds a very important prepositional modifier: Godliness with contentment. The word translated here contentment literally means self-sufficiency.

This was a favorite word of the Stoic philosophers of Paul's day. The Stoic man lived in detachment from the externals of life, and he found his happiness within himself. He was the source of his own happiness. Paul took this word and expanded it into a Christian virtue. The Christian is, in a real sense, self-contained, but instead of finding our sufficiency within ourselves, we find it in our relationship with Jesus Christ and His Word. The Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you." It is our relationship with God—godliness—plus self-sufficiency that is great gain. Self-sufficient people don't have to keep adding and accumulating things in order to be happy. They carry their happiness within themselves. A lot of times we buy things because it makes us feel good. We all occasionally do that, but how much better to have your own internal happiness and joy that doesn't have to be fueled by unwise purchases or the acquisition of things.

After all, Paul goes on to say: We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

We were penniless the moment before we were born, and we'll be penniless the moment after we breathe our last breath; and everything in between is fading and fleeting. It's passing, not permanent. It is vanishing, not valuable. As one commentator said, "We'll all stand before God without baggage." So then...

Having food and clothing (the Greek word literally means "covering," and it can include not just the clothes on our back but the roof over our head. The idea here involves the necessities of life), with these we should be content.

He's saying something here that is rather shocking. Christians don't harbor ambitions of being wealthy in this life. We aren't very interested in that. Our goal in life is not the accumulation of wealth. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." The writer of Proverbs said (in paraphrase), "Lord, give me neither great poverty nor great wealth. If I have great poverty, I might be tempted to steal; and if I have great wealth, I might be tempted to grow proud."

It's important for us to take care of our families and to meet our obligations in life. But the simpler our lifestyles, the better. If we have food and clothing, let's be content with that.

As I read this passage, I couldn't help thinking of that American great philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, and what he said in his classic book, *Walden*: It is desirable that a man... live in all respects so compactly and preparedly that, if an enemy take the town, he can, like the old philosopher, walk out the gate empty-handed and without anxiety.

In another place, Thoreau said: A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.

In another place, Thoreau spoke of an old deacon that he knew. When he died, his possessions were auctioned off; and all the neighbors eagerly gathered together to view them and to bid on them. Thoreau added dryly that the neighbors bought the dead person's trinkets to "carefully transport them to their worn garrets and dust holes, to lie there till their estates are settled, when they will start again."

So we have to ask ourselves: Have I been bitten by the buy-it bug? We live in a consumer-oriented nation. Every time I sit down at my television, I'm bombarded by ads trying to coax me into buying something. Every time I turn on the radio, I'm bombarded by ads trying to sell me something. Every time I turn on my computer, my screen is full of pop-up ads. Every time I check my e-mail, I have to delete a dozen spam e-mails, trying to get me to buy something. And every time I go to the store, I see thousands of things I could buy, and the store knows how to position them in the aisles so as to make it almost irresistible.

So we've become a nation of consumers and impulse shoppers. We go into the store for a loaf of bread and come out with a cart of groceries. We go into Wal-Mart for some plant food and end up spending \$89. But blessed is the person who has learned to swat the "buy-it bug."

2. What Does This Purchase Say About Me? (Vv. 9-12)

That leads to my second question: What does this purchase say about me, about my spiritual life? Which do I most crave—gold or God? Continue reading with the next verse—1 Timothy 6:9ff:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

The word "desire" here is a strong word. It doesn't just mean that you occasionally daydream about having a lot of money. It means that the desire to accumulate wealth and possessions becomes the driving force of your life. I read about a man who loved gold. He inherited a fortune, and he redecorated his bedroom. He put gold parchment wallpaper up, hung yellow curtains, had a golden colored rug and a yellow bedspread. He even bought some yellow pajamas. But then he got sick and came down with, of all things, yellow jaundice. His wife called the doctor who made a house call and went up to his bedroom for an examination. The doctor stayed up there a long time. When he came down, his wife asked, "How is he?" The doctor replied, "I don't know. I couldn't find him."

For some people, it just becomes a way of life with them. They become so blended into their desire for gold that they can't be separated or distinguished from it. They and their drive for wealth blend in together. But look at the next verse:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

In contrast to that, the true Christian has a different agenda in life. We have a different set of cravings and desires. Paul goes on to say:

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

I remember hearing Billy Graham tell a story which I do not have in print and cannot authenticate. But I'm sure I recall hearing him tell it or reading it in one of his publications. He and his wife Ruth were on vacation down in the Caribbean, and there was a very wealthy man who lived on the island. Hearing the Grahams were there, he invited them for supper, and after supper he talked with them for a long time about all his problems and his unhappiness and his emptiness. The next night they were invited out again, this time to the home of a native pastor. This man and his wife were quite poor and had little of this world's goods. The surroundings were very different from those of the previous night. But, oh, the joy in the home and the happiness in their hearts. It was quite a contrast. Paul tells Timothy to warn the Christians of Ephesus about being more passionate for gold than they are for God.

The sad thing is this—I'm not sure Timothy was successful in conveying this message. Why do I say that? Because not so long afterward, the Apostle John wrote a little letter to this selfsame church of Ephesus, where Timothy had been serving. It's only a few verses long, and it is contained in the book of Revelation, chapter 3. It's really from Christ Himself, and the words are in red letters in my Bible. The Lord sadly confesses that the church in Ephesus, the church as a whole, has left its first love. It had evidently been drawn away by its materialistic culture from a passionate love for Jesus.

Could that be happening to us? Could that be happening to you? Which occupies your thoughts the most? Your money or your Master?

3. Am I Too Engrossed in This Purchase? (Vv. 13-16)

Here's the third question: Am I too engrossed in this purchase? In the light of the Second Coming of Christ, am I too engrossed in the things I'm accumulating? Look at verses 13-16:

For I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in inapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.

Notice Paul's emphasis here on the Second Coming of Christ. "Our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate." We are living in the light of the imminent return of Christ, and that should have an impact on the way we value the accumulated possessions of life.

I've been reading a book entitled *The Journey Home*, which was written by evangelist Bill Bright during his final illness. In that book he says something to this effect: I only have a few months to live, and I don't want to be bothered or distracted by the things of this world. They hold little value for me. My treasures are elsewhere now, and I'm focusing on those things that will never pass away.

I love the way Paul puts it in a parallel passage, in 1 Corinthians 7. He said, "Brothers... time is short. From now on... those who buy something (should live) as though it were not theirs to keep, those who use the things of this world as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away" (NIV).

4. Am I Enjoying What I Already Have? (V. 17)

Here's a fourth question: Am I enjoying what I already have. The next verse says: Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

There is a wonderful, sanctified balance given us in these verses. On the one hand, we're not to be too engrossed in the things of this world and we aren't to be overly concerned about wealth and possessions. On the other hand, we're to be thankful for what God has given us, and we're to know that He wants us to enjoy it. And as we do so, we should remember that much of what God gives us comes with no price tag.

As I was preparing this message, I walked out onto my front porch and watched the rain falling from heaven. It struck me that God was ingenious in inventing rainfall, which is His global irrigation system. When I try to water something, I just pour the water out of a bucket and it falls in a heavy stream. God could have sent down great cataracts like Niagara, but He created a phenomenon in which millions upon millions of tiny droplets of water, each one spaced out evenly, none of them very heavy, one following another in rapid succession, falling in a little straight line to earth until the world is gently watered and the plants properly irrigated. And as I stood there and listened to the sound of the rainfall and the beauty of the mist, I thought: If this happened only once in a hundred years, everyone in the world would want to see it. But because it happens so frequently, we've forgotten how to enjoy it.

Rainfall and sunshine and the gently blowing breeze and the beauty of the stars are God's simple pleasures.

For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth over and around us lies,
Lord of all to Thee we raise this our hymn of humble praise.

God wants you to enjoy His world, and He wants you to enjoy what He gives you. I don't want to have a lot of things. I don't crave a lot of possessions. But I want to enjoy what I do have, and I want to possess it with thankfulness, knowing that every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights, from whom is no variableness or shadow of turning.

5. Does This Purchase Diminish My Ability to Give to God's Work? (Vv. 18-19)

Now there is one final question to ask ourselves. Does this purchase diminish my ability to give generously and liberally and faithfully to God's word? Look at verses 18-19: Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Why is it that the most affluent generation of Christians in world history is only giving about two percent of their income to the work of their Lord? But I know that this isn't the first time in history that this has happened. It happened in the days of Haggai the prophet.

I'd like to end this message on cash flow by showing you a passage of Scripture in which another generation was having trouble with its cash flow, too. Look at Haggai 1:5. In this passage, the people of Judah were spending all their money on their own houses and possessions and neglecting the work of the house of the Lord. Look at what Haggai said:

Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put into a bag with holes."

That sounds like cash flow problems to me, doesn't it?

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the Lord.

Don't forget about My house. Don't forget about the needs of My kingdom. Don't forget about My program, My priority, My work.

"You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the Lord of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while everyone of you runs to his own house."

In other words, they were spending so much money on themselves they just didn't have money to support the great work of their God; and as a result the blessing of God wasn't on their finances.

There is a principle that runs all the way through the Bible, and it is this. If we will but give God a minimum of ten percent of our income, He will bless the remainder and more than make up for us the difference. But if we spend it all our ourselves, we'll be putting our money in a bag with holes in it.

Paul said to Timothy, "Tell those who are rich in this present world to be ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for time to come."

So don't take your purchases lightly, and don't make them impulsively. We are simply stewards over the money God has entrusted to us, and we should always ask ourselves: "How would Jesus use this money?" And we do that by asking these questions:

- Have I been bitten by the "buy-it" bug?
- What does this purchase say about me?
- Am I too engrossed in this purchase?
- Am I enjoying what I already have?
- Does this purchase diminish my ability to give to God's work?

Jesus summed it up like this: Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust corrupts and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust does not corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.