

Hints to Young Men!

by J.C. Ryle

"Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see — *but* know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment!" Ecclesiastes 11:9

1. Ought not a young man to think?

"My people do not consider." Isaiah 1:3

"Consider your ways!" Haggai 1:5, 7

Certainly a young man ought to think. Until I can persuade you to do that — I have done nothing. The very first request I make to every reader of this address is this — that he will give his heart the benefit of a little quiet thinking.

Lack of thought is one simple reason why thousands of souls are cast away forever. Men will not *consider* — they will not look forward — they will not look around them — they will not reflect on the end of their present course, and the sure consequences of their present ways — and they awake at last to find they are damned for lack of thinking!

Young men, none are in more danger of this, than yourselves. Recklessness and thoughtlessness are your greatest snares. You hate the trouble of sober, quiet thinking — and so you form wrong decisions, and run your heads into sorrow. Young Esau must have his brother's stew, and sells his birthright — he never thought how much he should one day need it. Young Simeon and Levi must avenge their sister Dinah, and slay the Shechemites — they never considered how much trouble they might bring on their father Jacob and his house. It is one of God's solemn charges against the Jews in Isaiah's time, "*My people do not consider.*" (Isaiah 1:3.)

Believe me, this world is not a world in which we can do well without thinking, and least of all do well in the matter of our souls. "Don't think," whispers Satan. He knows that an unconverted heart is like a dishonest tradesman's books — it will not bear close inspection.

"Consider your ways!" says the word of God — stop and think — consider and be wise.

Well says the Spanish proverb, "Hurry comes from the devil."

Just as men marry in haste, and then repent at leisure — so they make mistakes about their souls in a minute — and then suffer for it forever. Just as a bad servant does wrong, and then says, "I never gave it a thought!" — so young men run into sin, and then say, "I did not think about it — it did not look like sin." Not look like sin! What would you have? Sin will not come to you,

saying "*I am sin!*" It would do little harm if it did. Sin always seems "good, and pleasant, and desirable," at the time of commission.

Oh! get wisdom, get discretion. Remember the words of Solomon: "Ponder the paths of your feet, and let all your ways be established." (Proverbs 4:26.) It is a wise saying of Lord Bacon, "Do nothing rashly. Wait a little while."

Some, I dare say, will object that I am asking what is unreasonable — that *youth* is not the time of life when people ought to be grave and thoughtful. I answer, there is little danger of their being too much so in the present day. Foolish talking, and jesting, and joking, and excessive merriment — are only too common.

Doubtless there is a time for all things; but to be always vain and trifling is anything but wise. What says the wisest of men? "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting — for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter — for by the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning — but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." (Ecclesiastes 7:2, 3, 8.)

Matthew Henry tells a story of a great statesman in Queen Elizabeth's time, who retired from public life in his latter days, and gave himself up to serious thought. His former mirthful companions came to visit him, and told him he was becoming melancholy: "No," he replied, "I am *serious*; for all are serious round about me. God is serious in observing us — Christ is serious in interceding for us — the Spirit is serious in striving with us — the truths of God are serious — our spiritual enemies are serious in their endeavors to ruin us — poor lost sinners are serious in Hell! Why then should not you and I be serious too?"

Oh! young men, learn to be thoughtful. Learn to consider what you are *doing* — and where you are *going*. Make time for calm reflection. Commune with your own heart — and be still. Do not be lost merely for lack of thought and consideration.

2. What are your prospects?

A wise man will always look forward. To think of nothing but time present, is the part of a fool. There are two things to which the young should look forward, as well as the old — and these two are *death* and *judgment*.

Young men, it is appointed unto you once to die; and however strong and healthy you may be now, the day of your death is perhaps very near. I see young people sick — as well as old people. I bury youthful corpses — as well as aged corpses. I read the names of persons no older than yourselves in every churchyard. I learn from books that, excepting infancy and old age — more die between thirteen and twenty-three, than at any other season of life. And yet you often live as if you were sure never to die at all!

Are you thinking that you will mind these things tomorrow? Remember the words of Solomon: "Boast not yourself of tomorrow; for you know not what a day may bring forth." (Proverbs 27:1.) "Serious things tomorrow," said a heathen to one who warned him of coming danger; but his tomorrow never came. *Tomorrow is the devil's day* — but today is God's day. Satan cares not how spiritual your *intentions* may be, and how holy your *resolutions* — if only they are fixed for tomorrow. Oh! give not place to the devil in this matter. Answer him, "No! Satan, it shall be today — today!"

All men do not live to be Patriarchs, like Isaac and Jacob. Many children die before their fathers. *David* had to mourn the death of his two finest sons. *Job* lost all his ten children in one day. Your lot may be like one of theirs, and when death summons, it will be vain to talk of *tomorrow* — you must go at once!

Are you thinking that you will have a convenient season to mind these things by and by? So thought Felix and the Athenians, to whom Paul preached; but it never came. *Hell is paved with such vain imaginations!* Better make sure work while you can. Leave nothing unsettled, which is eternal. Run no risks — when your soul is at stake. Believe me, the salvation of a soul is no easy matter — it is no child's play. All need a "great salvation," whether young or old — all need to be born again — all need to be washed in Christ's blood — all need to be sanctified by the Spirit. Happy is that man who does not leave these things uncertain, but never rests till he has the witness of the Spirit within him, that he is a child of God.

Young men, your time is short. Your days are but a span long — a shadow — a vapor — a tale that is soon told. Your bodies are not brass. "Even the young men," says Isaiah, "shall utterly fall." (Isaiah 40:30.)

Your health may be taken from you in a moment — it only needs a fall, a fever, an inflammation, a broken blood-vessel — and the *worm* would soon feed upon you! There is but a step between any one of you and death. This night your soul might be required of you. You are fast going the way of all the earth — you will soon be gone. Your *life* is all uncertainty — your *death* and *judgment* are perfectly sure. You too must hear the Archangel's trumpet, and go forth to stand before the great white throne — you too must obey that summons, which Jerome says was always ringing in his ears, "*Arise, you dead, and come to judgment!*" "Surely I am coming quickly," is the language of the Judge himself. I cannot, dare not, will not let you alone.

Oh! that you would all lay to heart the words of the Preacher: "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see — *but* know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment!"

It is astonishing that, with such a prospect, any man can be careless and unconcerned! *Surely none are so mad — as those who are content to live unprepared to die.* Surely the unbelief of men is the most astonishing thing in the world. Well may the clearest prophecy in the Bible begin with these words, "Who has believed our report?" (Isaiah 53:1.) Well may the Lord Jesus say, "When the Son of Man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18.8.)

Young men, I fear lest this be the report of many of you in the courts above, "They *will not* believe." I fear lest you be hurried out of the world, and awake to find out too late, that death and judgment are realities!

3. Have you not something to lose?

You have something belonging to you of priceless value. You have a *soul*. Of all the things that God has given you, this is the most important — and it is a solemn thought that a young man may "lose his own soul." "What shall it profit a man — if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" Mark 8:36

Your soul is eternal. It will live forever. The world, and all that it contains, shall pass away — as firm, solid, beautiful, and well-ordered as it is — the world shall come to an end! "The earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up!" (2 Peter 3:10.) The works of statesmen, writers, painters, architects — are all short-lived — your soul will outlive them all. The angel's voice shall proclaim one day, that "*Time shall be no longer!*" (Rev. 10:6.) But that shall never be said of your souls.

Try, I beseech you, to realize the fact that *your eternal soul is the one thing worth living for*. It is the part of you which ought always to be first considered. No place, no employment is good for you — which injures your soul. No friend, no companion deserves your confidence — who makes light of your soul's concerns. The man who hurts your person, your property, your character — does you but temporary harm. He is your true enemy — who contrives to damage your soul.

Think for a moment what you were sent into the world for. Not merely to eat and drink, and indulge the desires of the flesh. Not merely to dress up your body, and follow its lusts wherever they may lead you. Not merely to work, and sleep, and laugh, and talk, and enjoy yourselves, and think of nothing but time. No! You were meant for something higher and better than this. You were placed here to train for eternity. Your *body* was only intended to be a house for your immortal *soul*. It is flying in the face of God's purposes, to do as many do — to make the soul a servant to the body, and not the body a servant to the soul!

Young men, God is no respecter of persons. He regards no man's clothes, or purse, or rank, or position. He sees not with man's eyes. *The poorest saint that ever died in a workhouse — is nobler in His sight than the richest sinner that ever died in a palace!* God does not look at riches, titles, learning, beauty, or anything of the kind. One thing only God does look at — and that is the immortal soul. He measures all men by one standard, one measure, one test, one criterion, and that is the state of their souls. "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart!" 1 Samuel 16:7

The catechism begins with this admirable question and answer: "What is the chief and highest end of man?"

"To glorify God — and fully to enjoy him forever."

Do not forget this. Keep in view morning, noon, and night, the interests of your immortal soul. Rise up each day, desiring that it may prosper. Lie down each evening, inquiring of yourself whether your soul has made progress in holiness. Remember Zeuxis, the great painter of old. When men asked him why he labored so intensely, and took such extreme pains with every picture, his simple answer was, "*I paint for eternity!*" Do not be ashamed to be like him. Set your immortal soul before your mind's eye, and when men ask you why you live as you do, answer them in his spirit, "I live for my eternal soul."

Believe me, the day is fast coming, when the soul will be the one thing men will think of, and the only question of importance will be this, "*Is my soul lost — or saved?*"

4. It can be done.

It is possible to be a young man — and yet to serve God. Religion was not meant for parsons and old women only, as some say. It was meant for young as well as old. Remember that.

I fear the snares that Satan lays for you on this point. I fear lest he succeed in filling your minds with the vain notion, that to be a true Christian in youth is impossible. I have seen many carried away by this delusion. I have heard it said, "You are requiring impossibilities, in expecting so much religion from young people. Youth is no time for seriousness. Our desires are strong, and it was never intended that we should keep them under control, as you wish us to do. God meant us to enjoy ourselves. There will be time enough for religion by and bye."

And this kind of talk is only too much encouraged by the world. The world is only too ready to *wink at youthful sins*. The world appears to think it a matter of course, that young men must "sow their wild oats." The world seems to take it for granted, that young people must be impious, and that it is not possible for them to follow Christ.

Young men, I will ask you this simple question — Where will you find anything of all this in the Word of God? Where is the chapter or verse in the Bible which will support this foolish talking and reasoning of the world? Does not the Bible speak to old and young alike, without distinction? Is not sin, sin — whether committed at the age of twenty or fifty? Will it form the slightest excuse, in the day of judgment, to say, "I know I sinned, but then I was young!" Show your common sense, I beg of you, by giving up such vain excuses. You are *responsible* and *accountable* to God from the very moment that you know right and wrong.

I know well there are many difficulties in a young man's way. I allow it fully. But there are always difficulties in the way of doing right. The path to Heaven is always narrow — whether we are young or old.

There are difficulties — but God will give you grace to overcome them. God is no hard master. He will not, like Pharaoh, require you to make bricks without straw. He will take care that the

path of plain duty is never impossible. He never laid a command on man, which He would not give man power to perform.

There are difficulties — but many a young man has overcome them hitherto, and so may you. Moses was a young man of like passions with yourselves — but see what is said of him in Scripture, "By faith *Moses*, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward!" Hebrews 11:24-26

Daniel was a young man when he began to serve God in Babylon. He was surrounded by temptations of every kind. He had few with him — and many against him. Yet *Daniel's* life was so blameless and consistent, that even his enemies could find no fault in him, except "concerning the law of his God." Daniel 6:5

And these are not solitary cases. There is a cloud of witnesses whom I could name. Time would fail me, if I were to tell you of young Isaac, young Joseph, young Joshua, young Samuel, young David, young Solomon, young Abijah, young Obadiah, young Josiah, and young Timothy. These were not angels, but men, with hearts naturally like your own. They too had . . .
obstacles to contend with,
lusts to mortify,
trials to endure, and
hard places to fill — like any of yourselves. But as young as they were — they all found it possible to serve God. Will they not all rise in judgment and condemn you — if you persist in saying it cannot be done?

Young men, try to serve God. Resist the devil, when he whispers that it is impossible. Try — and the Lord God of the promises will give you strength in the trying. He loves to meet those who struggle to come to Him — and He will meet you and give you the power that you feel you need.

Be like the man, whom Bunyan's Pilgrim saw in the interpreter's house. Go forward boldly, saying, "Set down my name!"

Those words of our Lord are true, though I often hear them repeated by heartless and unfeeling tongues, "Seek — and you shall find; knock — and it shall be opened unto you." (Matthew 7:7.) *Difficulties* which seemed like mountains — shall melt away like snow in spring. *Obstacles* which seemed like giants in the mist of distance, shall dwindle into nothing when you fairly face them. The *lion* in the way which you fear — shall prove to be *chained*. If men believed the promises more — they would never be afraid of duties. But remember that little word I press upon you, and when Satan says, "you cannot be a Christian while you are young," answer him, "Get behind me, Satan! By God's help, I will try."

5. Who is afraid?

Many, I suspect, if the truth were known — are afraid. "Beware!" I say to every young man who reads this address — *beware of being influenced by the fear of man.*

"The fear of man does indeed bring a snare." (Proverbs 29:25.) It is terrible to observe the power which it has over most minds, and especially over the minds of the young. Few seem to have any opinions of their own, or to think for themselves. Like dead fish — they float along with the stream and tide. What others think right — they think right. What others call wrong — they call wrong also. There are not many *original thinkers* in the world. Most men are like *sheep* — they follow a leader. If it was the fashion of the day to be Romanists — they would be Romanists. If it was the fashion of the day to be Muhammadans — they would be Muhammadans. They dread the idea of *going against the current* of the times. In a word, the opinion of the day — becomes their religion, their creed, their Bible, and their God.

The thought, "*What will my friends say or think of me?*" nips many a good inclination in the bud. The fear of being observed, laughed at, and ridiculed — prevents many a good habit being taken up. There are Bibles that would be read this very day, if the owners dared. They know they ought to read them, but they are afraid! "*What will people say?*"

There are knees that would be bent in prayer this very night — but the fear of man forbids it! "What would my wife, my brother, my friend, my companion say — if they saw me praying?"

Alas! what wretched slavery this is — and yet how common! "I feared the people," said *Saul* to Samuel — and so he transgressed the commandment of the Lord. (1 Samuel 15:24.) "I am afraid of the Jews," said *Zedekiah*, the graceless king of Judah — and so he disobeyed the advice which Jeremiah gave him. (Jeremiah 38:19.) *Herod* was afraid of what his guests would think of him — so he did that which made him "exceedingly sorry" — he beheaded John the Baptist! *Pilate* feared offending the Jews — so he did that which he knew in his conscience was unjust — he delivered up Jesus to be crucified. If this is not slavery — then what is?

Young men, I want you all to be free from this bondage. I want you each to care nothing for man's opinion, when the path of duty is clear. Believe me, it is a great thing to be able to say "*No!*"

Here was good king Jehoshaphat's weak point — he was too easy and yielding in his dealings with Ahab, and hence many of his troubles. (1 Kings 22:4.) Learn to say "*No!*" Let not the fear of not seeming good-natured, make you unable to do it. When sinners entice you, be able to say decidedly, "I will not consent!" (Proverbs 1:10.)

Consider only how *unreasonable* this fear of man is. How short-lived is man's enmity, and how little harm can he do you! "Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die — which shall be as grass; and forget the Lord your Maker, who has stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth!" (Isaiah 51:12, 13.)

And how thankless is this fear! None will really think better of you for it. The world always respects those most who act boldly for God. Oh! break these *bonds* — and cast these *chains* from

you. Never be ashamed of letting men see that you want to go to Heaven. Think it no disgrace to show yourself a servant of God. Never be afraid of doing what is right.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "Do not fear those who can kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul! Rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell!" (Matthew 10:28.) Only try to please God, and He can soon make others pleased with you. "When a man's ways please the Lord — He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." (Proverbs 16:7.)

Young men, be of good courage — do not care about what the world says or thinks. You will not always be in the world.

Can man save your soul? No!

Will man be your judge in the great and dreadful day of account? No!

Can man give you a good conscience in life — a good hope in death — a good answer in the morning of the resurrection? No, no, no!

Man can do nothing of the sort. Then, "Do not fear the reproach of men or be terrified by their insults. For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool." (Isaiah 51:7, 8.) Call to mind the saying of good Colonel Gardiner: "I fear God — therefore I have none else to fear." Go, and be like him.

6. Does pleasure pay?

Most certainly, pleasure does not pay. And yet how few think so! How many imagine nothing is so delightful as to take their fill of pleasure! Take heed, I cry, to every reader of this address — take heed and beware of the love of pleasure!

Youth is the time when our *passions* are strongest — and like unruly children, cry most loudly for *indulgence*. Youth is the time when we have generally most health and strength — death seems far away, and to enjoy ourselves in this life, seems to be everything. Youth is the time when most people have few earthly cares or anxieties to take up their attention. And all these things help to make young men think of nothing so much as pleasure. "*I serve my lusts and pleasures!*" that is the true answer many a young man should give, if asked, "Whose servant are you?"

Young men, time would fail me — if I were to tell you all the *fruits* this love of pleasure produces, and all the ways in which it may do you harm. Why should I speak of reveling, feasting, drinking, gambling, theater-going, dancing, and the like? Few are to be found who do not know something of these things by bitter experience.

All things which give a feeling of excitement for the time — all things that drown thought, and keep the mind in a constant whirl — all things that please the senses, and gratify the flesh —

these are the sort of things that have mighty power at your time of life, and they owe their power to the love of pleasure. Be on your guard. Do not be like those of whom Paul speaks, who are "Lovers of pleasure — more than lovers of God." (2 Timothy 3:4.)

Remember what I say, if you will cleave to earthly pleasures — these are the things which murder souls. There is no surer way to get a seared conscience and a hard impenitent heart, than to give way to the desires of the flesh and mind. It seems nothing at the time, but it tells in the long run.

Consider what Peter says: "Abstain from *fleshly lusts*, which war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11.) Fleshly lusts destroy the soul's peace, break down its strength, lead it into hard captivity, and make it a slave.

Consider what Paul says: "Mortify your members which are upon earth." (Colossians 3:5.) "Those who are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." (Galatians 5:23.) "I keep my body under control, and bring it into subjection." (1 Corinthians 9:27.)

Once the body was a perfect mansion for the soul — now it is all corrupt and disordered, and needs constant watching. It is a burden to the soul — not a helper. It is a hindrance — not an assistance. The body may become a *useful servant* — but it is always a *bad master*.

Consider again the words of Paul: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh — to fulfill the lusts thereof." (Romans 13:14.) "These," says Leighton, "are the words, the very reading of which so wrought with Augustine, that he turned from being a licentious young man — and became a faithful servant of Jesus Christ." Young men, I wish this might be the case with all you.

Remember again, if you will cleave to earthly pleasures — that they are all unsatisfying, empty, and vain. Like the locusts of the vision in Revelation, they seem to have crowns on their heads — but like the same locusts, you will find they have stings — real stings — in their tails! *All is not gold, that glitters. All is not good, that tastes sweet. All is not real pleasure, that pleases for a time.*

Go and take your fill of earthly pleasures if you will — you will never find your heart *satisfied* with them. There will always be a voice within, crying like the horse-leech in the Proverbs, "Give, give!" There is an empty place there, which nothing but God can fill. You will find, as Solomon did by experience, that *earthly pleasures are but a vain show* — vanity and vexation of spirit — white-washed sepulchers, fair to look at without — but full of ashes and corruption within. Better be wise in time. Better to write "poison" on all earthly pleasures! The most lawful of them must be used with moderation. All of them are soul-destroying — if you give them your heart!

And here I will not shrink from warning all young men to remember the seventh commandment — to beware of immorality and fornication — of all impurity of every kind. I fear there is often a lack of plain speaking on this part of God's law. But when I see how Prophets and Apostles have dealt with this subject — when I observe the open way in which the Reformers of our own

church denounce it — when I see the number of young men who walk in the footsteps of Reuben, and Hophni, and Phinehas, and Amnon — I for one cannot, with a good conscience, hold my peace.

I doubt whether the world is any better for the excessive silence which prevails about this commandment. For my own part, I feel it would be false and unscriptural delicacy, in addressing young men, not to speak of that which is pre-eminently "*the young man's sin*."

"Pleasure," says Thomas Adams, "must first have the warrant — that it be without sin; and then the measure — that it be without excess."

The breach of the seventh commandment is the sin above all others, that, as Hosea says, "Takes away the heart." (Hosea 4:11.) It is the sin that leaves deeper scars upon the soul than any sin that a man can commit. It is a sin that slays its thousands in every age, and has overthrown many of the saints of God in time past. Lot, and Samson, and David — are fearful proofs. It is the sin that man dares to smile at, and smooths over under the names of gaiety and mirthfulness. But it is the sin that the devil peculiarly rejoices over, for he is the "impure spirit." This is the sin that God peculiarly abhors, and declares that He "will judge." (Hebrews 13:4.)

Young men, "flee immorality!" (1 Corinthians 6:8) — if you love life. "Let no man deceive you with vain words — for because of these things, the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience." (Ephesians 5:6.) Flee all occasions of immorality — the *company* of those who might draw you into it — the *places* where you might be tempted to it. Read what our Lord says about it: "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully, has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Hell!" Matthew 5:28-29

Be like holy Job: "Make a covenant with your eyes." (Job 31:1.) Flee talking of it. It is one of the things that ought not so much as to be named. You cannot handle *pitch* — and not be defiled. Flee the thoughts of it — resist them, mortify them, pray against them — make any sacrifice rather than give way. Imagination is the hotbed where immorality is too often hatched. Guard your thoughts — and there is little fear about your deeds.

Consider the caution I have been giving. If you forget all else — do not let this be forgotten!

7. There are no gains without pains!

Men know that well, in worldly matters. It is known in banks. It is known in merchants' offices. It is known in shops. I wish every young man to remember this, in the matters of his soul. If your soul is to prosper — then you must be diligent in the use of public means of grace.

Be regular in going to the house of God, whenever it is open for prayer and preaching, and it is in your power to attend. Be regular in keeping the Lord's day holy, and determine that God's day out of the seven, shall henceforth always be given to its rightful owner.

I would not leave any false impression on your minds. Do not suppose I mean that *going to church* made up the whole of religion. I tell you no such thing. I have no wish to see you grow up to be formalists and Pharisees. If you think that the mere carrying your body to a certain house, at certain times, on a certain day in the week — will make you a Christian, and prepare you to meet God — I tell you flatly you are miserably deceived. All services without heart-service — are unprofitable and vain. They only are true worshipers — who "worship God in spirit and in truth — for the Father seeks such to worship Him." (John 4:23.)

But *means of grace* are not to be despised, just because they are not saviors. Gold is not food — you cannot eat it — but you would not therefore say it was useless, and throw it away. Your soul's eternal well-being most certainly does not depend on means of grace — but it is no less certain that without them, as a general rule, your soul will not do well.

God might take all who are saved to Heaven in a chariot of fire, as He did Elijah — but He does not do so. He might teach them all by visions, and dreams, and miraculous interpositions, without requiring them to read or think for themselves — but He does not do so. And why not? Because He is a God who works by *means*, and it is His law and will that in all man's dealings with Him, that means shall be used. None but a fool or enthusiast would think of building a house without ladders and scaffolding — and just so no wise man will despise means.

I will dwell the more on this point, because Satan will try hard to fill your minds with *arguments against means*. He will draw your attention to the numbers of PEOPLE who use them, and are no better for the using. "See there," he will whisper, "do you not observe those who go to church are no better than those who stay away?" But do not let this move you. *It is never fair to argue against a thing because it is improperly used.* It does not follow that means of grace can do no good — because many attend on them and get no good from them.

I dwell on this point too, because of the strong concern which I feel that every young man should regularly hear the preaching of Christ's Gospel. I cannot tell you how important this is. By God's blessing, the ministry of the Gospel might be the means of converting your soul — of leading you to a saving knowledge of Christ — of making you a child of God in deed and in truth. This would be cause for eternal thankfulness indeed. This would be an event over which angels would rejoice.

But even if this were not the case, there is *a restraining power and influence* in the ministry of the Gospel, under which I earnestly desire every young man to be brought. There are thousands whom it keeps back from evil — though it has not yet turned them unto God; it has made them far better members of society — though it has not yet made them true Christians. There is a certain kind of *sanctifying effect* in the faithful preaching of the Gospel, which tells insensibly on multitudes, who listen to it without receiving it into their hearts. To hear sin cried down and holiness cried up — to hear Christ exalted, and the works of the devil denounced — to hear the kingdom of Heaven and its blessedness described, and the world and its emptiness exposed — to hear this week after week, Sunday after Sunday, is seldom without good effect to the soul. It makes it far harder afterwards to run into any excess of riot and profligacy. It acts as a *wholesome check* upon a man's heart. This, I believe, is one way in which that promise of God is made good, "My word shall not return unto me void." (Isaiah 55:11) There is much truth in that

strong saying of Whitefield: "*The Gospel keeps many a one from the jail and gallows — if it does not keep him from Hell.*"

8. The soul's poison!

If I saw a man drinking slow poison, would I not try to stop him? Undoubtedly I would. But there is no poison so bad as sin — and there is nothing I wish a young man to understand so thoroughly as the evil of sin.

Young men, if you did but know what sin is, and what sin has done — you would not think it strange that I exhort you as I do. You do not see it in its true colors. Your eyes are naturally blind to its *guilt* and *danger* — and hence you cannot understand what makes me so anxious about you. Oh! let not the devil succeed in persuading you that sin is a small matter.

Think for a moment what the Bible says about sin:

how it dwells naturally in the heart of every man and woman alive, (Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:23)

how it defiles our thoughts, words, and actions — and that continually, (Genesis 6:5, Matthew 15:19)

how it renders us all guilty and abominable in the sight of a holy God. (Isaiah 64:6, Habakkuk 1:13)

how it leaves us utterly without hope of salvation, if we look to ourselves, (Psalm 143:20)

how its fruit in this world is shame, and its wages in the world to come death, (Romans 6:21, 23)

Think calmly of all this. I tell you this day, it is not more sad to be dying of consumption, and not to know it — than it is to be a living man, and not know sin!

Think what an awful change sin has worked on all our natures. Man is no longer what he was, when God formed him out of the dust of the ground. He came out of God's hand upright and sinless. (Ecclesiastes 7:29.) In the day of his creation, he was like everything else, "very good." (Genesis 1:31.) And what is man now? A fallen creature, a ruin, a being that shows the marks of corruption all over:

his *heart* like Nebuchadnezzar, degraded and earthly, looking down and not up;

his *affections* like a household in disorder, calling no man master, all extravagance and confusion;

his *understanding* like a lamp flickering in the socket, impotent to guide him, not knowing good from evil;

his *will* like a rudderless ship, tossed to and fro by every desire, and constant only in choosing any way rather than God's way.

Alas! what a wreck is man, compared to what he might have been. Well may we understand such figures being used, as *blindness*, *deafness*, *disease*, *corruption*, *death* — when the Spirit has to give us a picture of man as he is. And man as he is, remember, was so made by sin!

Think too, what it has cost to make atonement for sin, and to provide a pardon and forgiveness for sinners. God's own Son must come into the world, and take upon Him our nature — in order to pay the price of our redemption and deliver us from the curse of a broken law. He, who was in the beginning with the Father, and by whom all things were made — must suffer for sin, the just for the unjust — must die the death of a malefactor, before the way to Heaven can be laid open to any soul. See the Lord Jesus Christ despised and rejected by men — scourged, mocked, and insulted! Behold Him bleeding on the cross of Calvary — hear Him crying in agony, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" Mark how the sun was darkened, and the rocks rent at the sight — and then consider, young men, what must be the evil and guilt of sin.

Think, also, what sin has done already upon earth. Think how sin . . .
cast Adam and Eve out of Eden,
brought the flood upon the old world,
caused fire to come down on Sodom and Gomorrah,
drowned Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea,
destroyed the seven wicked nations of Canaan,
scattered the twelve tribes of Israel over the face of the globe.

Sin alone did all this!

Think, moreover, of all the misery and sorrow that sin has caused, and is causing at this very day.
Pain, disease, and death;
strifes, quarrels, and divisions;
envy, jealousy, and malice;
deceit, fraud, and cheating;
violence, oppression, and robbery;
selfishness, unkindness, and ingratitude
— all these are the fruits of sin! Sin is the parent of them all! Sin is that which has so marred and spoiled the face of God's creation!

Young men, consider these things, and you will not wonder that we preach as we do. Surely if you did but think of them — you would break with sin forever.

Will you play with poison?

Will you sport with Hell?

Will you take fire into your hands?

Will you harbor your deadliest enemy in your bosom?

Will you go on living as if it mattered nothing whether your own sins were forgiven or not — whether sin had dominion over you, or you over sin?

Oh! awake to a sense of sin's sinfulness and danger. Remember the words of Solomon, "Fools," none but fools, "make a mock at sin!" (Proverbs 14:9.)

Hear then the request that I make you this day, pray that God would teach you the real evil of sin. As ever you would have your soul saved — arise and pray!

9. The soul's Remedy!

If I had discovered a certain remedy in the time of the cholera, I would have thought it a public duty to make it known. But I know a remedy for the worst disease in the world — even for sin, and I want all young men to know it too. I wish all young men to become acquainted with Jesus Christ.

This is, indeed, the principal thing in religion. This is the cornerstone of Christianity. Till you know this, my warnings and advice will be useless — and your endeavors, whatever they may be, will be vain. A watch without a main-spring is not more unserviceable than is a religion without Christ.

But let me not be misunderstood. It is not the mere knowing Christ's name that I mean — it is the knowing His mercy, grace, and power — the knowing Him, not by the hearing of the ear, but by *the experience of your hearts*. I want you to know Him by faith — I want you, as Paul says, to know "the power of His resurrection; being made conformable unto His death." (Philippians 3:10.) I want you to be able to say of Him, "He is *my* peace and my strength, *my* life and my consolation, *my* Physician, and *my* Shepherd, *my* Savior and *my* God!"

Why do I make such a point of this? I do it because in Christ alone "all fullness dwells," (Colossians 1:19) — because in Him alone there is a full supply of all that we require for the necessities of our souls. Of ourselves we are all poor empty creatures . . .
empty of righteousness and peace,
empty of strength and comfort,
empty of courage and patience,
empty of power to stand, or go on, or make progress in this evil world.

It is in Christ alone that all these things are to be found — grace, peace, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. It is just in proportion as we *live* upon Him, that we are strong Christians. It is only when self is nothing, and Christ is all in our confidence — it is then alone that we shall do great exploits. Then alone are we armed for the battle of life, and shall overcome. Then alone are we prepared for the journey of life, and shall get forward.

To live on Christ, to draw all from Christ, to do all in the strength of Christ, to be ever looking unto Christ — this is the true secret of spiritual prosperity. "I can do all things," says Paul, "through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13.)

Young men, I set before you Jesus Christ this day as the treasury of your soul; and I invite you to begin by going to Him, if you would so run as to obtain. Let this be your first step — go to Christ.

Do you want friends? He is the best friend, "A friend that sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24.)

Do you feel *unworthy* because of your sins? Fear not — His blood cleanses from all sin. He says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18.)

Do you feel weak, and unable to follow Him? Fear not — He will give you power to become sons of God. He will give you the Holy Spirit to dwell in you, and seal you for His own — a new heart will He give you, and a new Spirit will He put within you.

Are you troubled or beset with, peculiar infirmities? Fear not — there is no evil spirit that Jesus cannot cast out — there is no disease of soul that He cannot heal.

Do you feel doubts and fears? Cast them aside, "Come unto me," He says. "Him that comes, I will never cast out." He knows well the heart of a young man. He knows your trials and your temptations, your difficulties and your foes. In the days of His flesh he was like yourselves — a young man at Nazareth. He knows by experience, a young man's mind. He can be touched with the feelings of your infirmities — for He suffered Himself, being tempted. Surely you will be without excuse, if you turn away from such a Savior and Friend as this!

Hear the request I make of you this day — if you love life, seek to become acquainted with Jesus Christ.

10. The safety-lamp

I would not like any one that I loved, to go down into a coal-mine without a safety-lamp. And I would gladly persuade all young men who read this address, to use a safety-lamp in this *dark* and *dangerous* world. There is one ready for all who will use it. That safety-lamp is the Bible.

The Bible is God's merciful provision for sinful man's soul — the map by which he must steer his course, if he would attain eternal life. All that we need to know, in order to make us peaceful, holy, or happy — is there richly contained. If a young man would know how to begin life well, let him hear what David says: "How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed unto your word." (Psalm 119:9.)

Young men, I charge you to make a habit of reading the Bible, and not to let the habit be broken. Let not the laughter of companions — let not the bad habits of the family you may live in — let none of these things prevent your doing it. Determine that you will not only *have* a Bible, but also make time to *read* it too. Allow no man to persuade you that it is only a book for children and old women. It is the book from which king David got wisdom and understanding. It is the book which young Timothy knew from his childhood. Never be ashamed of reading it. Do not "despise the word." (Proverbs 13:13.)

Read it with *prayer for the Spirit's grace*, to make you understand it. Beveridge says well, "A man may as soon read the *letter* of Scripture without eyes — as understand the *spirit* of it without grace."

Read it *reverently*, as the word of God, not of man — believing implicitly that what it approves is right, and what it condemns is wrong. Be very sure that every doctrine which will not stand the test of Scripture, is false. This will keep you from being tossed to and fro, and carried about by the dangerous opinions of these latter days. Be very sure that every practice in your life which is contrary to Scripture — is sinful, and must be given up. This will settle many a question of conscience, and *cut the knot* of many a difficult question. Remember how differently two kings of Judah read the word of God.

Jehoiakim read it, and at once cut the writing to pieces, and burned it on the fire. (Jeremiah 36:23.) And why? — Because his heart rebelled against it, and he was resolved not to obey.

Josiah read it, and at once tore his clothes in repentance, and cried mightily unto the Lord. (2 Chronicles 34:19.) And why? Because his heart was tender and obedient. He was ready to do anything which Scripture showed him was his duty. Oh! that you may follow the last of these two — and not the first.

And read it *regularly*. This is the only way to become "mighty in the Scriptures." A hasty glance at the Bible now and then — does little good. At that rate you will never become familiar with its treasures, or feel the sword of the Spirit fitted to your hand in the hour of conflict. But get your mind stored with Scripture, by diligent reading — and you will soon discover its value and power. *Texts* will rise up in your hearts in the moment of temptation. *Commands* will suggest themselves in seasons of doubt. *Promises* will come across your thoughts in the time of discouragement. And thus you will experience the truth of David's words, "Your word have I hid in my heart — that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11); and of Solomon's words, "When you go, it shall lead you; when you sleep, it shall keep you; and when you awake, it shall talk with you." (Proverbs 6:22)

I dwell more on these things, because this is an age of reading. Of making many books, there seems no end — though few of them are really profitable. There seems a rage for cheap printing and publishing. Newspapers of every sort abound, and the tone of some which have the widest circulation, tells badly for the taste of the age. Amidst the flood of dangerous reading, I plead for my Master's Book — I call upon you not to forget the book of the soul! Let not newspapers, novels, and romances be read — while the Prophets and Apostles lie despised. Let not the exciting and licentious swallow up your attention — while the edifying and sanctifying can find no place in your mind. Young men, give the Bible the *honor* due to it, every day you live. Whatever you read — read that first.

Beware of bad books — there are plenty in this day. Take heed *what* you read. I suspect there is more harm done to souls in this way, than most people have an idea is possible. Value all books in proportion as they are agreeable to Scripture. Those that are nearest to it are the best — and

those that are farthest from it, and most contrary to it, are the worst.

11. Lose nothing for lack of asking

Men seldom lose anything for lack of asking here on earth — although they often ask, and get nothing. I invite young men to remember this in the matter of their souls. I invite them to ask of Him who gives to all liberally. I invite them, wherever they are, to pray.

I observe a remarkable passage in the first leading article of the "Times" newspaper, of August 20th, 1847: "We question if any person of any class or school, ever read the Scriptures regularly and thoroughly — without being, or becoming, not only religious, but sensible and consistent." This is an editorial opinion. It is, at any rate, a striking admission from the greatest organ of public opinion in the civilized world. Let us be thankful for it.

PRAYER is the life-breath of a man's soul. Without it we may have a name to live, and be counted Christians — but we are dead in the sight of God. The feeling that we must cry to God for mercy and peace, is a mark of grace; and the habit of spreading before Him our soul's needs, is an evidence that we have the spirit of adoption.

Prayer is the appointed way to obtain the relief of our spiritual necessities — it opens the treasury, and sets the fountain flowing. If we have not — it is because we ask not.

Prayer is the way to procure the outpouring of the Spirit upon our hearts. Jesus has promised the Holy Spirit, the Comforter to His people. He is ready to come down with all his precious gifts, renewing, sanctifying, purifying, strengthening, cheering, encouraging, enlightening, teaching, directing, and guiding into all truth. But then He waits to be entreated.

And here it is, I say it with sorrow — here it is, that men fall so miserably short. Few indeed are to be found who pray — many who go down on their knees, and say a *form* perhaps — but few who really pray. There are . . .

few who *cry* unto God,
few who seek, as if they wanted to find,
few who knock, as if they hungered and thirsted,
few who *wrestle* with God,
few who *strive* with God earnestly for an answer,
few who give Him no rest,
few who continue in prayer,
few who watch unto prayer,
few who pray always without ceasing, and faint not.

Yes! few pray. It is just one of the things assumed as a matter of course — but seldom practiced. It is a thing which is everybody's business — but in fact hardly anybody performs.

Young men, believe me, if your soul is to be saved — you must pray. God has no dumb children! If you are to resist the world, the flesh, and the devil — you must pray. It is vain to look for

strength in the hour of trial — if it has not been sought for previously. You may be thrown with those who never pray — you may have to sleep in the same room with someone who never asks anything of God — still, mark my words, you must pray.

I can quite believe you find great difficulties about it — difficulties about *opportunities*, and *seasons*, and *places*. I dare not lay down no positive rules on such points as these. I leave them to your own conscience. You must be guided by circumstances.

Our Lord Jesus Christ prayed on a mountain;
Isaac prayed in the fields;
Hezekiah turned his face to the wall as he lay upon his bed;
Daniel prayed by a river side;
Peter, the Apostle, on the house-top.

I have heard of young men praying in stables and hay-lofts. All that I contend for is this — you must know what it is to "enter into your closet." (Matthew 6:6.) There must be stated times when you must speak with God face to face — you must every day have your seasons for prayer. You must pray.

Without this, all our advice and counsel is useless. Prayer is that piece of spiritual armor, which Paul names last in his catalogue, in Ephesians 6 — but it is in truth, first in value and importance. This is that food which you must daily eat — if you would travel safely through the wilderness of this life. It is only in the strength of this, that you will get onward towards the mount of God.

I have heard it said that the needle-grinders of Sheffield sometimes wear a magnetic mouth-piece at their work, which catches all the fine dust that flies around them, prevents it entering their lungs, and so saves their lives. Prayer is the mouthpiece that you must wear continually — or else you will never work on uninjured by the unhealthy atmosphere of this sinful world. You must pray!

Young men, be sure no time is so well spent, as that which a man spends upon his knees. Make time for this, whatever your employment may be.

Think of *David*, king of all Israel — what does he say? "*Evening and morning and at noon — I will pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice.*" (Psalm 55:17.)

Think of *Daniel*. He had all the business of a kingdom on his hands — yet he prayed three times a day. See there the secret of his safety in wicked Babylon.

Think of *Solomon*. He begins his reign with prayer for help and assistance, and hence his wonderful prosperity.

Think of *Nehemiah*. He could find time to pray to the God of Heaven, even when standing in the presence of King Artaxerxes. Think of the example these godly men have left you — and go and do likewise.

Oh! that the Lord may give you all the Spirit of grace and supplication. Gladly would I consent that all this address should be forgotten — if only this doctrine of the importance of prayer might be impressed on your hearts.

12. Who is your friend?

I wish I knew what kind of a *friend* each reader of this address has. If I did — I would know more than I do now about his soul. But I can give him a piece of advice, and that is to *be very particular in the choice of his friends*.

Understand me — I do not speak of *acquaintances*. I do not mean that you ought to have nothing to do with any but true Christians. To take such a line is neither possible nor desirable in this world. Christianity requires no man to be discourteous.

But I do advise you to be very careful in your choice of *friends*. Do not open all your heart to a man — merely because he is clever, agreeable, good-natured, high-spirited, and kind. These things are all very well in their way — but they are not everything. Never be satisfied with the friendship of anyone who will not be useful to your soul.

Believe me, the importance of this advice cannot be overrated. There is no telling the harm that is done by associating with godless companions and friends. The devil has few better helps in ruining a man's soul. Grant him this help, and he cares little for all the armor with which you may be armed against him. Good education, early habits of morality, sermons, books, stable homes, letters of parents — all, he knows well, will avail you little — if only you will cling to ungodly friends. You may resist many open temptations, and refuse many plain snares — but once take up a bad companion, and the devil is content. That solemn chapter which describes Ammon's wicked conduct with Tamar, almost begins with these words, "But Ammon had a *friend* — a very subtle man." (2 Samuel 13:3.)

You must recognize that we are all creatures of imitation. *Precept* may teach us — but it is *example* that draws us. There is that in us all — that we are always disposed to catch the ways of those with whom we live; and the more we like them, the stronger does the disposition grow. Without our being aware of it, they influence our tastes and opinions — we gradually give up what they dislike, and take up what they like — in order to become more close friends with them. And worst of all, we catch their ways in things that are wrong — far quicker than in things that are right. Health, unhappily, is not contagious — but disease is. It is far more easy to catch a cold — than to impart health. It is far more easy to make each other's religion dwindle away — than grow and prosper.

Young men, I ask you to lay these things to heart. Before you let anyone become your constant companion — before you get into the habit of telling him everything — and going to him in all your troubles, and all your pleasures — before you do this, just think of what I have been saying. Ask yourself, "Will this be a useful friendship to me or not?"

"Evil companions" do indeed "corrupt good character." (1 Corinthians 15:33.) I wish that text were written in hearts, as often as it is in copy books. Good friends are among our greatest blessings — they may . . .
keep us back from much evil,
quicken us in our heavenly course,
speak a word in season,
draw us upward, and draw us onward.

But a bad friend is a positive misfortune — a weight continually dragging us down, and chaining us to earth! Keep company with an impious man, and it is more than probable you will in the end become like him! That is the general consequence of all such friendships. The good go down to the bad — and the bad do not come up to the good. Even a stone will give way before a continual dropping. The world's proverb is only too correct, "Clothes and company tell true tales about character." "Show me *who* a man's friend is," say the Spaniards, "and I will show you what he is."

I dwell the more upon this point, because it has more to do with your prospects in life, than at first sight appears. If ever you marry, it is more than probable you will choose a wife among the connections of your friends. If Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram had not formed a friendship with Ahab's family — he would most likely not have married Ahab's daughter. And who can estimate the importance of a right choice in marriage? It is a step which, according to the old saying, "either makes a man — or mars him." Your happiness in *both lives* may depend on it.

Your wife must either help your soul — or harm it; there is no medium. She will either fan the flame of religion in your heart — or throw cold water upon it, and make it burn low. She will either be wings — or fetters, a hindrance — or a spur, to your Christianity, according to her character. He who finds a good wife, does indeed "find a good thing." And if you have the least wish to find one — be very careful how you choose your friends.

Do you ask me what kind of friends you shall choose? Choose friends who will benefit your soul — friends whom you can really respect — friends whom you would like to have near you on your death-bed — friends who love the Bible, and are not afraid to speak to you about it — friends such as you will not be ashamed of owning at the coming of Christ, and the day of judgment.

Follow the example that David sets you; he says, "I am a companion of all those who fear you, and of those who keep your precepts." (Psalm 119:63.) Remember the words of Solomon: "He who walks with wise men shall be wise — but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." (Proverbs 13:20.) Depend on it, bad company in the present life — is the sure way to procure worse company in the life to come!