

The image is a book cover for 'AN HONEST HEART' by A. W. Pink. The central illustration depicts a lush forest in autumn. In the foreground, tall grasses and reeds grow along the banks of a calm stream. The middle ground is filled with trees showing vibrant yellow and orange foliage, with some red leaves visible on bushes. In the background, a dense forest of evergreen trees covers a hillside under a clear blue sky. The entire scene is enclosed within a decorative red border with ornate, symmetrical corner designs and repeating patterns along the edges.

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## **An Honest Heart**

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If there is one thing more than another which we seek to keep in mind while preparing articles for these pages (Studies in the Scriptures 1943) it is the need for and importance of preserving the *balance* of Truth, for we have long been convinced that untold harm has been done to souls through failure at this point. If the preacher gives a disproportionate place in his ministry to the Divine Law, relegating the Gospel to the background, not only are his hearers in danger of forming a one-sided concept of the Divine character but the Christian is deprived of that which is most needed for the establishing and growth of his faith in Christ. On the other hand if the Divine Law be virtually shelved so that its strictness, its breadth and its spirituality are not made known, light thoughts upon sin and superficial views of the holiness of God will be the inevitable result. Both the Law and the Gospel must be expounded and enforced if souls are to be acquainted with God as “light” (1 John 1:5) and as “love,” and if they are to render unto Him that which is His due.

In like manner there needs to be proportionate attention paid to both doctrinal and practical teaching, the one relating to instruction and the other concerning deportment. It is an essential part of the pulpit’s office to open up the foundational truths of the Christian Faith, for only thus will souls be fortified against error. It is ignorance of the Truth which causes so many to fall easy victims to Satan’s lies. Such doctrines as the Divine Inspiration of the Scriptures, the Holy Trinity, the Sovereignty of God, the Fall of man, the Everlasting Covenant, the Person and Office of the Mediator, the design and nature of the Atonement, the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit, the Justification and Sanctification of the believer must be systematically taught if the minister would discharge his duty. Yet he must not confine himself to doctrine: they who feed on rich food and then take little or no exercise become sickly and useless—true alike

naturally and spiritually. Faith must produce works if it be worth anything. Well-nurtured branches of the vine are for fruitfulness and not ornamentation. Christians are to “adorn the doctrine of God” (Titus 2:10) by a daily walk which glorifies Him and is a blessing to their fellows.

Once more—if the balance is to be preserved the preacher must see to it that he is careful to maintain a due proportion between the objective and subjective sides of the Truth. He fails miserably in the discharge of his duty if he neglects to probe the professor and search the conscience of his hearers. He needs to remind them frequently that God requires Truth “in the *inward* parts” (Psa. 51:6), that His Law must be written “upon the heart” (Heb. 8:10) if it is to exert any effectual power in the life. He is required to call his hearers to “examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5)—yea urge them to pray with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my ways” (Psa. 139:23). Multitudes of professing Christians mistake an intellectual assent to the letter of Scripture for a saving faith, and most of what they hear in so-called evangelical circles is only calculated to bolster them up in a false hope. He who is faithful in dealing with souls will frequently remind his hearers of Christ’s statement, “Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven: but he that *doeth* the will of My Father which is in Heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

But the preacher needs to be much on his guard lest he overdoes what is termed “experimental preaching.” If he virtually confines himself to the lines specified in the preceding paragraph his hearers will become too introspective, too busily engaged in looking within, and instead of their assurance being strengthened, genuine Christians will be filled with doubts and questions about their state. To counteract that tendency the objective side of the Truth must also be emphasized. Christ in all the wonders and glories of His peerless Person, in the perfections of His mediatorial office, in the sufficiency of His atoning work,

must be held up to view, so that the hearts of His redeemed may be drawn out to Him in faith, in love, in worship. They must be encouraged to “look unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2) and “consider the Apostle and High Priest of their profession” (Heb. 3:1), for only thus will they be furnished with both incentives and strength to run the race that is set before them.

What has been pointed out above applies as much to the editor of a magazine as to the occupant of the pulpit. He must beware of being a “hobbyist”—always harping upon a favourite theme. Side by side with pressing the precepts of Scripture he must dwell upon the exceeding great and precious promises of God. Messages of exhortation must be balanced by messages of consolation. Articles which rebuke and lay low need to be followed by subjects which comfort the mourner and lift up the soul in praise to God. If on the one hand we read that the Lamb is to be eaten with “bitter herbs” (Exod. 12:8), right after we are told of the “tree” being cast into the bitter waters of Marah so that they were made sweet (Exod. 15:25). If the Word of God be likened to a “hammer” which breaks in pieces the hard heart (Jer. 23:29) and a sword to pierce even to “the dividing asunder of soul and spirit” (Heb. 4:12)—we also find it being compared with “honey and the honeycomb” (Psa. 19:10). He who is wise will observe these things and seek grace to be regulated accordingly.

At present we are engaged with a particularly searching portion of the Sermon on the Mount, and one design we have in dwelling upon it in such detail is the testing and exposing of formal professors. It is therefore expedient that we should accompany these articles with a message that is intended to help (under God’s blessing) those of the unestablished saints who are liable to draw a false conclusion therefrom. If empty professors are ready to greedily devour that Bread which is the peculiar portion of God’s little ones, it is also true that not a few regenerate souls are prone to appropriate unto themselves that which applies only to hypocrites. If on the one side there are

unregenerate people who firmly believe themselves to be real Christians, on the other side there are genuinely renewed souls who greatly fear they are not Christians at all—they who now conclude the profession of faith made by them, sincerely, in the past, was based on a delusion, and that after all they have been deceiving themselves and others—that they are hypocrites.

It is indeed a fearful thing for a soul to be living in “a fool’s paradise,” persuading one’s self all is well while in reality the wrath of God abides on him. But is it anything less tragic (even though less dangerous) for a child of God to live in “the slough of despond,” passing sentence of Divine condemnation upon himself when in fact God has blotted out his transgressions? Why allow Satan to rob me of all rest of soul when peace and joy are my birthright and legitimate portion? Perhaps, the reader replies, because I cannot help myself, the Enemy is too powerful for me. But my friend, Satan obtains his hold *by lies*, and his hold is broken as soon as we meet him with the Truth. He succeeds in seducing men into sinful acts by promising them pleasure and profit therefrom; but the child of God meets his evil suggestions by reminding himself that if he sows to the flesh he must of the flesh reap corruption. In the light of what God says are the fearful and certain consequences of sin, the lie of Satan is exposed and rendered powerless. Once you have good and solid reason to believe a work of grace has been wrought within you, pay no attention to the doubts which Satan seeks to cast thereon.

But something much graver and more grievous is involved than an act of folly when a child of God accredits Satan’s lie that he is but a deceived soul and hypocrite: he dishonours and insults *the Holy Spirit!* A genuine Christian would be horrified at giving place to the delusion that the redemption of Christ is imperfect and inadequate, that His atoning blood is not sufficient to cleanse from sin, that it must be plussed with something from the creature. And ought he not to be equally horrified at calling into question the reality and efficacy of the Spirit’s work in regeneration, supposing it is not to be credited unless it is

regularly confirmed by certain feelings of which we are the subjects? Is it any less a sin to deny or even doubt the work of the Holy Spirit than it is to deny or doubt the sufficiency of the finished work of Christ? Are we as diligent in seeking to guard against the one as much as the other? It is much to be feared that few even among the saints regard these sins as being equally grave. Ah, my reader, it is a vile thing for me to affirm that I am unregenerate if there is clear proof—obtainable by comparing myself with God’s unerring Word—that the blessed Spirit of God has quickened me into newness of life. Plain warning against this enormity has not been sufficiently given by the pulpit.

What is meant, it may be asked, by the “clear proof” which God’s Word presents to the renewed of their regeneration? That is a most important question, for ignorance thereon or a mistaken conception of the nature of that proof has kept many a quickened soul from enjoying that spiritual peace and assurance to which he was justly entitled. Unless I know what the principal features of a born-again soul are, how can I compare or contrast myself with them? If I form my own idea of what it is which fundamentally and experimentally distinguishes a Christian from a non-Christian, or if I derive my concept from the ideas and confessions of fellow mortals instead of allowing it to be moulded by the teaching of Holy Writ, then I am certain to err. How many, for example, suppose that regeneration consists of a radical change of the old nature, a transforming of the flesh into the beauty of holiness—and then because they discover there is still a sink of iniquity within and sin now rages even more fiercely than it did formerly, draw the conclusion that most certainly no miracle of grace has been wrought within them?

Now in the parable of the Sower, the first recorded one of Christ’s, we find what should be of great comfort to the fearing and trembling ones of the flock, for if they will carefully compare themselves with the different characters which are depicted in that parable, they ought to be able to perceive *which*

*of them* portrays their *own* case and describes their own condition, and thus ascertaining which company they really belong. But in order to this there must be a genuine and frank looking of facts in the face. On the one hand, there must be no undue eagerness to believe the best of themselves, refusing to recognize their own features if the mirror of the Word reflects them as ugly ones. And on the other hand there must be no stubborn determination to go on believing the worst of themselves, declining to identify their picture even when it is drawn by the heavenly Artist, simply because it depicts their countenance as made comely by the operations of Divine grace. Mock humility and feigned modesty are as much a sin as pride and presumption. David was not boasting when he said, “How love I Thy Law,” nor was Paul when he said, “I have fought a good fight.” Each spoke the truth, but gave God the glory for his experience.

In the parable of the Sower our Lord sets before us the reception which the preaching of God’s Word meets with. He likens the world to a field, which He divides into four parts according to the different kinds of its ground or soil. In His interpretation of the parable Christ explained those different soils as representing various classes of those who hear the Word. They may be termed the hard-hearted, the hollow-hearted, the half-hearted, and the honest-hearted. The importance of this particular parable appears in the fact that it is recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and all three narratives should be carefully compared in order to obtain the complete pictures set forth. In this parable Christ is speaking not from the standpoint of the Divine counsels, for there can be no failure there—but from that of human accountability. What we have here is the Word of the Kingdom addressed to man’s responsibility, the effect it has on him, his response thereto, and the reasons why the outcome is unfruitfulness or fruitfulness.

**The first class are the wayside hearers.** In eastern countries the public highway often runs right through the centre of a field,

and because of the traffic constantly passing over it is beaten down, packed, and becomes hard and unyielding. Such is the heart of all those who are given up to the commerce, the pleasures and fashions of this world. They may from various motives attend the house of prayer, but the preaching of the Word has no effect upon them: they are unresponsive thereto. They do not go there seeking a blessing and their souls are unaffected by what they hear. They do not cry unto God, “that which I see not teach Thou me” (Job 34:32), for they are not concerned for His glory or their own eternal welfare. They have no real personal interest in spiritual things and are quite unimpressed by the most solemn representations and unmoved by the most winsome appeals. Their bodies are in the pews but their minds are elsewhere, their thoughts are upon the things that perish, their affections set on things below. They are not there to worship God and are glad when the service is over.

Now let us notice the two things which are said of this class. First, “when anyone heareth the Word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not” (Matt. 13:19). How could the message have any effect upon him when he failed to grasp its purport? And how could he expect to enter into its meaning when his attention was not concentrated thereon, when his interest was elsewhere? He has none but himself to blame. If he prays not for light, whose fault is it that he remains in darkness! Second, “then cometh the Wicked One and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.” Where there has been no meditation upon the Word heard or read, no understanding thereof, and so, no impression made upon the heart, it is an easy matter for the great Enemy of God and man to catch away the good Seed or crowd out of the mind that which obtained a superficial entrance, so that there will not even be serious reflection thereon. Now my reader, are you prepared to solemnly and definitely affirm that you have no understanding of the Word of God, that it is entirely to you as if written in an unknown tongue, that Satan has so caught it away it has no place in your thoughts?



**The second-class are the stony-ground hearers.** The type of ground referred to here is that where the bed or base is of rock yet with a thin layer of earth over it. Into this shallow soil the seed is received but the result is most superficial and evanescent. It cannot be otherwise, for as our Lord points out, “they had no deepness of earth, and when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away.” Those who belong to this class are what may be termed the emotional type. They are very impressionable, easily moved, quickly stirred. Yet it is all on the surface. They make good resolutions and quickly break them. They hear the Gospel and are carried away by the eloquence of the preacher and leap into Christ as it were in a moment, and profess an instantaneous faith in Him. Their faces are radiant and their joy is exuberant. They are the ones who come “forward” at Revival meetings and rush into church membership, but their future history is most disappointing.

Let us take note of the three things said of this class. First, “the same is he which heareth the Word and anon (instantly) with joy receiveth it.” The emotions have been stirred, but the conscience has not been searched. There was no awe of soul in realizing Who it is with whom we have to do, no heart-rending horrors of the sinfulness of sin, no alarm at the wrath to come—nothing but a sudden, yet transient, joy. Second, “yet hath he no root in himself.” It was only a surface effect, a mere passing sentiment. There has been no ploughing up of the soul, no Law-work producing deep and lasting convictions. Third, “but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, by and by he is offended” (Matt. 13:20, 21). Their “goodness is as a morning cloud and as the early dew that goeth away” (Hosea 6:4) the scoffs of the ungodly, the cold shoulder from old friends prove too much for them, and the churches know them no more. Now my reader, test yourself at this point: has your experience stood the test of time or have you abandoned your profession and returned to your wallowing in the mire?

**The third class are the thorny-ground hearers.** The type of ground here referred to is where the soil seems to be more fertile and favourable, for it is neither so beaten down as to have an impenetrable surface nor so shallow that there is no room for root. But it is inimical to a desirable crop, for weeds and thistles, thorns and briars choke and crowd out the good seed so that an harvest is prevented. This is admittedly the most difficult class to diagnose. The seed has taken root and a shoot springs up and promises well, but it is surrounded by hostile weeds. However, it survives and puts forth an ear, but it is so festooned with briars that the sunshine cannot reach it—its life is choked, and it comes to nothing. They who belong to this class attempt to serve two masters. They are very pious on the Lord's Day, but thoroughly impious on the other days. They sing the songs of Zion, are members of a church, but make no serious attempt to regulate their daily lives by the precepts of Holy Writ.

Let us take note of Christ's interpretation of the thorns. In Matthew 13:22 they are defined as "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches." The one who has made a Christian profession is young. He has a growing family, his position in this world is not yet secured and therefore he cannot be expected to be out and out for the Lord. Once he "makes good in life" he will have more leisure for spiritual things and more to give to the cause of Christ. Meanwhile temporal anxieties weigh him down. Suppose he "makes good"—does the Lord *now* have the first place in his affections and thoughts? Far from it—riches are deceitful and cumber their possessor. He feels he must live in accord with his improved position, do more entertaining, send his children to college. Mark 4:19 adds "the lust of other things entering in"—perhaps he aspires to civic office or membership in Parliament, and how can he spiritually thrive in politics! Luke 8:14 gives "the pleasures of this life." These are the thorns which choke so many, and they "bring no fruit to perfection" or completion. Would you say, my readers, that the "thorns" have so choked the Word of God in you that you have brought no fruit to completion?

**The fourth class are the good-ground hearers.** This is soil which not only receives the seed and has depth to give it root, but where it springs up, bears fruit and actually brings forth a goodly yield, so that the husbandman is well-rewarded for his labours. Let us take careful note then of what is here predicated of the good-ground hearer. First, it is, “he that heareth the Word and *understandeth it.*” He has taken pains so to do. He has “searched the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11) to ascertain whether or not the things to which he has listened are really according to the Divine Oracles, for he feels there is far too much at stake to take any man’s say-so for it. Mark 4:20 adds, “and *receive it.*” He has prayerfully pondered what he has heard and personally appropriates it as God’s message to his own soul. However unpalatable to the flesh, however searching and humbling, he refuses it not. Luke 8:15 adds “and *keep it and bring forth fruit with patience.*” He holds fast the Word because it is treasured up in his heart as his most cherished possession, and though he is much discouraged by the slowness of his growth he perseveres in crying to God for the increase.

But there is one word said concerning this fourth class which we wish to particularly observe: they are the ones who receive the Word “In an *honest and good heart.*” This is the only time in the parable that our Lord defines the kind of heart which received the Word. It is here we have disclosed the decisive factor, that which fundamentally distinguishes those belonging to the fourth class from all the others. Thus it is of prime importance we should seek to ascertain exactly what is connoted by “an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15), and diligently search ourselves whether or not we possess such. Clearly the terms used here by Christ are in designed contrast from Jeremiah 17:9—“the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked,” which describes that which every descendant of Adam is born with. “An honest and good heart” then is not the natural heart, but one which Divine grace has imparted.

“But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and

good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15). Let it be duly considered that as it is not the falling of the seed into the ground which makes it good, so it is not the Word of God which makes the heart honest. The soil itself must be rich or there will be no satisfactory crop, and the heart itself must first be honest if the Word is to be received and bear fruit. But such a heart no man has by nature—instead it is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. “By nature we are a lie and in our best estate vanity. The old nature is a lie, a mere falsity, something contrary to that nature God created. It was first introduced by a lie of the Devil (Gen. 3:5) and therefore a fancy that God had lied in His command. Therefore our old nature is no better than a lie, and we cannot serve God with it” (Stephen Charnock, the Puritan). The heart of fallen man is radically and essentially dishonest, feeding on lies, loving deceits, producing hypocrisies; and he can no more effect any alteration in it than the Ethiopian can change his skin. Nor does he even desire to do so—he is totally unconscious of its rottenness.

“The preparation (or disposings) of the heart in man...is from the LORD” (Prov. 16:1). It is by the regenerative operations of the Holy Spirit that the heart is made honest. Honesty of heart is the grand distinction between the genuine Christian and all other men. We do not regard it as a separate grace, like purity or humility, but rather is the regulator of all the graces: thus we read of “*unfeigned* faith” (2 Tim. 1:5) and “*unfeigned* love” (1 Peter 1:22). As holiness is the glory of all the Divine perfections, so honesty is what gives colour and beauty to all the Christian’s graces. Holiness is the distinctive glory of the Godhead: as Howe termed it, “an attribute of attributes, casting lustre upon the others.” “As God’s power is the strength of His perfections, so His holiness is the beauty of them: as all would be weak without almightiness to back them, so all would be uncomely without holiness to adorn them” (Charnock). This it is on a lower plane: without honesty to regulate them, the graces of the Christian

would be worthless.

As honesty of heart is that which distinguishes the genuine Christian from all other men, so it is the grand feature which is common to all the children of God, none of them being without it. Different saints are eminent for various graces: Abraham for his faith, Moses for his meekness, Phineas for his zeal, Job for his patience or endurance. But honesty is that which characterizes and regulates all of them, so that to speak of a dishonest Christian is a contradiction in terms. An honest heart is an “upright” heart (Psa. 7:10): it is a “single” (Col. 3:22) or “undivided” one (Hosea 10:2). An honest heart is a “sound” one (Prov. 14:30), a “true” one (Heb. 10:22). The marks and fruits of an honest heart are candour, genuineness, truthfulness, integrity, righteousness, fidelity, sincerity—in contrast from dissimulation, guile, deceitfulness, pretence, treachery. An honest heart hates all shams. But passing from generalizations let us point out some of the more specific and fundamental workings and manifestations of an honest heart.

**1. An honest heart loves the Truth, and none other does.**

“This is condemnation that light is come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19), and that is true—a description of all men the world over. What a fearful state to be in: not only in the dark, but loving the darkness. And why? Because it is congenial to their depraved hearts, it is their native element. Hence the passage goes on to say, “for everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d” (verse 20). Many excuses are made why they turn away from plain and faithful preaching and why they do not read God’s Word in private, but the real reason is because they hate the Light—exposure, even to themselves, is the very last thing of all they desire. In sharp contrast therefrom: “But he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (verse 21). This is the man with an honest heart: so far from hating the Light, he welcomes it,

wanting to be searched and discovered by it.

An honest heart is open to the Word, not merely to certain portions only, but to the Word as a whole. Such an one sincerely wants the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth. He does not wish the preacher to please or flatter him, but to be frank and faithful. The language of the unregenerate is, “Speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isa. 30:10). They desire to hear of an easy and flesh-pleasing road to Heaven, one which does not demand the denying of self and forsaking the world. They want to be at ease in their sins and assured they are the children of God while free to serve the Devil. But it is the very opposite with one having an honest heart. He is fearful of being imposed upon, and thinking more highly of himself than he has a right to do. If he is deceived, he ardently longs to be undeceived; if he is building his house upon sand, he wants to know it. He is willing to be tested and searched, and therefore he “cometh to the Light”—does so repeatedly and continuously, as the tense of the verb denotes.

An honest heart, then, is a Truth-loving heart, one which genuinely desires to know the mind of God, one which is ready for his creed, his character and his conduct to be searched by the light of the Sanctuary. He wants to know the truth about *God*, the One with whom he has to do, the One before whom he must yet appear and render an account. He will not be put off with any superficial and sentimental representations of the Divine Character, he determines at all costs to acquaint himself with God as He actually is. He wants to know the truth about *himself*, whether his soul be only slightly disposed or whether his case be so desperate as to be altogether beyond help. He is anxious to determine whether he has only a head or intellectual knowledge of things that matter most or whether he has been given a heart or spiritual knowledge of them. He wants to make certain of how he stands with regard to God and eternity, and he dare not take any man’s opinion or say-so with regard thereto.

## **2. An honest heart accepts the Divine diagnosis of fallen**

*man's condition and bows to the Divine verdict passed upon him.* That diagnosis is that which is sinful, depraved, corrupt in every part of his being; that his understanding is darkened, his affections perverted, his will enslaved. The Divine Physician declares that, “from the sole of his foot even unto the head there is *no* soundness in him” (Isa. 1:6). It explains why this is so: because man, every man, is “shapen in iniquity” and “conceived in sin” (Psa. 51:5), and therefore “the wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psa. 58:3). So far from allowing that there is something spiritually good in every man, which only needs to be carefully cultivated in order to bring it to fruition, the Divine Physician declares, the “imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21), and in the flesh, “there dwelleth no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). And the honest heart quarrels not with that diagnosis, but receives it as true of himself.

Because fallen man is what he is he stands condemned before his Judge. The Divine Law pronounces him guilty. It declares that he is a rebel against God that he has followed the desires of his own heart and disregarded the claims of his Maker. It declares that there is, “no fear of God” before his eyes (Rom. 3:18), that he has conducted himself as though there is no Day of reckoning to be faced. It declares that he has “set at nought all God’s counsel and would none of His reproof” (Prov. 1:25). It declares that “the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). It declares that, in the searching light of the Divine holiness, his best performances, his religious actings, his very righteousnesses are as “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). Now because the *honest* heart welcomes the Light, because it sincerely desires to know the worst about himself, it bows to the Divine verdict and “sets to his seal that God is true” (John 3:33). An honest heart acknowledges, “I am vile” (Job 40:4), “without excuse” (Rom. 1:20), a Hell-deserving sinner; and none but an honest heart sincerely does so.

### **3. An honest heart causes its possessor to take his place**

*before God in the dust.* How can it be otherwise if he accepts the Divine diagnosis and condemnation of his condition? As the penitent thief on the Cross acknowledged, “we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds” (Luke 23:41), so the one who truly bows to God’s verdict owns that the everlasting burnings are his legitimate due. Thus pride receives its death-wound, all pretensions to goodness are repudiated, and with the publican of old he smites upon his breast crying, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Instead of seeking to extenuate his transgressions, he wonders at God’s longsufferance toward him. Instead of asking, what have I done to deserve eternal damnation? He marvels that he is not in Hell already. He perceives clearly that if such a wretch as himself is to receive salvation it must be by grace alone, and that God has the full right to withhold such grace if He so pleases.

**4. An honest heart ceases fighting against God, which is only another way of saying that he repents of his evil past, for true repentance is a taking sides with God against myself.** He who loves the Truth is influenced and regulated by it; and therefore is he brought to renounce whatever is opposed to it. As light and darkness are opposites, so uprightness and crookedness, honesty and sin have nothing in common. Where there is an honest heart repentance and conversion necessarily follow. And repentance is not only a sorrowing for sin but also a turning away from it, the throwing down of the weapons of our warfare against God. To love the light is to love God, for He is light (1 John 1:5), and if we love God we shall forsake our sins, abandon our idols and mortify our lusts. An honest soul cannot do otherwise: anything short of that would be hypocrisy. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness we lie and do not the Truth” (1 John 1:6). The upright man is the one who “feareth God and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8).

**5. An honest heart seeks to please God in all things and offend Him in none.** That is why this honesty is termed



“simplicity (the single eye) and godly sincerity” (2 Cor. 1:12), for it desires and seeks the approbation of God above everything else. An honest heart refuses to accept the plaudits of men on anything for which conscience would condemn him. “God is a Spirit and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). He cannot be imposed upon by pious words or a sanctimonious demeanour. He must be approached with “a true heart” (Heb. 10:22): all dissimulation and pretence has to be set aside in our dealings with Him who “trieth the heart and the reins” and whose eyes are “a flame of fire.” When the heart beats true toward God there is a deep desire to please Him, not in some things only, but in *all* things, so that without reserve it asks, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). True, that desire is not fully realized in this life, but the genuineness of it is evidenced when we can truly say, “I hate *every* false way” (Psa. 119:104).

**6. An honest heart *feigns not wisdom, but is very conscious of and frankly owns up to great ignorance.*** Even though he is well acquainted with the letter of Scripture and thoroughly familiar with all the external means of grace, that contents him not: there is a longing for a spiritual, an experimental, and an efficacious knowledge of the Truth. Such an one feels himself to be the veriest babe in Divine things, which is indeed a healthy sign, for it is under such the mystery of godliness is revealed (Matt. 11:25). Such a one cries daily, “that which I see not teach Thou me” (Job 34:32), for he longs to know the way of the Lord more perfectly—not only in the letter but chiefly in the power thereof. So conscious is he of his ignorance that he prays with David, “make me to understand the way of Thy precepts” (Psa. 119:27)—how to walk in them, the way to keep them. And again, “Teach me Thy statutes”—observe well how this is repeated again and again (Psa. 119:12, 26, 64, 68, 124, 135), for it is in *this* the upright realize themselves to be more deficient.

**7. An honest heart *makes conscience of sin.*** Necessarily so if

he sincerely desires to please God. Therefore he does not wilfully and habitually ally himself in any known sin, against the light and stirrings of conscience, for “the highway of the upright is to depart from evil” (Prov. 16:17). As one of the lesser known Puritans said, “A righteous man hates all sins, even the ones he cannot conquer; and loves all the Truth, even that which he cannot understand” (Anthony Burgess). He makes conscience of what the world calls peccadilloes or trifling faults, praying, “Take us the foxes, the *little* foxes that spoil the vines” (Song. 2:15), yea, “cleanse Thou me from secret faults” (Psa. 19:12)—the sins of ignorance of which I am not conscious, but which defile before the thrice Holy One. Consequently, an honest heart makes it a point of confessing all known sins to God, even those of which his fellows know nothing. Sin is his heaviest burden and greatest grief.

**8. An honest heart welcomes godly reproof.** “Grace will teach a Christian to take those potions which are wholesome, though they be not toothsome” (George Swinnock, 1660). “Rebuke a wise man and he will love thee” (Prov. 9:8), but hypocrites will resent it and fools rage at thee. An honest heart prefers the bitters of gracious company to the dainties of the ungodly: he would rather be smitten by a saint than flattered by the unregenerate. He not only gives a permit to faithful admonition but, when in his right mind, invites to, “*Let* the righteous smite me: it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psa. 141:5). “As oil refreshes and perfumes, so does reproof, when fitly taken, sweetens and renews the heart. My friend must love me well if he tells me my faults: there is an unction about him if he points out my errors” (C. H. Spurgeon) and about me also if I heed him. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:6)—only the upright will subscribe to that.

**9. An honest heart is impartial.** “Now therefore are we all

present before God, to hear *all things* that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33). These words of Cornelius were the language of sincerity. How very rare is such a spirit. The average church-member wishes to hear only that which accord with “*our* doctrines” and when he reads the Bible it is through theologically-tinted glasses. Here is where so many preachers are handicapped: they are bound by a detailed creed and know that if they departed therefrom they would lose their position. Bias, prejudice, sectarian shibboleths quench the spirit of honesty. To desire the Truth for *Truth’s* sake is rare indeed. But an honest heart is impartial, refusing to pick and choose and is not swayed by denominational prejudices. An honest heart values the Divine precepts equally with the promises, appropriates the admonitions and threats as well as the comforting portions of Scripture, acknowledges himself in the wrong and his opponent who has the Truth on his side to be right, and admires and owns the image of Christ when he sees it in one belonging to another company.

**10. An honest heart is chiefly concerned with the inner man.**

In His solemn denunciations of the Scribes and Pharisees Christ said, “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess... Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt. 23:25, 27, 28). It is at this point especially that the genuine Christian is distinguished from the formal religionists. One with an honest heart makes conscience of wandering thoughts, evil imaginations the workings of unbelief, the risings of pride and rebellion against God. He seeks grace to mortify his lusts and prays to be cleansed from “secret faults.” He cries daily, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa. 51:10); “Unite my heart to fear Thy name” (Psa. 86:11); “Incline my heart unto Thy

testimonies and not to covetousness” (Psa. 119:36). He makes much of *heart work* and endeavours to keep it with all diligence (Prov. 4:23).

Probably most of our readers are ready to exclaim, Alas, this quite cuts me off: I freely admit that such honesty of heart as has been described ought to be found in me, but to my shame and sorrow I must confess that much to the contrary is still operative in my soul. But cannot you see that is the last thing you would frankly own if you were dishonest?! The fact is that no soul is conscious of the workings of unbelief until God has *given* faith, is not troubled about the swellings of pride until humility is *bestowed*, mourns not over coldness until love is *communicated*, and is not exercised over deceitfulness before he is *made* sincere. We best learn to know things by their opposites. It would be a great mistake to insist that there is such a thing as perfect and unmixed honesty in this life, so that there is no guile or falsehood joined with it. We not only know in part, but our faith and love are weak and unstable, and honesty of heart has to contend with much that is opposed to it. If we can plead before God uprightness of intentions and if we grieve over all crookedness within us that is sure proof we are no longer under the dominion of hypocrisy.

There are two distinct and mutually-hostile principles at work within the Christian, each bringing forth after its own kind, and it is by *what* each one brings forth that its presence may be ascertained. The “works of the flesh” are manifest (Gal. 5:19, etc.), but “the fruit of the Spirit” (verse 22, etc.) is equally identifiable. A detailed description of “the fruit of the Spirit” should not be understood to mean that “the flesh” has ceased to exist. And a portrayal of the workings of an honest heart must not be taken to signify that all which is contrary thereto has been expelled. David was an upright man, yet he found it needful to pray, “Remove from me the way of lying” (Psa. 119:29). The disciples of Christ had been given honest hearts, yet their Master deemed it requisite to bid them, “be not as the hypocrites” (Matt.

6:5). It is the regenerate who are exhorted, “wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile and all hypocrisies” (1 Peter 2:1), which would obviously be quite meaningless if those evils had been eradicated from their beings. “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults” (Psa. 19:12). There is more deceit and more deceit and self-ends operating in all of us than we perceive. If you prize an honest heart above a good name and value a clear conscience before God beyond a high reputation among men you are no hypocrite.

