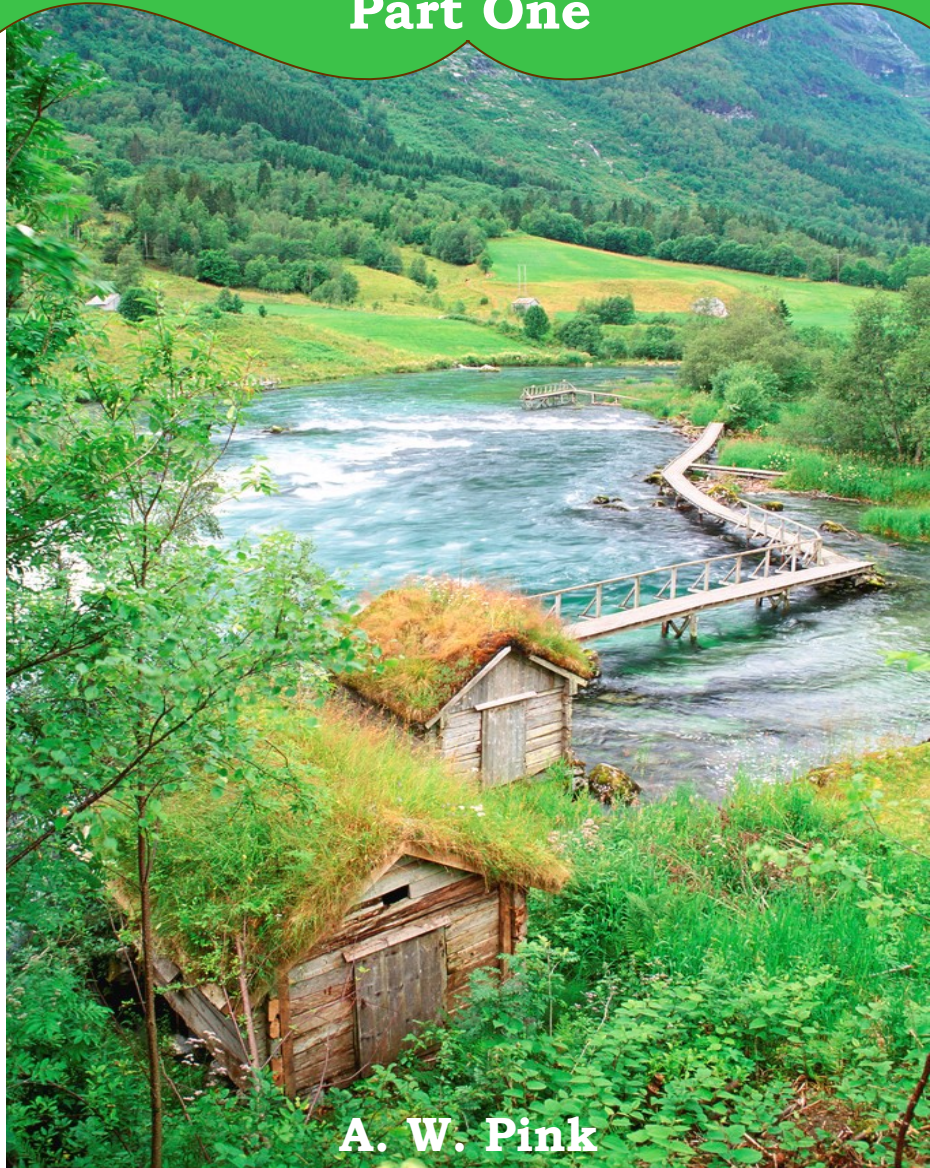


# Christian Profession Tested Part One



A. W. Pink

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*“Not every one 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. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall he likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it”*  
Matthew 7:21-27.

“Not every one 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” (verse 21). With these words our Lord commenced the twelfth and final division of this notable Sermon. It was perhaps the most searching and solemn section in it. Here the One who cannot be imposed upon by any deceit makes known His inexorable demand for reality. Here the One who shall yet officiate as the Judge of all the earth declares that at the Grand Assize all who have deceived themselves and deluded others will stand forth in their real characters. Here the One who knows every thought and imagination of the heart, before whose omniscient eye all things are naked and opened, makes it crystal clear that lip service is worthless and that even the most imposing deeds count for nothing where vital and practical godliness is lacking. The more this passage be thoughtfully pondered the less surprised are we that so many seek to get rid of this Sermon by terming it “Jewish” and insisting “it is not for this dispensation.”

If it be true that Matthew 5-7 is more hated by our moderns than

any other portion of God's Word, it is equally true that none is more urgently needed by them. Never were there so many millions of nominal Christians on earth as there are today, and never was there such a small percentage of real ones. Not since before the days of Luther and Calvin, when the great Reformation effected such a grand change for the better, has Christendom been so crowded with those who have "a form of godliness" but who are strangers to its transforming power. We seriously doubt whether there has ever been a time in the history of this Christian era when there were such multitudes of deceived souls within the churches, who verily believe that all is well with their souls when in fact the wrath of God abideth on them. And we know of no single thing better calculated to undeceive them than a full and faithful exposition of these closing verses of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount.

The relation of this passage to the context is easily determined. Taking the more remote one, this final section forms a fitting conclusion to the whole address, which, be it remembered, was delivered in the hearing of the multitude (5:1; 7:28), though more immediately to His "disciples." It was a most suitable climax. Christ had commenced by delineating the character of those who are approved of God, and He finished by describing those upon whom eternal judgment will fall. Herein we may see how the chief of the apostles patterned his ministry after the example of his Master. If on the one hand "love" constrained him, on the other hand it was by "the terror of the Lord," that he sought to persuade men. Thus, when standing before Felix, "he reasoned of righteousness, temperance and judgment" so that the governor "trembled" (Acts 24:25). Alas, how little of this faithful dealing with souls is there in this degenerate day: how little probing of the conscience, how little plain speaking of the awful doom awaiting the ungodly, how little shaking them out of their fatal complacency.

If we look at the more immediate context we shall be increasingly impressed with the appropriateness of this solemn peroration. Our Lord had just uttered warning against the false prophets, who are to be recognized by the "fruits" which they bear, or in other words by the "converts" which they make, the disciples they draw after them. It is the antinomian beguilers who are there more specially in view,

as is clear from our Lord's words "which come to you in sheep's clothing," thereby concealing their real character. In like manner their adherents assume a sanctimonious pose and employ the most pious language, carrying a Bible with them wherever they go and being able to quote it freely. They refer to the Redeemer in most reverent terms, being particular to accord Him His title of "Lord." Nevertheless, when weighed in the balances they are found wanting, for they are lacking in vital godliness. Their hearts are not renewed, their wills are not surrendered to God, their conduct corresponds not with their high pretensions.

It is the juxtaposition of Matthew 7:19, and 7:20, which enables us clearly to perceive the scope of the latter. Though the Saviour had said in verse 16 "Ye shall know them by their fruits," He repeats this identifying mark of these deceivers of souls in verse 20, and then immediately adds "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom." The intimate connection then between these two sections of His Address is too plain to miss: the converts made by the false prophets are big talkers but little doers. They claim to be devoutly attached to Christ but their claim is invalid, being unsupported by the evidence which is necessary to give it credibility. Their fine talk is not corroborated by a Christian walk, and therefore it is insufficient to obtain for them an entrance into His kingdom. If the blind follow the blind both fall into the ditch. It takes something more than "sheep's clothing" to make one a servant of Christ, and something more than lip service is needed before He will own anyone as a true disciple of His. It is empty and windy professors whom He here exposes.

"Not every one 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." Let us consider first the application of these words to those who were immediately addressed. Many of the Jews were so impressed by the miracles wrought by Christ that they were disposed to be His disciples while ignorant of and in fact strongly opposed to His doctrine concerning salvation and the requirements of the kingdom of God. "When He was in Jerusalem at the passover in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto

them” (John 2:23, 24). Nicodemus expressed the attitude of some of the more influential when he said “Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). But so far from allowing Nicodemus to entertain the idea that an acknowledgment of Him as a “teacher sent from God” would secure for him the blessings He came to bestow, He told him frankly that except he were born again he could neither see nor enter the kingdom of God.

When Christ had fed the great multitude with the five loaves and two small fishes, so deeply were they impressed that we are told: “Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did. said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” Yet “When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force and make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone” (John 6:14, 15). This it was which directly occasioned the searching declaration of the section which is now before us. Very far was He from taking advantage of a temporary and superficial bias of men in His favour: plain speaking and honest dealings characterized the whole of His transactions with His countrymen. It was to prevent them from imagining that their owning Him as Prophet, or even acknowledging Him as the Messiah in the sense that they understood the term, was sufficient that He here impressed upon His hearers that they must be actually and personally *doers* of God’s will before they were qualified to participate in the blessings of His spiritual and eternal kingdom.

While the verses before us were addressed first and locally to the Jews of Christ’s day, yet it is obvious that they have a far wider application, that they belong to the Gentiles of our day. As we have proceeded through this Sermon section by section, we have endeavoured to point out again and again and make clear the force and relevancy of our Lord’s words as they respected His immediate hearers and also their pertinency unto and bearing upon ourselves. There was nothing provincial or evanescent in the teaching of Christ: it was designed for all nations and for all generations, and by it all men will yet be judged (John 12:48). This declaration of Christ’s then is full of important instruction to all in every country and every age, wherever the Gospel is presented to the examination

and reception of men. It was true at the beginning, it is just as true today, and will continue so long as the world lasts, that some, yea, many, will go no farther than a mere lip profession, and consequently will be excluded from the kingdom: and that only those who really perform the Divine will shall enter into the enjoyment of the blessings of Christianity.

This expression “the kingdom of heaven” need not detain us very long, for we have explained its meaning in previous chapters. As it is employed here it is synonymous with “the kingdom of God” in John 3:3, as a comparison of Matthew 18:3, and Luke 18:17, clearly proves. It had reference to the new order of things introduced by the Messiah, being in contrast with and the successor of Judaism. That new order of things may be contemplated as beginning in this present life and perfected in the life to come, they being two aspects of the one economy: the former we designate the kingdom of grace and the latter the kingdom of glory. Most of the older commentators understood “the kingdom of heaven” in the verse now before us as referring to the second aspect, and therefore as being equivalent to the state of celestial blessedness: but personally we see no reason for this restriction. A mere lip profession fails to secure even a present participation in the peculiar privileges of Christianity, for it obtains neither reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sins, nor an enjoyment of that holy happiness which is the portion now of those truly converted. It inevitably follows that those who enter not the kingdom of grace on earth will never enter the kingdom of glory in heaven.

“Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven,” or as we find it in Luke 6:46, “Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord . . .?” This expression is equivalent to acknowledging Christ as Teacher and Master, even owning Him as the Son of God, the alone Saviour of sinners. There is a designed emphasis in the “Lord, Lord,” for it is meant to express not merely profession, but a decided, open, habitual profession. Thus Christ here declares that a mere verbal acknowledgment of the truth concerning His person or a lip profession that we are His disciples, prepared to accept His teaching, however explicit, public, and often repeated that profession be, does not open the way to the enjoyment

of the special blessings of His kingdom, unless it is proved to be the result of true repentance and sound conversion, and unless it be accompanied with a corresponding course of conduct in doing the will of the Father. An outward profession of the most orthodox religion is useless if it be joined not with vital godliness and sincere obedience. Even the demons owned Him as the “Son of God” (Matthew 8:29), but what did it avail them?

It scarcely needs to be pointed out that no entrance into the kingdom of God is possible unless Christ *is* owned as “Lord.” Unitarians and those “modernists” who deny that Christ is anything more than the ideal Man are certainly outside the pale of salvation. “The words before us obviously imply, what is very distinctly stated in other parts of Scripture, that a profession of discipleship and acknowledgment of our submission in mind and heart to Christ Jesus is absolutely necessary in order to our enjoying the privileges of discipleship. No person who does not call Christ ‘Lord, Lord’ can enter into the kingdom of God: no man who is ignorant of His claims, who treats these claims with neglect, who rejects these claims, or who though he may be all but persuaded that these claims are just, yet from worldly motives does not acknowledge them—no such person can participate in the peculiar blessings of His disciples, either on earth or in heaven” (John Brown, to whom we are indebted for some things above and in what follows). “Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am” (John 13:13). “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God” (2 John 9).

But while the necessity of owning Christ as Lord is clearly implied in His words here, the truth which they more directly teach is that profession, however necessary in connection with faith and obedience, cannot of itself secure a participation in the spiritual blessings of the new economy. No matter how loudly a man avows his acceptance of the teachings of Christ, unless he be a *doer* of the Word his avowals count for nothing. He who requires the heart will not be put off with shadows for the substance, the mere semblance for the reality, words instead of works. Empty compliments are not worth the breath which utters them. They who trust in a form of godliness which is devoid of its power are building their hopes upon

a foundation of sand. Not only is a bare profession insufficient for the saving of the soul, but it is an insult to Christ Himself. It is a horrible mockery to call Him Lord while we continue to do only what is pleasing to ourselves, to profess to obey Him while we treat His commands with contempt. It is *obedience* which marks men as His disciples and distinguishes them from the subjects of Satan.

Let us now describe the different types of professors. First, there are those who are simply *nominal* ones. They bear the name of “Christians” and that is all. They happen to have been born in a country where Christianity is the prevailing religion and where it is regarded as a mark of respectability to give some recognition and assent to it. A few drops of water were sprinkled upon them in infancy by a preacher and possibly they received some kind of instruction in the rudiments of religion during the days of their childhood. But after reaching maturity, excepting for an occasional visit to a church, probably at “Christmas” or “Easter,” that is as far as they go. Yet if asked to declare themselves they readily affirm they are “Christians,” but that means little or nothing more than that they are not Jews, pagans or open infidels. Such persons usually are grossly ignorant of the very fundamentals of the Faith and often the lives of respectable heathen would put theirs to shame. Surely such people are outside the kingdom of God. They cannot participate in its blessings either on earth or in heaven: if they could, its blessings would not be spiritual ones.

Second, *formal* professors. This class is made up of those who regard themselves as much in advance of the ones in the former. They are able to repeat some catechism, or at least give a fairly intelligent account of both the doctrine and the laws of Christ. If not members of a church they are at least “adherents” and regular attenders at its services. They claim to be submissive to Christ’s authority and observe all the outward acts of worship which characterize His followers, but they know nothing of the blessedness of communion with the Lord, nor is His joy their strength. Their religion is but a mental assent to an orthodox creed and going through a round of external observances. They evince no desire for the Truth to have a dominating power over their affections and wills, and most of them regard as deluded enthusiasts



and canting hypocrites those who regard experimental godliness as the only genuine Christianity, and pant after a deeper acquaintance with God. It is plain that these, too, are outside the kingdom, being strangers to those operations of the Spirit which alone make us meet for it.

Third, *deceived* professors. “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Prov. 30:12). Those in this class look with pharisaical pity upon those described above. These deem themselves better taught. They place no reliance upon infant sprinkling, no subscription to the soundest confession of faith, rather do they pride themselves upon an intellectual assent to the letter of Holy Writ. They are quite sure that Christ died for them and that they have accepted Him as their personal Saviour. None can shake their assurance. Yet meekness and lowliness characterize them not, forbearing one another and forgiving one another they are strangers to, the fruit of the Spirit and practical godliness are missing from their daily lives. Their associates address them as “Brother” or “Sister” and that suffices. But what does it profit me to have the reputation of being a wealthy man if I have not the wherewithal to purchase the necessities of life? What avails it to call me a healthy person if disease be eating away my very vitals? If Christ bars the door of the kingdom against me no personal assurance will give me entrance.

Fourth, *hypocritical* professors. The number in this class, we are fain to believe, is much smaller than in the preceding ones: for them there is some hope while life lasts, but for these we can see none. Hypocritical professors are those who deliberately assume a role: they are consciously playing a part. They know that they are not Christians, but for one reason or other are anxious to make their fellows believe they are so. Some of them belonged formerly to one of the other groups, to the third especially, then they discovered the emptiness of their profession or that they had been deceived; too dishonest to disclaim themselves as Christians they took increased pains to persuade others of their piety. Not content with a dull, formal round of duties, they put on the appearance of a deep interest in the things of God and of zeal in seeking to promote His cause. This is incomparably the vilest of the four classes we have sketched.

Such conduct is no less contemptible than irrational. God cannot be imposed upon and no affronts are likely to be more severely punished than dishonour done to His omniscience. The hypocrite's portion will be the "outer darkness" where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Fifth, the *genuine* professor. This is the real Christian, who enjoys the blessings of the kingdom of grace here and will be admitted to the bliss of the kingdom of glory hereafter. He is described here according to his conduct or actions: "but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven." Two points need determining: what is here signified by the Father's will, and what is meant by the doing of it? "The fundamental part of doing the will of God is revealed in these words: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him' (Matthew 17:5). Where this is complied with, everything else follows" (J. Brown). The will of the Father is perfectly made known by the incarnate Word, for He is the final Spokesman of God (Heb. 1:1, 2), all judgment being committed unto Him (John 5:22). The will of the Father is that we should forsake our sins, trust in His Son, take His yoke upon us, and follow Him; to do less and yet call Him our Lord is most horrible mockery. So perfect and intimate is the oneness of the Father and the Son that Christ goes on to say: "Whosoever heareth these sayings *of Mine*, and doeth them," is like one who builds his house upon a rock (verse 24 and cf. Luke 6:46).

What is meant by doing the Divine will? Obviously it does not connote a perfect or flawless performance thereof, for there is no Christian who has ever attained to such excellence in this life, though nothing short of this is the standard set before us (Matthew 5:48). It means that I have surrendered my heart and will to the claims of Christ, so that I truly desire Him to "reign over" me (Luke 19:14) and order my life. It means that I have subjected myself to His authority and that it is the prevailing bent of my mind and constant endeavour to please and honour Him in all things. It means that I genuinely aim to be both internally and externally conformed to His holy image, and that it is my greatest grief when I do those things which displease Him. It means I truly seek that my thoughts, affections and actions are regulated by His precepts. It is not a

sinless obedience which is here in view, but it is a sincere one. It is not a forced one, but prompted by love. It is not merely an external compliance with the Divine commands but a “doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph. 6:6).

“Not every one 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.” Previously we sought to supply an exposition of this verse: explaining the meaning of its terms, pointing out its bearing upon the Jews of that day, and its application unto our own. On this occasion we propose to deal with it more in a *topical* manner. Obviously the theme of this verse is the inadequacy of a mere lip profession of Christian discipleship, and since so many are fatally deceived at this very point we deem it advisable to devote some more paragraphs on the subject. We shall now endeavour to show something of the attainments possible to the formalist and how near he may come to the kingdom of Christ without actually entering it. It is the third class of professors, the *deceived* ones, that we have chiefly in view. We shall seek to examine and test them at four simple but essential points and show of each one wherein they come short of that which is the experience and portion of the regenerate.

1. *Knowledge*. It is plain from the teaching of Holy Writ that there are two distinct orders or types of knowledge of spiritual and Divine things, and that the difference between them is not merely one of degree but of kind, a radical and vital difference. There is a knowledge of God and of His Word which is a saving one, but there is also a knowledge of the same Objects which—though it may be accurate and extensive—is a non-saving one. Thus it is of vast importance that everyone who values his soul should be properly informed as to the essential differences between these two kinds of knowledge, so that he may diligently examine himself and ascertain *which* of them is *his*. That the above distinction is no arbitrary one, no imaginary one of ours, is evident from many passages. When the apostle declared that the Colossian saints “*knew* the grace of God *in truth*” (1:6) he was employing discriminating language, for there are others who know the grace of God only *in theory*. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus

Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3), which is a saving knowledge. “When they *knew* God they glorified Him not as God,” but became idolators and were abandoned of Him (Rom. 1:21-24): that was a non-saving knowledge of God.

“Though I have the gift of prophesy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; . . . and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13:2). Nor is that an altogether unlikely case. Far from it. It is possible for the natural man to acquire a much fuller and more intelligent grasp of the Truth than that which is possessed by the majority of genuine Christians. If he be endowed with a competent intellect, if he has received a good education, if he closely applies himself to the study of Scripture (as he might to one of the arts or sciences), then he may become expertly proficient in a letter knowledge and notional understanding of the same. By patient industry he may master the Hebrew and Greek languages in which they were originally written. By reading and rereading sound theological works he may secure a comprehension of the whole doctrinal system of Truth. By consulting able commentators he may obtain light upon perplexing passages. He may even arrive at an understanding of the “mysteries” of iniquity and of godliness, so that he is quite sound in the Faith. And if he be a fluent speaker, he may discourse upon Divine things so that none may legitimately take issue with his orthodoxy, yea, many may find his preaching instructive and helpful.

There are also very many unregenerate listeners who by waiting upon the ministry of the Word may obtain a wide knowledge thereof. A considerable number are possessed with an insatiable curiosity, or appetite, for the acquisition of religious information, and, by regular attendance at church, close attention to what they hear and the aid of retentive memories, become well instructed in spiritual things, especially where this be supplemented by the reading of a considerable amount of devotional literature. Though unregenerate obtain clear views of the whole Gospel scheme and those gifted with clear minds often grasp more of the profounder aspects of Truth than many of God’s own children are capable of understanding (for “not many wise men after the flesh” [1 Cor. 1:26] are among His elect), and dig more deeply into the mines of

Truth and make greater discoveries than do the saved. They may apprehend things so clearly as to satisfy their judgment and express their notions so distinctly to others as to convince, yea, to defend their beliefs so tellingly and argue about the same to such effect as to silence any who differ from them.

Nor is this knowledge limited to the doctrinal side of the Truth. They may attain unto well-proportioned conceptions of the Divine character and perfections and correct views of the person and work of Christ, the office and operations of the Holy Spirit. By sitting under the faithful preaching of God's servants and by reading articles of a searching nature they may secure a good understanding of the experimental side of things. They may be quite clear upon the miracle of regeneration and be able to draw the lineaments of the new creature as true to life as though they had the image thereof in their own souls. They may be able to describe the work of grace as accurately as though they had an experience of it in their own hearts. They may depict the conflicts between the flesh and spirit as though such opposition were taking place within themselves. They may speak as glowingly of the Christian's graces as if they were the possessors of them. They may narrate the actings of certain graces under such and such a temptation as though they were recounting their own history. They may have the exact idea and true notion of all these things in their heads when there is nothing whatever of them in their hearts.

Yet in spite of all that we have predicated above of these unregenerate yet orthodox preachers and hearers, authors and readers, they are those who are "ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7), that is to say they do not and cannot arrive at the *saving* knowledge of it. And why is this so? Because they lack the necessary faculty for its entrance. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). A saving knowledge of the Truth is impossible unto the unregenerate. There must needs be a suitability between the instrument and its task, between the agent and that which is to be apprehended. An animal is incapable of entering into what the human intellect may comprehend, and one

who has no spiritual faculty is unable to receive spiritual things in a *spiritual* way. The natural man may acquire theoretical and notional knowledge of things, but he cannot obtain a spiritual or saving knowledge of them, for he is totally devoid of spiritual life.

Let us now attempt to answer the question, What is the essential difference between these two kinds of knowledge, wherein does a natural and notional knowledge of Divine things come short of a spiritual and saving knowledge of them? Consider the following: “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee” (Job 42:5): we give not an exposition of those words, but use them illustratively of this contrast. One may listen for years to sermons but when the soul actually has Christ revealed *in* him (Gal. 1:16) he learns the tremendous difference there is between a hearsay knowledge of Him and a spiritual perception as He stands manifested to the soul as a living Reality. Let us endeavour still further to simplify by a human analogy. A child is born with such a filament over his eyes that he is quite blind. He receives a good education and loved ones seek to use their eyes on his behalf and take pains in describing to him some of the beauties and wonders of nature: by their word pictures he obtains clear concepts of many objects. But suppose a specialist performs a successful operation and vision is vouchsafed him: how vastly different his own sight of a glorious sunset from the previous notion he had formed of it!

No matter how carefully and accurately his friends have described a sunset to him, how vivid the contrast when he beheld one for himself! Equally real, equally radical, equally vivid is the difference between a second-hand knowledge of the Truth and a personal acquaintance and experience of its power. Following out the analogy a little farther: while blind, that man may have thought his friends exaggerated the grandeur of a sunset, but as soon as he has seen one for himself he knows that neither poet’s tongue nor artist’s brush could possibly do it justice. He may even have entertained doubts as to the thing itself, wondering if his friends were but drawing upon their imagination and seeking to amuse him with a fairy tale, but now all uncertainty is at an end. So with the regenerate soul and Christ: once his sin-blinded eyes are opened to behold the Lamb, he exclaims with one of old, “I *know* that my

Redeemer liveth.” A saving knowledge of Christ ravishes the soul and so draws the heart unto Him as to esteem all else as dross in comparison with the excellency of the knowledge of Him (Phil. 3:8).

A Laplander may have read about honey, but not until he has eaten some does he really know what it is like. Nor does the soul truly know the Lord until he has “*tasted* that He is gracious” (1 Pet. 2:3). The formalist knows God is omniscient, the Christian has an inward experience thereof, by His detecting to him the heart’s deceitfulness and discovering secret sins. The former knows God is almighty, but the latter has felt His omnipotency working within him: enabling him to believe (Eph. 1:19), subduing his lusts, overcoming the world. The one kind of knowledge then is speculative, the other practical; the one is merely notional, the other experimental; the one is acquired second-hand, the other is communicated directly. He “hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Natural knowledge puffs up, but spiritual humbles and makes the soul painfully conscious of its spiritual ignorance. Observe how in Psalm 119 David prays no less than eight times “teach me.” Natural knowledge produces no spiritual fruit, and it is vain to boast of spiritual learning if it be not accompanied with a holy life.

2. *Repentance*. There are four principal acts and exercises in repentance: confession of sin, hatred of sin, sorrow for sin, resolution against sin; and each of these may be and has been performed by the unregenerate. Cain cried out at the weight and grievousness of his sin saying, “My punishment [or “iniquity”] is greater than I can bear” (Gen. 4:13). Pharaoh acknowledged his sin and condemned himself for it (Ex. 9:27), so did Israel when they had provoked the Lord (Num. 14:40), so did Saul (1 Sam. 15:14), so did Judas (Matthew 27:3). As to hatred of sin, Jehu detested the idols of Baal and destroyed them, yet his heart was not upright (2 Kings 10:26-28, 31). After their lengthy captivity in Babylon Israel were delivered from their love of idolatry, so that the Spirit said “thou that abhorrest idols” (Rom. 2:22). Many there are who hate injustice and oppression, unmercifulness and cruelty, lying and

dishonesty. Concerning sorrow for sin: Israel mourned after their worship of the golden calf (Ex. 33:4) and “mourned greatly” (Num. 14:39) after they had sorely provoked the Lord, and yet continued in their provocations (verse 44). Ahab expressed sore grief for his wickedness (1 Kings 21:27). As to resolution against sin, a strong case of such is seen in Balaam (Num. 22:18, 38).

If the unregenerate may go thus far in a way of repentance, wherein do they fall short? If theirs be not “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18), where is it to be found? Saving repentance proceeds from sorrow for sin, whereas the sorrow of the formalist is defective at these points. First, they *mourn not for sin itself*, but over its consequences. Not as their deeds are contrary to God, a violation of His Law, opposed to His holy will, but because they involve unpleasant effects. Second, not for consequences in reference to God, but themselves: not because He is dishonoured, His authority spurned, and the creature preferred above Him. If they mourn because of His displeasure, it is rather for the effects of His anger. They care nothing about Satan being gratified and the cause of Christ reproached so long as they are not afflicted in their persons or estates. Third, they mourn not for all its consequences in reference to themselves: not as it defiles the soul, keeps at a distance from God, hardens the heart and renders it more incapable of holy duties, but only as it deprives of mercies and produces miseries.

Their *hatred of sin* is defective. It is not extended to all sin: they cannot say, “I hate every false way.” They may hate gross sins such as the state penalizes, but wink at lesser ones. They may hate open wickedness but not secret faults. They may abominate theft and uncleanness, yet make no conscience of pride and self-righteousness. They may hate those things which are cried down by people among whom they now live, and yet enter into the same heartily if they move to another part of the earth. They may hate an unprofitable sin, but refrain not from those which bring them in a revenue. They may hate a sin which is contrary to their peculiar temperament, but not that which is agreeable to their constitution. They may hate others’ sin rather than their own, as Judas complained at the prodigality of Mary; but such hatred is directed rather against the persons than the sins of others. Their hatred is



superficial. It is not with all their heart: it reaches not to the corruptions of their nature, nor is it accompanied with mortifying endeavours.

Their *resolutions against sin* are defective. In their *rise*. They issue not from a renewed heart, from a principle of holiness and love to Christ, but from apprehensions of unpleasant effects and future damnation. Or from the restraining power of God, which keeps them from purposing to sin rather than moves them to full resolution against it: so that their resolutions are negative rather than positive. Thus it was with Balaam, who said not “I will not” but “I cannot” (Num. 22:18, 38)—he had a mind to, but the Lord prevented him. In their *continuance*. Their good resolutions are not followed out to full execution, but are quickly broken. The cause from which they proceed is not constant, and therefore the effects are evanescent. They flow no longer when the spring from which they issue runs dry. That spring is but a momentary anguish or flash of fear, and when that vanishes their resolutions fail. Their goodness is but as “the morning cloud” and “early dew” (Hosea 6:4), which quickly disappear. David feared the danger of this when he prayed, “Keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people, and *prepare* their heart unto Thee” (1 Chron. 29:18).

3. *Faith*. We read of those who “stay themselves [rely] upon the God of Israel” (Isa. 48: 2), yet it was “not in truth, nor in righteousness” (verse 1), for they were obstinate and their neck “as an iron sinew.” There are those who have a faith so like unto a Justifying one that they themselves take it to be the very same and even Christians regard it as the faith of God’s elect. Simon Magus, for example, “believed” (Acts 8:13), and gave such a profession of it that Philip and the local church received him into their fellowship and privileges. Those who received the Seed into stony ground did “for a while believe” (Luke 8:13), and according to its description it differed nothing from saving faith except in its root—the difference not being evident but lying underground. The unregenerate may have a faith which receives unquestionably the Bible as the Word of God, for the Jews entertained no doubts that the Scriptures were the very oracles of God. Agrippa believed in the veracity of the prophets and received their testimony without question (Acts 26:26,

27). They may have a faith which leads to the owning of Christ as their Lord and worshipping Him as such (Matthew 7:21). They may even have a faith which produces strong assurance: those who opposed Christ were quite sure they were “Abraham’s seed” and not the slaves of Satan (John 8:33, 34).

Wherein does this faith come short of a saving one? Wherein is it defective? It is merely an intellectual assent to the letter of Scripture and not “with the heart” (Rom. 10:10), so as to bring Christ into it (Eph. 3:17), just as one may read and accredit a historical work and no spiritual effect be produced thereby. It is a faith which is “alone” (James 2:17), for it is unaccompanied by other graces, whereas a saving faith has as its concomitants love, meekness, holiness, perseverance, etc. Such a faith consents not to take a whole Christ: it will embrace Him as a Saviour, but is not willing for Him to reign over them as King. Those with such a faith desire Christ’s pardon but not His sceptre, His peace but not His yoke. They will accept Him to deliver them from hell, but not to sanctify and cast out of their temples whatever God abominates. They are not willing to subscribe to Christ’s terms of discipleship, which are the denying of self, the taking up of the cross, and following Him whithersoever He leads: such terms they consider harsh and unnecessary.

The faith of the formalist and empty professor is a lifeless and barren one. “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). In that chapter the apostle points out, first, the worthlessness of a bare profession of charity. To give good words to a brother in need, bidding him, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” yet withholding those things needful to him, is cruel hypocrisy (verses 15, 16); equally so is such a faith a mockery if we say we believe in the Holy One and a day of judgment and yet live impiously (verse 17). Second, such a faith is inferior to that of the demons, for they “believe and tremble” (verse 19), whereas empty professors are not afraid to mock God. Third, such a faith is radically different from that possessed and exercised by the father of all who believe, for he rendered unreserved obedience unto the Divine commands (verses 21-24). A faith which does not purify the heart (Acts 15:9), work by love (Gal. 5:6), overcome the world (1

John 5:4), and bring forth fruit acceptable to God, will not conduct anyone to heaven.

4. *Good works.* The unregenerate may make an exceedingly fair show on the practical side of religion, that is in their deportment, both in their addresses to God and dealings with men, in public and private alike. They may go far in their external conformity to the rule of righteousness and visible compliance with the revealed will of God, both as to moral and positive precepts. The outward carriage of the Pharisees, by Christ's own testimony, was "beautiful" (Matthew 23:27) and among their fellows they were esteemed as exceptionally holy men. Such may not only abstain from all gross sins but meet all the external requirements of morality and piety. Paul declares that, while unconverted, he was "blameless" as to his observance of the Law (Phil. 3:6), and the rich young ruler affirmed of the commandments, "all these have I kept from my youth up" (Luke 18:21), nor did Christ charge him with idle boasting. They may practice great austerities in order to mortify the flesh, as some of the Gnostics had for their rule, "Touch not, taste not, handle not" (Col. 2:21). A spirit of fanaticism may induce some of them to suffer martyrdom (1 Cor. 13:3).

Wherein lies the defectiveness of the works of the unregenerate? First, in the state of the persons performing them. They are not reconciled to God and how can He accept aught from His enemies? The individual must first be reconciled to God before He will receive anything at his hands: "the Lord had respect to Abel *and* to his offering" (Gen. 4:4). Second, in the root from which their actions proceed: their fruits are but the wild grapes of a degenerate vine: they must be renewed in the inner man before anything spiritual can be borne. Third, in the motive which prompts them, which is either servile fear or a spirit of legality rather than love; a dread of hell, or an attempt to gain heaven instead of from gratitude. Fourth, in the end which they have in view, which is a selfish one instead of seeking to promote the Divine honour: it is to pacify God rather than glorify Him. Fifth, in the absence of Christ's merits: their works are neither wrought for Christ's sake nor offered in His name, and since none may come unto the Father but by Him (John 14:6) all their works are refused, as Cain's offering was.

There are few passages in all the Word of God which are more solemn than Matthew 7:21-23, and which are more calculated to induce the sober believer to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. Certainly this writer regards it as much too important to skim over hastily. In these verses the Lord makes it known that there are those who regard themselves as genuine Christians merely because they have certain resemblances to the children of God, and who are even looked upon as such by others simply because of their outward conformity to the principles and ordinances of Christianity, and yet are denounced by Christ as “ye that work iniquity.” So presumptuous are they that they are firmly convinced heaven is theirs, yea, they are here represented as complaining to their Judge when He closes the door against them, putting in a plea for their claim at the bar of justice and arguing as though it were unfair that they should be excluded from the everlasting bliss of the righteous. Thus it is clearly implied that they lived and died in the full assurance that they were the objects of God’s approbation, that they were completely secured from the wrath to come.

Nor is this fatal delusion cherished by a comparative few, for our Lord here gives plain intimation that there are “many” who have implicit confidence in their salvation, but who will nevertheless hear from His lips those terrible words, “depart from Me.” How is their infatuation to be explained? The general answer would be, The deceitfulness of the human heart plus the sophistries of Satan. But on so deeply serious a matter as this we need something more than generalizations. When a thoughtful person learns that some dangerous disease is menacing the community, he wants to learn all he can about its nature, its symptoms, and especially the best means of prevention, of safeguarding himself against it. If we deem no pains and care too much in fortifying ourselves against a bodily disease, will the reader complain at the slowness of the writer’s progress if he endeavours to give a more specific and detailed answer to this weighty question: how shall we account for such a fatal confidence? We will seek to point out the grounds on which such a delusion rests, that we may avoid this woeful mistake.

I. *Ignorance.* Earlier we showed at some length the insufficiency of a mere intellectual acquaintance with the letter of Scripture, but

let it not be concluded therefrom that a notional knowledge of the Truth is of no value because it falls short of a saving one, still less derive encouragement for slothfulness. It is in the use of means that God is often pleased to meet with souls, and while they are reading and meditating on His Word to shine into their hearts. Scripture places no premium upon ignorance or indolence. Instead of asking, If such knowledge will not bring a man to heaven, to what purpose is it to labour after knowledge? rather say to yourself, How far must I be from heaven if I lack even that knowledge. What we brought out on the subject of a notional knowledge of the Truth earlier, instead of affording comfort to the ignorant should rather strike them with fear and trembling. If so much knowledge will not secure salvation, then how much worse is my case when I am destitute of what even he possesses. If those who come so near to the kingdom as to be able to view it cannot enter, then what hope is there for those who are content to remain far off from it.

So near are the ignorant to hell that they are within the very shadow of it. "Darkness . . . and shadow of death" are joined together in Scripture (Matthew 4:16). Ignorance is spiritual darkness, the very shadow of eternal death. There is but a thin partition between those immersed in spiritual ignorance and hell itself. Hell is termed "the *outer* darkness" (Matthew 8:12) because ignorance is the inner darkness, the next room as it were to hell itself. Sad indeed is the condition of such. If those who come so near to Canaan as to obtain a taste of its wondrous fruits yet fall in the wilderness so that they never enter it, how can they expect to enter Canaan who refuse to stir out of Egyptian darkness? One with much knowledge may possibly perish, but one who is quite ignorant of spiritual things shall *certainly* perish. When God makes mention of "a people of no understanding," He at once adds, "therefore He that made them will not have mercy on them" (Isa. 27:11). "Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise" certainly does not hold good here.

We do not have to go as far afield today as what is termed heathendom: there are millions within Christendom, yea, countless thousands of churchgoers and members, who know not what is necessary to bring a soul to heaven. They know not that

regeneration is imperative, that “except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God,” that as a fish cannot live out of water because away from its own element, so man is totally unfit for communion with the Holy One until he be renewed within. They know not that there must be a new creation, a miracle of grace wrought in the soul to make fallen man a new creature, so that it can be said of him, “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). The New Jerusalem is for new creatures. They know not that God must communicate to the heart a principle of holiness before there can be any holy affections, motions or fruits. Without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), and by nature man does not have the least grain of it.

So ignorant are the vast majority of those even in places reputed to be sound and orthodox that they know not that there must be the denying of self before anyone can become a follower of Christ: a repudiation of our own wisdom, righteousness, strength, desires, will, and interests. They know not that there must be a renunciation of the world before anyone can be a follower of Him who left the glories of heaven and entered the manger of Bethlehem: that we must be crucified unto the world and the world unto us or we shall never enter into the benefits and blessings purchased by the crucifixion of Christ. They know not that there must be a plucking out of right eyes and a cutting off of right hands, a mortifying of the flesh with its affections and lusts, so that we die daily. They know not that there must be a taking up of the cross if any man will come after Christ, which will cost him the loss of godless companions, the scorn of professors, many a tear and groan. They know not that the Christian life is a fierce wrestling (Eph. 6:12), a continual fight, a race that has to be run with all our might if the crown is to be obtained. If they really knew these things they would not be nearly so confident of heaven when they are total strangers to the very things required of all those for whom heaven is intended.

2. *Negligence and slothfulness.* Those who *do* have a vague and general idea of the things mentioned above are too indolent to lay them to heart, make them their chief concern and prayerful meditation, that they may understand them more clearly. Even if they know them they will not take the pains seriously to examine

their state by them: they will not go to the trouble of comparing their hearts with the Divine rule. So little interested are they in their eternal welfare that they will not spare a few hours to inquire solemnly whether or not they measure up to what the Word of God requires of them. Alas, for the wretched carelessness of the vast majority concerning their souls and everlasting state. They conduct themselves as atheists, acting as though there be no God, no day of reckoning, no lake of fire. They carry themselves as madmen, chasing shadows, playing with dynamite, sporting on the edge of the pit. They are indeed beside themselves (Luke 15:17), devoid of “the spirit . . . of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). If they were sane they would study God’s Word to discover its directions concerning salvation, and would test themselves by those directions.

Their very indifference and carelessness demonstrate the mass of our fellows to be practical atheists and spiritual lunatics. If they were sane they would be deeply concerned whether heaven or hell was to be their eternal abode. They would deem no trouble too great to ascertain which they were journeying unto, which their personal condition fitted them for. They would snatch a few of their swiftly passing hours and devote them to diligent inquiry and self-examination. They would not proffer idle excuses and postpone the task, but would promptly and earnestly set about it. Only those bereft of spiritual sense and reason would neglect a matter the issue of which is either everlasting life or everlasting death. But no; rather than seriously trouble themselves, they will complacently assume all is well with them and take it on trust that they are bound for heaven, when the only grounds they have for such trust are the lies of Satan and that which their own deceitful hearts prompt; and thus they rest the whole weight of eternity upon a cobweb and pin the everlasting concern of their souls upon a shadow.

What makes it more inexcusable is the fact that these same people are quite competent and painstaking over their *temporal* affairs. If a new position be offered them they make careful inquiries before committing themselves. If they purpose making an investment they go to much trouble in ascertaining the soundness of it. If they think of purchasing a property they make full investigations as to its title-deeds and value. But when it comes to eternal things they are

dilatory and slipshod, half-hearted and lazy. They make no serious preparation to meet their God, and when His call comes it finds them wanting. They are sluggards and therefore the sluggard's portion and doom will be theirs. Thus, when men and women are so slack and careless about their souls, when they will not make serious and solemn inquiry about their state, we need not wonder that so many are so woefully mistaken as to promise themselves heaven when in reality nothing but hell is reserved for them.

3. *Misapprehensions of God.* Where people are in ignorance and where they are too sottish to make any real and serious effort to dispel their ignorance, false conceptions of the Divine character are certain to obtain. True there are degrees of ignorance and therefore there are considerable differences in the erroneous ideas men form of God. But those formed by the unregenerate, whether they be the gross ones of the heathen or the more refined ones of Christendom, are alike false. Viewing God through the blurred lens of depraved hearts and minds they fashion Him as one suited to their corrupt inclinations. They invent a God who treats sin lightly, who looks with indulgence upon their waywardness, who is willing to accept a few religious performances as sufficient compensation for all their debt. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" is the charge which He prefers against them, but adds: "I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes" (Psa. 1:21).

They do not believe that God is inexorably just so that He will "by no means clear the guilty," but that every transgression and disobedience must receive a due recompense of reward, unless a sinless Substitute make atonement for them. They do not believe it is impossible to mock God with impunity, that as men sow they reap, so that if they sow to the flesh they must of necessity reap corruption. They do not believe that God is omniscient, that "His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good," for if they did it would act as a curb upon them. They do not believe God is so strict that He will call us to account for "every idle word" and that He "weigheth the spirits" (Prov. 16:2)—the springs of action, the motives which prompt. They do not believe He is ineffably holy, so that sins of thought as well as deed, of omission as well as commission, are hateful to Him. They do not believe that God is "a



consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29) so that this world and all its works will be burned up and that everyone whose name is not written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. They do not believe that God is absolute sovereign, so that “He hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth” (Rom. 9:18).

Even where there is sufficient light and conviction as to reveal to sinners that they come short of the Divine rule, and where they perceive that what the Word insists is necessary to salvation is not found in them, instead of abandoning their false hopes they persuade themselves that God is more merciful than the Scriptures represent Him to be. It is true, says the sinner, in such a case, that the way to heaven is a narrow one and that God’s kingdom can only be entered “through much tribulation” (Acts 14:22), but God will save me even though I fail here and there and I be lacking in this and that. It is true that God *is* merciful, yet for one sin He banished our first parents from Eden! It is true that God is merciful, but for one sin His curse descended upon Ham and his posterity. It is true that God is merciful, but for one sin Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt, Achan and his family were stoned to death, Gehazi was smitten with leprosy, Ananias and Sapphira became corpses. God *is* merciful, yet He sent the flood upon the world of the ungodly, rained fire and brimstone upon the cities of the plain, sent His angel and slew all the firstborn of Egypt and destroyed Pharaoh and his hosts at the Red Sea.

Though they allow themselves in this sin and that, though they are thoroughly self-willed and self-pleasing, they tell themselves that God is lenient. Though they ignore God’s righteous claims upon them and make no effort to meet His holy requirements, they comfort themselves with the thought that He is gracious. They refuse to allow that He is as strict and rigid as His faithful servants declare Him to be. They petulantly ask, Even though I be not so precise and puritanical as some are, shall I not be saved even as they? Though I come not up to their standard, yet God is very pitiful and knows how weak we are, and therefore He will lower the standard for me so that I may be saved as well as the best of them. Poor deluded souls, if that be all their hope, their case is indeed hopeless. Will God be so merciful as to contradict Himself and go

contrary to His Word? Must He show them so much mercy as to despise His own Truth and make Himself a liar? What cause have they to tremble who have nothing to bear up their hopes of heaven but downright blasphemy!

4. *Self-love and self-esteem.* This is as prolific and powerful a cause of self-deception as any of those mentioned above. Sinners compare themselves with their fellows and award themselves the first prize every time. He who is immoral regards himself as better than those who grind the poor and rob the widow. He who is a liar and a thief prides himself that he is no murderer. He who is outwardly religious deems himself vastly superior to the openly profane. Each one discovers some cause or other to say with the self-righteous Pharisee, "I thank God that I am not as this publican." This is because they measure themselves by a wrong standard. Even a soiled handkerchief looks comparatively clean if it be placed on a miry road, but were it laid on newly fallen snow its uncleanness would soon be evident. So it is with those who are blind to their deplorable condition. But men are possessed with such a high estimate of themselves, and entertain such a good opinion of their souls' condition, that even if they can be induced to measure themselves by the rule of God's Word and examine their state they come to the work prepossessed, prejudiced in their own favour. Self-love will not suffer them to deal impartially with their souls.

When they read some condemnatory passage of Scripture they refuse to appropriate it: when they hear a particularly solemn and searching sermon they take it not home to themselves but apply it to some of their fellows. If they be awakened in some measure to the awfulness of sinning against God and alarmed at the fearful punishment reserved for such, this mood is only fitful and fleeting, for they quickly reassure themselves that no such guilt rests upon them. Sudden death may strike down some of their companions, but self-delusion blinds them to their own peril. A manifest judgment from God may fall upon their community, but they persuade themselves that they are in no danger of the wrath to come. The fact is that there are very few indeed who abandon all hope, give way to utter despair and conclude *they will* experience the everlasting burnings, and yet there is only a very little company who will

escape them. The multitudes continue defying God, sinning with a high hand, and go on walking along the road which leads to the pit, and yet by one means or another each persuades himself he shall not enter there. “For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful” (Psa. 36:2).

Yes, the sinner “*flattereth himself* in his own eyes.” If he did not, he would be in terrible distress and anguish. He would not go on so cheerfully and gaily if he really believed himself in danger of hell. But he has too good an estimate of himself for that: he does not think he has ever done anything worthy of such a doom, he is sure he is not bad enough for such a place. Men flatter themselves that they do not live in vice, but are decent citizens and good neighbours. They can see no reason why God should be angry with *them*. They do not take His name in vain nor scoff at religion. Yea, they flatter themselves that they have done much to commend themselves to Him and obtain His approbation. They read their Bibles occasionally and say their prayers. They attend church and contribute to its upkeep. They send their children to the Sabbath school. They resolve that later on they will be even better, out and out for Christ. but meanwhile they want to enjoy the world a little longer, “trust in themselves that they are righteous” (Luke 18:9) and are comparatively clean in their own sight, and yet they are not washed from their filthiness (Prov. 30:12).

There be others, many such, who flatter themselves that they are genuine Christians. They persuade themselves that they have repented of their past, believed the Gospel, and that their sins are forgiven. Consequently when they hear or read anything solemn it makes no impression upon them. Self-love and self-esteem blind them to their true condition. They are Laodiceans who say, “I am rich [spiritually] and increased with goods [have made considerable progress and grown in grace] and in need of nothing,” but as the Lord declares, “and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). And nothing shakes them out of their self-complacency. They continue flattering themselves “until their iniquity be found to be hateful”—until they are disillusioned in hell. As a blind man cannot judge of colours, so prejudiced in their own favour are the self-righteous that

it is impossible for them to judge of the complexion of their souls, whether the image of God or the image of the Devil be stamped upon it. As one has well said, “Satan blinds one eye and self-love closes the other,” and the deceitfulness of sin seals both, and thus they assure themselves that they are on the way to heaven when they are on the high road to hell. Doubtless a number of such will read this very article and be quite unsearched by it, sure that it pertains not to *their* case.

A closing word to Christian readers. Since the four things described above are the principal ones among the more immediate causes of deceit concerning the state of the soul, then how sincerely ought the regenerate to examine themselves at these points and seek to make sure they are not imposing on themselves. How they should “cease from man” and search the Scriptures without bias to ascertain the general tenor of their teaching as to *what God requires* if they are to dwell with Him for ever, not confining themselves to such verses as John 3:16, and Romans 10:13, but comparing such as Isaiah 55:7; Acts 3:19; Hebrews 5:9, so as to obtain a *full* answer to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” How cautiously and conscientiously should we examine ourselves, testing the grounds of our hope, determining whether or not there really is in us that which meets God’s terms, whether or not our righteousness exceeds that of the religious formalist (Matthew 5:20). Nor can such a task be discharged hurriedly: “*Give diligence* to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10)—with what earnestness should we give ourselves to this work!

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth *Me*, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth” (Jer. 9:23, 24). Yes, “knoweth *Me*,” the living God, and not a fantasy devised by your own sentiment. To believe in a God who has no existence save in their own imagination is the case with multitudes in the churches today. “Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace” (Job 22:21). To cherish the image of a fictitious god entails a fictitious peace. Eternal life is to “know Thee the only *true God*,

and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3): how we should labour after such a knowledge of Him! Finally if self-love and esteem effectually hinder an impartial examination of myself, if it be the case with a host of my fellows that “a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?” (Isa. 44:20), how earnestly should I cry to God to grant me an honest heart which desires to know the truth and nothing but the truth about my case.

What is the relation between our present verses and the one immediately preceding? Matthew Henry gives the following as his analysis of verses 21-23: “(1). Christ here shows by a plain remonstrance that an outward profession of religion, however remarkable, will not bring us to heaven, unless there be a correspondent conversation. (2). The hypocrite’s plea against the strictness of this law, offering other things in lieu of obedience. (3). The rejection of this plea as frivolous.” Personally we think William Perkins perceived more clearly the connection between verses 22, 23 and verse 21: “In these two verses Christ returns to explain and confirm the first conclusion of the former verse concerning those professors that shall not be saved. The words contain two parts: first, a description of the persons by their behaviour; secondly, a declaration of their condemnation.” For our own part we regard the verses which are now to be before us as containing an exemplification and amplification of what had been affirmed in the preceding one, showing that the most gifted and eminent professors will not be treated as exceptions if they fail to meet the fundamental requirement of God’s kingdom.

In the previous verse Christ had declared, “Not every one 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:” something far more important and radical than a mere lip profession is needed in order to participate in spiritual blessings, even a full surrendering of ourselves unto Christ and a performing of the Divine will from the heart. But now the Lord went on to affirm something still more solemn and searching: “Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many

wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me ye that work iniquity.” Here it is not simply the rank and file of those claiming to be the followers of Christ who are in view, but the most influential ones among them, their *leaders and preachers*. Nor does He single out a few exceptional cases, but declares that there are “many” who have occupied positions of prominence and authority, who wrought mighty works in His name, but so far from enjoying His approbation are denounced by Him as workers of iniquity.

First, it should be pointed out that the gifts and works of these men are described according to the nature of those which obtained in Bible times. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as “prophesying” today, nor has there been for eighteen centuries past. A prophet was the mouthpiece of God. Under an afflatus of the Holy Spirit he gave forth a Divine revelation. In other words, he spoke by Divine inspiration. It was not an ordinary and natural gift, but an extraordinary and spiritual one. It was withdrawn when the Canon of Scripture was completed, for in His written Word we now have the Divine will fully revealed, containing as it does a complete and perfect rule of faith and practice (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Consequently, any person who now poses as a Divine prophet, claiming to have a special message from God, is either an impostor or a fanatic: an emissary of Satan seeking to beguile the unwary, or a neurotic who suffers his enthusiasm to run away with him, or an egoist who desires to direct attention to himself and occupy the limelight.

Because a man spoke by Divine inspiration in Bible times it was no proof that he was regenerate. Here, as everywhere else, God exercised His sovereignty, employing as His mouthpiece whom He pleased. Thus we find Balaam, the soothsayer, uttered some remarkable predictions concerning Israel, the Messiah Himself, and the judgments which should overtake various nations; all of which were fulfilled. We are told that “the Lord put a word in Balaam’s mouth” (Num. 23:5), that he “knew the knowledge of the most High” and “saw the vision of the Almighty” (Num. 24:6), yet he “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15) and perished amid the enemies of the Lord (Num. 31:8). So also of the apostate

king of Israel it is written, “the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied,” so that it became a proverb: “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (1 Sam. 10:10, 11). More remarkable still is the case of Caiaphas, the man who delivered up the Redeemer into the hands of Pilate, for of him we are told: “And this spake he not of himself [but by Divine inspiration]: but being high priest that year, he *prophesied* that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:51, 52).

“And in Thy name have cast out devils” or “demons.” This was another of the supernatural gifts or powers bestowed upon men at the beginning of the Christian era, and yet it was not confined to the regenerate. It is at least open to doubt whether the man mentioned in Luke 9:49, was such, for there we are told that “John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out demons in Thy name and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us.” But a clearer case to the point is that of the betrayer of our Lord. In Matthew 10:1, we are expressly told that “when Christ had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out,” and one of that company was Judas Iscariot! Had Judas failed to perform this feat his fellow apostles had at once had their suspicions aroused, and when the Saviour announced, “One of you shall betray Me,” instead of asking, “Lord, is it I?” had at once known He referred to Judas. “And in Thy name done many wonderful works” or “works of power,” miraculous works—the Greek word occurring again in Matthew 11:20, in connection with Christ’s “mighty works.” This power too was conferred upon Judas.

If it should be asked, Why should God so remarkably endow the unregenerate, even using them as His mouthpieces? several answers might be returned. First, as has been intimated above, in order to exemplify God’s uncontrollable sovereignty over and ownership of all men. He can employ His creatures as He pleases and select as His agents and instruments whom He will and none can say Him nay. Second, to display His invincible power. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord . . . He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Prov. 21:1), and if the king’s heart, so every man’s; but how little is that realized today. Balaam was but a puppet in His hands, unable to

resist His will. Caiaphas was the enemy of Christ and yet compelled to utter a remarkable prophecy about Him! Third, to evince that supernatural gifts and endowments—though highly esteemed among men—are not the most precious of His bestowments: something infinitely more valuable is reserved for the objects of His everlasting love. What comparison is there between Balaams prophecy and the “new song” in the mouths of the redeemed, between the miracles performed by Judas and being made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light?

Our Lord thus plainly intimates that men may conduct themselves as His commissioned servants—acting in His name—that they may be endowed with the most remarkable gifts, that they may perform supernatural works, and yet not be saved. It was so at the beginning of this dispensation; it is so now. It would be a great mistake to draw the conclusion that because our Lord describes these unregenerate professors according to the terminology of the first century, when ministers were endowed with extraordinary gifts and exercised supernatural powers, that it has no direct bearing on leaders among professing Christians in this twentieth century. Because verse 22 depicts conditions which no longer obtain in kind that is no proof that it has no immediate application unto men of prominence in the religious realm today. Rather should we reason that, if such a fearful warning was needed at the beginning of this era, when men were so wonderfully gifted, how much more pertinent is it to those of lesser talents and abilities in this degenerate generation!

The modern equivalent of prophesying in the name of Christ would be *preaching* in His name: the casting out of demons would find its present counterpart in the deliverance of Satan’s slaves chronicled by our “city missions”—such as the reforming of drunkards, reclaiming of fallen women, recovering of drug addicts; while the “wonderful works” may be taken as referring to the costly buildings termed “churches” with their huge memberships, and the sensational achievements of “missionaries” in heathen lands. Not that we wish to imply that all engaged in such activities are unregenerate; nevertheless, after close observation and personal contact with many of these workers, we seriously doubt whether



more than a small percentage of them have really been born again. Nor should this at all astonish us. Our Lord Himself distinctly declared of “many” of those serving in His name, “I never knew you,” and if that were true of those who wrought during the palmiest days of the Christian era, why should it be thought strange that such a state of affairs pertains now that Christendom is so apostate?

Here then is what is most solemn of all in this awe-inspiring passage: that there will be many preachers, Christian leaders and workers—and in view of our Lord’s use of the word in verse 13, probably the great majority of them—who will be shut out of heaven. Sad and awful as this is, yet from our observation in many sections of Christendom and from what generally obtains we cannot say it surprises us. Among the young men accepted as students for the ministry is there any larger percentage of regenerate ones than of the young men making a Christian profession who enter not the ministry? We are far from believing they are all hypocrites. Doubtless there are many thousands who select the ministry as their avocation because of the social prestige and financial remuneration it affords. But large numbers of youths who receive the Word “with joy” (Matthew 13:20) mistake their religious enthusiasm and fervour for a call from God and love for souls, and having more zeal than knowledge, and friends who encourage rather than counsel caution, they make the great mistake.

Once the young man is accepted as a student for the ministry his regeneration is (with very rare exceptions) tacitly assumed. And what is there then which is in any wise calculated to open his deceived eyes? Some of the denominations require him to spend years at a university in order to obtain a degree, and there his time and energies are strenuously occupied with subjects that contain nothing whatever for the soul, but only that which is apt to foster intellectual conceit. One who has mistaken carnal ambition and enthusiasm for a call from God is not likely to find a course in sociology, psychology, logic, philosophy, etc., likely to disillusion him. And even when the young man is not required to enter a university, he has to take a course in “divinity.” In other words he is introduced to the sacred study of theology as a subject on which to

exercise his intellectual powers, as a text book over which he must pore and whose contents he must master in order to pass examinations thereon. The result is that in the vast majority of cases he is so sickened therewith that after his ordination he never again opens a theological treatise.

Nor is there any more hope, humanly speaking, that his eyes may be opened to his lost condition after he has been ordained and called to a charge. If he is to “make good” therein such a multitude of duties demand his attention that there is little opportunity for the careful examination of his own soul. There are so many departments of the church he has to superintend, so many sermons and addresses he must prepare each week, so many calls to make, that he has little leisure for self-introspection. He is so occupied with the concerns and needs of others that attention to the ministerial injunction “take heed *unto thyself*” (1 Tim. 4:16) is crowded out. It is greatly to be feared that thousands of ministers today have ground to lament “they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but *mine own vineyard* have I not kept” (Song of Sol. 1:6). But whatever be the contributing causes and occasions of this tragic fatality, the fact remains that the Divine Judge is yet going to say unto many of those who preached and wrought in His name, “I never knew you.”

“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me ye that work iniquity” (verse 23). There are five things here which claim our attention, though utterly insufficient is any mortal to do them justice. First, the time-mark: “then.” Second, the character in which Christ is here viewed: as the Judge of men. Third, the solemn verdict announced: “I never knew you.” Fourth, the fearful sentence imposed: “depart from Me.” Fifth, the real character of religious formalists: “ye that work iniquity.” It would not be possible to assemble together five things of greater gravity and moment than these. And what human pen is competent to comment upon subjects so awesome? Oh, that both writer and reader may approach the same with becoming reverence and solemnity.

“And *then*” looks back to the ‘in that day’ of the previous verse. It is the day of final retribution, when “every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be

revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13). It is "the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5), "because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world. . . by that Man whom He hath ordained" (Acts 17:31). Who can conceive of the consternation which will possess the hearts of impenitent rebels, of unmasked hypocrites, of disillusioned formalists, as they are compelled to stand with an assembled universe before the dread tribunal? Then will the books be opened, the secrets of all hearts disclosed, the hidden things of darkness brought to light. Then shall each one who has trampled upon the Divine Law, rejected the only Mediator, and done despite to the Spirit of grace, stand forth in his true colours, stripped of the disguise with which he imposed upon his fellow creatures. "The heaven shall reveal his iniquity; and the earth shall rise up against him" (Job 20:27). They will be speechless with guilt, utterly overwhelmed, unable to "stand in the judgment" (Psa. 1:5).

"And then will *I* profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." The Speaker is the Lord Jesus, ye not as presenting Himself as the Saviour of sinners, but rather officiating as their Judge, pronouncing their doom. In this solemn passage our Lord gave plain intimation that He was more than man, that He is none other than the Arbiter of every man's eternal state, from whose decision there can be no appeal. Amazing indeed was the contrast between His lowly appearance and external circumstances and this language of conscious majesty and power. While delivering this sermon on the mount Christ appeared before men's eyes as a Galilean peasant, yet both the tone and tenor of it proclaimed Him to be none other than Immanuel, God manifest in flesh. No wonder we are told that "when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: For He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes" (verses 28, 29) And it is before this very Judge that both writer and reader must yet appear!

"I never knew you." This does not mean that Christ was totally unacquainted with their persons, that He was not cognizant of their character and conduct. No, rather does it signify that He did not

approve of or accept them. When it is said, “The Lord *knoweth* the way of the righteous” (Psa. 1:6), it is to be understood that He is pleased with the same. Here then is the awful verdict: “I never knew you;” no, not even when you were preaching and working in My name. You may have deceived yourselves and those to whom you ministered, but it was impossible to impose upon Me. In His “I will *profess* unto them,” He seems to speak ironically: *you* have professed much, made free use of My name, maintained your standing as leaders in the Church—so now hear *My* profession! “I *never* knew you” makes it quite clear they were not such as had fallen from grace, as it also looks back to eternity past: they had never been born again, never evangelically repented, never believed savingly, and had not been among the favoured company upon whom His approbation rested before the foundation of the world.

“Depart from Me.” Here is the fearful sentence imposed. They may have been highly respected in the churches, but they are objects of abhorrence to the Lord Christ. They frequently had His name on their lips, but since He dwelt not in their hearts they are totally disqualified for the celestial courts. “If the most admired and useful preacher on earth had no better evidence of his conversion than his abilities and success as a preacher, he would preach to others and be himself a castaway” (T. Scott). “Depart from Me” is the announcement of their just condemnation. They had been near to Him by their profession and by the position they held in the Church, but now they must go to the only place for which they are fitted, which is banishment from the Holy One. Herein we discover the force of that terrible expression “the second death” (Rev. 21:8): it is not extinction of being or the annihilation of the soul, but eternal separation from Christ, alienation from the life of God; it is a being “punished with everlasting destruction *from* the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:9), cut off for ever from the Bestower of blessing, tormented in the lake of fire.

“Ye that work iniquity.” How different is the Divine estimate from the human! These preachers and leaders pleaded that they had wrought many “wonderful works,” but because they had not proceeded from renewed hearts, because they had been done to win the applause of their fellows, rather than for the glory of God, the

One who cannot be imposed upon declares they are “works of iniquity.” Ah, my reader, we may look upon and admire the outward show, but the One who will yet judge us “looketh on *the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:7), and therefore “that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15)—even the righteousnesses of the natural man are but “filthy rags” in His sight.

***“Deeds of greatness as we deemed them  
He will show us were but sin;  
Cups of water we’d forgotten  
He will tell us were for Him.”***

Not only the gross external crimes, but pride and presumption and the religious performances of hypocrites are “works of iniquity.”

In view of the chapters preceding this one there is no need for us to make a lengthy application here. The chief lesson for us to take to heart from the above is the utter insufficiency of the most imposing gifts. Yet how many there are who suppose that the exercise of unusual abilities in the church is evidence of great spirituality. As uncommon natural endowments are by no means always accompanied by moral worth, so the presence of abnormal powers is no proof of regeneration. We must learn to distinguish between the performing of wonderful works and the possession of spiritual graces, for the former is no guarantee of the latter. Showy talents may raise a man above his fellows, even above genuine Christians, but unless he is indwelt by the Spirit of God what are they worth? “Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries. . .and have not charity, I am nothing” (1 Cor. 13: 2). Then let us search ourselves and see whether or not we have something better than those to whom Christ will yet say, “I never knew you.” A principle of holiness within evidenced by a godly walk without is infinitely to be preferred above the power to cast out demons and heal the sick. To commune with God in private is an inestimably grander privilege than to speak with tongues in public.

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