

Coming to Christ



A. W. Pink

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1. Introduction

By way of introduction let us bring before the readers the following Scriptures. (1). “Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life:” John 5:40. (2). “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest:” Matthew 11:28. (3). “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him:” John 6:44. (4). “All that the Father giveth Me, shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out:” John 6:37. (5). “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple:” Luke 14:26, 27. (6). “To whom coming, as unto a living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious:” 1 Peter 2:4. (7). “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them:” Hebrews 7:25.

The first of these passages applies to every unregenerate man and woman on this earth. While he is in a state of nature, no man can come to Christ. Though all excellencies both Divine and human, are found in the Lord Jesus, though He is “altogether lovely” (Song. 5:16), yet the fallen sons of Adam see in Him no beauty that they should desire Him. They may be well instructed in “the doctrine of Christ,” they may believe unhesitatingly all that Scripture affirms concerning Him, they may frequently take His name upon their lips, profess to be resting on His finished work, sing His praises, yet their *hearts* are far from Him. The things of this world have the first place in their affections. The gratifying of self is their dominant concern. They surrender not their lives to Him. He is too holy to suit their love of sin; His claims are too exacting to suit their selfish hearts; His terms of discipleship are too severe to suit their fleshly ways. They *will not* yield to His Lordship—true alike with each one of us till God performs a miracle of grace upon our hearts.

The second of these passages contains a gracious invitation, made by the compassionate Saviour to a particular class of sinners. The

“all” is at once qualified, clearly and definitely, by the words which immediately follow it. The character of those to whom this loving word belongs is clearly defined: it is those who “labour” and are “heavy laden.” Most clearly then it applies not to the vast majority of our light-headed, gay-hearted, pleasure-seeking fellows, who have no regard for God’s glory and no concern about their eternal welfare. No, the word for such poor creatures is rather, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God *will* bring thee into judgment” (Eccl. 11:9). But to those who have “laboured” hard to keep the law and please God, who are “heavy laden” with a felt sense of their utter inability to meet His requirements, and who long to be delivered from the power and pollution of sin, Christ says, “Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.”

The third passage quoted above at once tells us that “coming to Christ” *is not* the easy matter so many imagine it, nor so simple a thing as most preachers represent it to be. Instead of its so being, the incarnate Son of God positively declares that such an act is utterly impossible to a fallen and depraved creature unless and until Divine power is brought to bear upon him. A most pride-humbling, flesh-withering, man-abasing word is this. “Coming to Christ” is a far, far different thing from raising your hand to be prayed for by some Protestant “priest,” coming forward and taking some cheap-jack evangelist’s hand, signing some “decision” card, uniting with some “church,” or any other of the “many inventions” (Eccl. 7:29) of man. Before any one can or will “come to Christ” the understanding must be supernaturally enlightened, the heart must be supernaturally changed, the stubborn will must be supernaturally broken.

The fourth passage is also one that is unpalatable to the carnal mind, yet is it a precious portion unto the Spirit-taught children of God. It sets forth the blessed truth of unconditional election, or the discriminating grace of God. It speaks of a favoured people whom the Father giveth to His Son. It declares that every one of that blessed company shall come to Christ: neither the effects of their fall in Adam, the power of indwelling sin, the hatred and untiring efforts of Satan, nor the deceptive delusions of blind preachers, will be able to finally hinder them—when God’s appointed hour arrives,

each of His elect is delivered from the power of darkness and is translated into the kingdom of His dear Son. It announces that each such one who comes to Christ, no matter how unworthy and vile he be in himself, no matter how black and long the awful catalogue of his sins, He will by no means despise or fail to welcome him, and under no circumstances will He ever cast him off.

The fifth passage is one that makes known the terms on which alone Christ is willing to receive sinners. Here the uncompromising claims of His holiness are set out. He must be crowned Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all. There must be the complete heart renunciation of all that stands in competition with Him. He will brook no rival. All that pertains to “the flesh,” whether found in a loved one or in self, has to be hated. The “cross” is the badge of Christian discipleship: not a golden one worn on the body, but the principle of self-denial and self-sacrifice ruling the heart. How evident is it, then, that a mighty, supernatural, Divine work of grace *must* be wrought in the human heart, if any man will even *desire* to meet such terms!

The sixth passage tells us that the Christian is to *continue as he began*. We are to “come to Christ” not once and for all, but frequently, daily. He is the only One who can minister unto our needs, and to Him we must constantly turn for the supply of them. In our felt emptiness, we must draw from His “fullness” (John 1:16). In our weakness, we must turn to Him for strength. In our ignorance we must apply to Him for wisdom. In our falls into sin, we must seek afresh His cleansing. *All* that we need for time and eternity is stored up in Him: refreshment when we are weary (Isa. 40:31), healing of body when we are sick (Exod. 15:26), comfort when we are sad (1 Peter 5:7), deliverance when we are tempted (Heb. 2:18). If we have wandered away from Him, left our first love, then the remedy is to “repent and do the *first* works” (Rev. 2:5), that is, cast ourselves upon Him anew, come just as we did the first time we came to Him—as unworthy, self-confessed sinners, seeking His mercy and forgiveness.

The seventh passage assures us of the eternal security of those who do come. Christ saves “unto the uttermost” or “for evermore” those who come unto God by Him. He is not of one mind today and of another tomorrow. No, He is “the same yesterday, and today, and

forever” (Heb. 13:8). “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1), and blessedly does He give proof of this, for “He ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Inasmuch as *His* prayers are effectual, for He declares that the Father hearest Him “always” (John 11:42), none whose name is indelibly stamped on the heart of our great High Priest can ever perish. Hallelujah!

Having sought to thus introduce some of the leading aspects of the subject which is to engage our attention, we now propose to enter into some detail as the Spirit of Truth is pleased to grant us His much-needed assistance. Let us consider some of the Obstacles in coming to Christ.

2. Obstacles in Coming to Christ

Under this head it will be our endeavour to show *why* it is that the natural man is *unable* to “come to Christ.” As a starting point let us again quote John 6:44, “No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him.” The reason why this is such a “hard saying,” even unto thousands who profess to be Christians, is because they utterly fail to realize the terrible havoc which the Fall has wrought; and, it is greatly to be feared, because they are themselves strangers to “the plague” of their own hearts (1 Kings 8:38). Surely if the Spirit had ever awakened them from the sleep of spiritual death, and given them to see something of the dreadful state they were in by nature, and they had been brought to feel that the carnal mind *in them* was “enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7), then they would no longer cavil against this solemn word of Christ’s. But the spiritually dead can neither see nor feel spiritually.

Wherein lies the total inability of the natural man? 1. It is *not in the lack of the necessary faculties*. This needs to be plainly insisted upon, or otherwise fallen man would cease to be a responsible creature. Fearful as were the effects of the Fall, yet they deprived man of none of the faculties with which God originally endowed him. True it is that the coming in of sin took away from man all power to use those faculties aright, that is, to employ them for the glory of his Maker. Nevertheless, fallen man possesses identically the same threefold nature, of spirit and soul and body, as he did before the Fall. No part of man’s being was annihilated, though

each part was defiled and corrupted by sin. True, man died spiritually, but death is not extinction of being: spiritual death is *alienation from* God (Eph. 4:18): the spiritually dead one is very much alive and active in the service of Satan.

No, the inability of fallen man to “come to Christ” lies in no physical or mental defect. He has the same feet to take him unto a place where the Gospel is preached, as he has to walk with to a picture-show. He has the same eyes by which to read the Holy Scriptures, as he has to read the world’s newspapers. He has the same lips and voice for calling upon God, as he now uses in idle talk or foolish song. So too he has the same mental faculties for pondering the things of God and the concerns of eternity, as he now uses so diligently in connection with his business. It is because of this that man “is without excuse.” It is the *misuse* of the faculties with which the Creator has endowed him which increases man’s guilt. Let every servant of God see to it that these things are constantly pressed upon their unsaved hearers.

2. We have to search deeper in order to find the seat of man’s spiritual impotency. His inability lies *in his corrupt nature*. Through Adam’s Fall, and through our own sin, our nature has become so debased and depraved, that it is impossible for any man to “come to Christ,” to “love and serve Him,” to esteem Him more highly than all the world put together and submit to His rule, until the Spirit of God renews him, and implants a new nature. A bitter fountain cannot send forth sweet waters, nor an evil tree produce good fruit. Let us try and make this still clearer by an illustration. It is the *nature* of a vulture to feed upon carrion: true it has the same bodily members to feed upon the wholesome grain the hens do, but it lacks the disposition and relish for it. It is the nature of a sow to wallow in the mire, true, it has the same legs as a sheep, to conduct it to the meadow, but it lacks the desire for the green pastures. So it is with unregenerate man. He has the same physical and mental faculties as the regenerate has for the things and service of God, but he has no love for them.

“Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen. 5:3). What an awful contrast is found here from that which we read two verses before: “God created man, in the likeness of God made He him.” In the interval, Adam had fallen, and a fallen parent could

beget only a fallen child, transmitting unto him his own depravity. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:4). Therefore do we find the sweet singer of Israel declaring, “Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa. 51:5). Though, later, grace made him the man after God’s own heart, yet by nature, David (as we) was a mass of iniquity and sin. How early does this corruption of nature appear in children. “Even a child is known by his doings” (Prov. 20:11): the evil bias of its heart is soon manifested—pride, self-will, vanity, lying, averseness to good, are the bitter fruits which quickly appear on the tender but vitiated twig.

3. The inability of the natural man to “come to Christ” lies in *the complete darkness of his understanding*. This leading faculty of the soul has been despoiled of its primitive glory, and covered over with confusion. Both mind and conscience are defiled: “there is none that understandeth” (Rom. 3:11). Solemnly did the Apostle remind the saints: “ye were sometimes darkness” (Eph. 5:8), not merely “in darkness,” but “darkness” itself. “Sin has closed the windows of the soul, darkness is over all the region: it is the land of darkness and shadow of death, where the light is as darkness. The prince of darkness reigns there, and nothing but the works of darkness are framed there. We are born spiritually blind, and cannot be restored without a miracle of grace. This is thy case, whoever thou art, that art not born again” (Thomas Boston, 1680). “They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge” (Jer. 4:22).

“The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). There is in the unregenerate *an opposition to* spiritual things and an aversion against them. God has made a revelation of His will unto sinners touching the way of salvation, yet they will not walk therein. They hear that Christ alone is able to save, yet they refuse to part with those things that hinder their coming to Him. They hear that it is sin which slays the soul, and yet they cherish it in their bosoms. They heed not the threats of God. Men believe that fire will burn them, and are at great pains to avoid it; yet they show by their actions that they regard the everlasting burnings as a mere scarecrow. The Divine commandments are “holy, just, and good,” but men hate them, and observe them only so far as their respectability among

men is promoted.

4. The inability of the natural man to “come to Christ” lies in *the complete corruption of his affections*. “Man as he is, before he receives the grace of God, loves anything and everything above spiritual things. If ye want proof of this, look around you. There needs no monument to the depravity of the human affections. Cast your eyes everywhere—there is not a street, nor a house, nay, nor a heart, which doth not bear upon it sad evidence of this dreadful truth. Why is it that men are not found on the Sabbath day universally flocking to the house of God? Why are we not more constantly found reading our Bibles? How is it that prayer is a duty almost universally neglected? Why is Christ Jesus so little beloved? Why are even His professed followers so cold in their affections to Him? Whence arise these things? Assuredly, dear brethren, we can trace them to no other source than this, the corruption and vitiation of the affections. We love that which we ought to hate, and we hate that which we ought to love. It is but human nature, fallen human nature, that man should love this present life better than the life to come. It is but the effect of the Fall, that man should love sin better than righteousness, and the ways of the world better than the ways of God” (C. H. Spurgeon, sermon on John 6:44).

The affections of the unrenewed man are wholly depraved and distempered. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and *desperately wicked*” (Jer. 17:9). Solemnly did the Lord Jesus affirm that the affections of fallen man are a mother of abominations: “For from within (not from the Devil!) out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness” (Mark 7:21, 22). “The natural man’s affections are wretchedly misplaced; he is a spiritual monster. His heart is where his feet should be, fixed on the earth; his heels are lifted up against Heaven, which his heart should be set on: Acts 9:5. His face is towards Hell, his back towards Heaven; and therefore God calls to him to turn. He joys in what he ought to mourn for, and mourns for what he should rejoice in; glories in his shame, and is ashamed of his glory; abhors what he should desire, and desires what he should abhor: Proverbs 2:13-15” (From Thomas Boston’s “Fourfold State”).

5. The inability of the natural man to “come to Christ” lies in *the total perversity of his will*. “‘Oh!’ said the Arminian, ‘men may be saved if they will.’ We reply, ‘My dear sir, we all believe that; but it is just the *if they will* that is the difficulty.’ We assert that no man *will* come to Christ unless he be drawn; nay, *we* do not assert it, but *Christ* Himself declares it—‘Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life’ (John 5:40); and as long as that ‘ye will not come’ stands on record in Holy Scripture, we shall not be brought to believe in any doctrine of the freedom of the human will. It is strange how people, when talking about free will, talk of things which they do not at all understand. ‘Now’ says one, ‘I believe men can be saved if they will.’ My dear sir, that is not the question at all. The question is, are men ever found naturally willing to submit to the humbling terms of the Gospel of Christ? We declare, upon Scriptural authority, that the human will is so desperately set on mischief, so depraved, and so inclined to everything that is evil, and so disinclined to everything that is good, that without the powerful, supernatural, irresistible influence of the Holy Spirit, no human being will ever be constrained towards Christ” (C. H. Spurgeon).

“Now here is a threefold cord against heaven and holiness, not easily to be broken; a blind mind, a perverse will, and disorderly, distempered affections. The mind, swelled with self-conceit, says the man should not stoop; the will, opposite to the will of God, says, he will not; and the corrupt affections rising against the Lord, in defence of the corrupt will, says, he shall not. Thus the poor creature stands out against God and goodness, till a day of power come, in which he is made a new creature” (Thomas Boston). Perhaps some readers are inclined to say, Such teaching as this is calculated to discourage sinners and drive them to despair. Our answer is, first, it is according to God’s Word! Second, O that it may please Him to use this article *to* drive some to despair of all help from themselves. Third, it makes manifest the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit’s working with such depraved and spiritually helpless creatures, if they are ever to savingly come to Christ. And until this is clearly perceived, HIS aid will never be *really* sought in earnest!

There are some souls greatly distressed and puzzled to know exactly what is signified by “coming to Christ.” They have read and

heard the words often, and perhaps many a preacher has bidden them to “come to Him,” yet without giving a scriptural explanation of what that term connotes. Such as have been awakened by the Spirit, shown their woeful condition, convicted of their high-handed and life-long rebellion against God, and brought to realize their dire need of Christ, and who are truly anxious to come savingly to Him, have found it a task altogether beyond their powers. Their cry is, “Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat!” (Job 23:3). True, there are not many who pass through such an experience, for *God’s* “flock” is but a “little” one (Luke 12:32). True, the vast majority of professing Christians claim that *they* found “coming to Christ” a very simple matter. But in the clear light of John 6:44 we must assure you, dear reader, that if *you* found “coming to Christ” to be easy, then it is proof you have *never* come to Him at all in a spiritual and saving way.

What, then, is meant by “coming to Christ?” First, and negatively, let it be pointed out that it is *not* an act which we perform by any of our bodily members. This is so obvious that there should be no need for us to make the statement. But in these awful days of spiritual ignorance and the carnal perversion of the holy things of God, explanation of the most elementary truths and terms is really required. When so many precious souls have been deluded into thinking that a going forward to a “mourner’s bench” or “penitent form,” or the taking of some preacher’s hand, is the same things as coming to Christ, we dare not pass over the defining of this apparently simple term, nor ignore the need for pointing out what it does not signify.

Second, the word “come,” when used in this connection, is a *metaphorical* one: that is to say, a word which expresses an act of the body is transferred to the soul, to denote its act. To “come to Christ” signifies the movement of a Spirit-enlightened mind toward the Lord Jesus—as Prophet, to be instructed by Him; as Priest, whose atonement and intercession are to be relied upon; as King, to be ruled by Him. Coming to Christ implies a turning of our back upon the world, and a turning unto Him as our only Hope and Portion. It is a going out of self so as to rest no longer on anything in self. It is the abandoning of every idol and of all other dependencies, the heart going out to Him in loving submission and

trustful confidence. It is the will surrendering to Him as Lord, ready to accept His yoke, take up the Cross, and follow Him without reserve.

To “come to Christ” is the turning of the whole soul unto a whole Christ in the exercise of Divine grace upon him: it is the mind, heart, and will being supernaturally drawn to Him, so as to trust, love, and serve Him. “It is the duty and interest of weary and heavy-laden sinners to ‘come to Jesus Christ’—renouncing all those things which stand in opposition to Him, or in competition with Him; we must accept Him as our Physician and Advocate, and give up ourselves to His conduct and government, freely willing to be saved by Him, in His own way, and on His own terms” (Matthew Henry). Ere proceeding further, we would earnestly beg each reader to prayerfully and carefully test and measure himself or herself by what has been said in this and the preceding paragraph. Take nothing for granted: as you value your soul, seek Divine help to make sure that you have truly “come to Christ.”

Now a popish “christ” is a christ of *wood*, and a false preacher’s “christ” is a christ of *words*; but Christ Jesus, our Lord, is “The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). The Christ of God fills Heaven and earth: He is the One by whom all things exist and consist. He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, having all power, dominion, and might. He is made higher than the heavens, and unto Him all principalities and powers are subject. At His presence both the earth and the heavens shall yet flee away. Such a Christ is neither to be offered nor proffered, sold nor given by sinful men. He is the unspeakable Gift of the Father to as many as He has ordained to eternal life, and none others. This Christ, this Gift of the Father, is supernaturally revealed and applied to the heirs of salvation by the Holy Spirit, when, where, and as He pleases; and not when, where, and how men please.

In the preceding article we dwelt at length upon those words of Christ in John 6:44, “no man can come unto Me,” seeking to show the nature of the fallen creature’s spiritual impotency, or why it is the unregenerate are unable to come to Christ in a spiritual and saving way. Let us now ponder the remainder of our Lord’s sentence: “except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.” Of

what does that “drawing” consist? We answer, first, just as our “coming to Christ” does not refer to any bodily action, so this Divine “drawing” respects not the employment of any external force. Second, it signifies a powerful impulse put forth by the Holy Spirit within the elect, whereby their native impotency for performing spiritual actions is overcome, and an ability for the same is imparted. It is this secret and effectual operation of the Spirit upon the human soul which enables and causes it to come to Christ. This brings us to our next division.

3. Coming to Christ with Our Understandings

1. *A knowledge of Christ is essential.* There can be no movement towards an unknown object. No one can obey a command until he is acquainted with its terms. A prop must be seen before it will be rested on. We must have some acquaintance with a person before he will either be trusted or loved. This principle is so obvious it needs arguing no further. Apply it unto the case in hand, the subject before us: the knowledge of Christ must of necessity precede our believing on Him or our coming to Him. “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (Rom. 10:14). “He that cometh to God *must* believe that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). None can come to Christ while they are ignorant about Him. As it was in the old creation, so it is in the new: God first says, “Let there be light.”

2. *This knowledge of Christ comes to the mind from the Holy Scriptures.* Nothing can be known of Him save that which God has been pleased to reveal concerning Him in the Word of Truth. It is there alone that the true “doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9) is to be found. Therefore did our Lord give commandment, “Search the Scriptures . . . they are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). When He berated the two disciples for their slowness of heart to believe, we are told that, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). The Divine Oracles are designated “the Word of Christ” (Col. 3:16) because He is the substance of them. Where the Scriptures have not gone, Christ is unknown: clear proof is this that an acquaintance with Him cannot be gained apart from their inspired testimony.

3. *A theoretical knowledge of Christ is not sufficient.* Upon this point we must dilate at greater length, for much ignorance concerning it prevails today. A head-knowledge about Christ is very frequently mistaken for a heart-acquaintance with Him. But orthodoxy is not salvation. A carnal judgment about Christ, a mere intellectual knowledge of Him, will never bring a dead sinner to His feet: there must be a living experience—God’s Word and Work meeting together in the soul, renewing the understanding. As 1 Corinthians 13:2 so plainly and solemnly warns us, I may have the gift of prophecy, understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, yet if I have not love, then I am nothing. Just as a blind man may, through labour and diligence, acquire an accurate theoretical or notional conception of many subjects and objects which he never saw, so the natural man may, by religious education and personal effort, obtain a sound doctrinal knowledge of the Person and Work of Christ, without having any spiritual or vital acquaintance with Him.

Not every kind of knowledge, even of God’s Truth and His Christ, is effectual and saving. There is a *form* of knowledge, as well as of godliness, which is destitute of power—“which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law” (Rom. 2:20). The reference is to the Jews, who were instructed in the Scriptures, and considered themselves well qualified to teach others; yet the Truth had not been written on their hearts by the Holy Spirit. A “*form* of knowledge” signifies there was a model of it in their brains, so that they were able to discourse freely and fluently upon the things of God, yet were they without the life of God in their souls. O how many have a knowledge *of* salvation, yet not a knowledge *unto* salvation, as the Apostle distinguishes it in 2 Timothy 3:15—such a knowledge as the latter must be imparted to the soul by the miracle-working operation of the Holy Spirit.

“They proceed from evil to evil, and *they know not Me*, saith the Lord” (Jer. 9:3). Of whom was this spoken—of the heathen who were without any written revelation from Him? No, of Israel, who had His Law in their hands, His temple in their midst, His Prophets speaking to them. They had been favoured with many and wondrous manifestations of His majesty, holiness, power and mercy; yet though they had much intellectual knowledge of Him, they were strangers to Him spiritually. So it was when the Son of God became

incarnate. How much *natural* light they had concerning Him: they witnessed His perfect life, saw His wondrous miracles, heard His matchless teaching, were frequently in His immediate presence; yet, though the Light shown in the darkness, “the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). So it is today. Reader you may be a diligent student of the New Testament, be thoroughly acquainted with the Old Testament types and prophecies, believe all that the Scriptures say concerning Christ, and earnestly teach them to others, and yet be yourself a stranger to Him spiritually.

“Except a man be born again he cannot *see* the kingdom of God” (John 3:3), which means that the unregenerate are utterly incapable of discerning the things of God spiritually. True, they may “see” them in a natural way: they may investigate and even admire them theoretically, but to receive them in an experimental and vital way they cannot. As this distinction is of such great importance, and yet so little known today, let us endeavour to illustrate it. Suppose a man who had never heard any music: others tell him of its beauty and charm, and he decides to make a careful study of it. That man might thoroughly familiarize himself with the art of music, learn all the rules of that art, so that he understood the proportions and harmony of it; but what a different thing is that from listening to a grand oratorio—the ear now taking in what before the mind knew only the theory of! Still greater is the difference between a natural and spiritual knowledge of Divine things.

The Apostle declared, “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery” (1 Cor. 2:7). He did not only affirm that it is a mystery in itself, but that it is still spoken “*in* a mystery.” And why is this? Because the unregenerate, even where it is spoken in their hearing, yea, when it is clearly apprehended by them in a notional way, yet they neither know nor apprehend the mystery that is still in it. Proverbs 9:10 declares, “the knowledge of the holy is understanding:” there is no true understanding of Divine things except the “knowledge of the holy.” Every real Christian has a knowledge of Divine things, a personal, experimental, vital knowledge of them, which no carnal man possesses, or can obtain, no matter how diligently he study them. If I have seen the picture of a man, I have an image in my mind of that man according to his

picture; but if I see the man himself, how different is the image of him which is then formed in my mind! Far greater still is the difference between Christ made known in the Scriptures and Christ “revealed in me” (Gal. 1:16).

4. *There must be a spiritual and supernatural knowledge of Christ imparted by the Holy Spirit.* That is in view in 1 John 5:20, “we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true.” The faculty must be suited to the object or subject known. The natural understanding is capable of taking in Christ and knowing Him in a natural way, but we must be “renewed in the spirit of our mind” (Eph. 4:23) before we can know Christ in a spiritual way. There must be a supernatural work of grace wrought upon the mind by the Holy Spirit before there can be any inward and spiritual apprehension of the supernatural and spiritual person of Christ. That is the true and saving knowledge of Christ which fires the affections, sanctifies the will, and raises up the mind to a spiritual fixation on the Rock of Ages. It is *this* knowledge of Him which is “life eternal” (John 17:3). It is *this* knowledge which produces faith in Christ, love for Him, submission to Him. It is *this* knowledge which causes the soul to truthfully and joyously exclaim, “whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee” (Psa. 73:25).

“No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). It is by the secret and effectual operation of the Spirit that the Father brings each of his elect to a saving knowledge of Christ. These operations of the Spirit begin by his enlightening the understanding, renewing the mind. Observe carefully the order in Ezekiel 37:14, “And shall put My Spirit in you, and ye shall live . . . then shall ye know that I am the Lord.” No sinner ever comes to Christ until the Holy Spirit first comes to him! And no sinner will savingly believe on Christ until the Spirit has communicated faith to him (Eph. 2:8, Col. 2:12); and even then, faith is an eye to *discern* Christ before it is a foot to *approach* Him. There can be no act without an object, and there can be no exercising of faith upon Christ till Christ is seen in His excellency, sufficiency, and suitability to poor sinners. “That ye may know *and* believe Me” (Isa. 43:10) is the order. “They that *know* Thy name

will (not “ought to”) put their trust in Thee” (Psa. 9:10). But again, we say, that knowledge must be a spiritual and miraculous one imparted by the Spirit.

The Spirit Himself, and not merely a preacher must take of the things of Christ and show them unto the heart. It is only in *God’s* “light” that we truly “*see* light” (Psa. 36:9). The opening of his eyes precedes the conversion of the sinner from Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). The light of the sun is seen breaking out at the dawn of day, before its heat is felt. It is those who “see” the Son with a supernaturally enlightened understanding that “believe” on Him with a spiritual and saving faith (John 6:40). We *behold* as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, before we are *changed* into His very image (2 Cor. 3:18). Note the order in Romans 3:11, “there is none that understandeth” goes before “there is none that seeketh after God.” The Spirit must shed His light upon the understanding, which light conveys the actual image of spiritual things in a spiritual way to the mind, forming them on the soul; much as a sensitive photographic plate receives from the light the images to which it is exposed. *This* is the “*demonstration* of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4).

5. *How is this spiritual and vital knowledge to be known from a mere theoretical and notional one?* By its effects. Unto the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “For our Gospel came not unto you in *word only*, but *also in power*, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance” (1 Thess. 1:5), which is partly explained in the next verse, “having received the Word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit had given that Word an efficacy which no logic, rhetoric, or persuasive power of men could. It had smitten the conscience, torn open the wounds which sin had made, exposed its festering sores. It had pierced them even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. It had slain their good opinion of themselves. It had made them feel the wrath of God burning against them. It had caused them to seriously question if such wretches could possibly find mercy at the hands of a holy God. It had communicated faith to look upon the great Physician of souls. It had given a joy such as this poor world knows nothing of.

The light which the Spirit imparts to the understanding is full of efficacy, whereas that which men acquire through their study is not

so. Ordinary and strong mineral water are alike in colour, but differ much in their taste and virtue. A carnal man may acquire a theoretical knowledge of all that a spiritual man knows vitally, yet is he “barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). The light that he has is ineffectual, for it neither purifies his heart, renews his will, nor transforms his life. The head-knowledge of Divine truth, which is all that multitudes of present-day professing Christians possess, has no more influence upon their walk unto practical godliness, than though it was stored up in some other man’s brains. The light which the Spirit gives, humbles and abases its recipient; the knowledge which is acquired by education and personal efforts, puffs up and fills with conceit.

A spiritual and saving knowledge of Christ always constrains the soul unto loving obedience. No sooner did the light of Christ shine into Paul’s heart, than he at once asked, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). Of the Colossians the Apostle declared, “The Gospel which is come unto you . . . bringeth forth fruit . . . since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth” or “in reality” (1:6). But a mere intellectual knowledge of the truth is “held in *un*righteousness” (Rom. 1:18). Its possessors are zealous to argue and cavil about it, and look down with contempt upon all who are not so wise as they; yet the *lives* of these frequently put them to shame. A saving knowledge of Christ so endears Him to the soul that all else is esteemed as dung in comparison with His excellency: the light of His glory has cast a complete eclipse over all that is in the world. But a mere doctrinal knowledge of Christ produces no such effects: while its possessors may loudly sing His praises, yet their hearts are still coveting and eagerly pursuing the things of time and sense.

The natural man may know the truth of the things of God, but not the things themselves. He may thoroughly understand the Scriptures in the letter of them, but not in their spirit. He may discourse of them in a sound and orthodox manner, but in no other way than one can *talk of* honey and vinegar, who never tasted the sweetness of the one, nor the sourness of the other. There are hundreds of preachers who have accurate notions of spiritual things, but who see and taste not the things themselves which are wrapt in the words of Truth—“understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1

Tim. 1:7). Just as an astronomer who makes a life-study of the stars, knows their names, positions, and varying magnitudes, yet receives no more personal and special influence from them than do other men; so it is with those who study the Scriptures, but are not supernaturally and savingly enlightened by the Spirit. O my reader, has the Day-Star arisen *in your heart* (2 Peter 1:19)?

We trust that sufficient has been said in the previous articles to make clear unto every Christian reader that the saving “coming to Christ” of a poor sinner is neither by physical or mental act, but is wholly spiritual and supernatural; that that act springs not from human reason or human will-power, but from the secret and efficacious operations of God the Spirit. We say clear unto “the Christian reader,” for we must not expect the unregenerate to perceive that of which they have no personal experience. The distinction pointed out in the second half of the last article (the whole of which may well be carefully reread) between a sound intellectual knowledge of Christ and a vital and transforming knowledge of Him, between knowing Christ as He is set forth in the Scriptures, and as He is Divinely revealed *in us* (Gal. 1:16), is not one which will appeal to the carnal mind; rather it is one which will be contemptuously rejected. But instead of being surprised at this, we should expect it.

Were our last article sent to the average “Fundamentalist” preacher or “Bible teacher,” and a request made for his honest opinion of it, in all probability he would say that the writer had lapsed into either “mysticism” or “fanaticism.” Just as the religious leaders of Christ’s day rejected His spiritual teachings, so the “champions of orthodoxy,” those who boast so loudly that *they* are faithfully and earnestly contending for the faith, will not receive the humbling and searching messages of Christ’s servants today. The substance of this article would be ridiculed by them. But their very ridicule only serves to demonstrate the solemn truth of 1 Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him.” These words have puzzled some who have thoughtfully pondered them, for they do not seem to square with the patent facts of observation.

We have personally met the most conscienceless men—untruthful, dishonest, not scrupling to use tactics which many a non-

professor would scorn—who, nevertheless, ardently proclaimed the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, the Deity of Christ, salvation by grace alone. We have had personal dealings with men whose hearts were filled with covetousness, and whose ways were worldly almost to the last degree, yet who tiraded against “modernism” and “evolutionism” etc., and “faithfully preached” the Virgin-birth and the blood of Christ as the sinner’s only hope. That these men are “natural” or “carnal,” that is, unregenerate, is plain and unmistakable if we measure them by the infallible rule of Holy Writ: it would not only be a contradiction in terms, but *blasphemy* to say such had been made, by God, “new creatures in Christ.” Nevertheless, so far from the foundation truths of Scripture being “foolishness” unto these unregenerate characters, they warmly endorse and ardently propagate them.

But what has been said above *does not* clash, to the slightest degree, with 1 Corinthians 2:14, when that verse be rightly read and understood. Let it be carefully noted that it does not say the “things *of God* are foolishness” unto the natural man. Had it done so, the writer had been at a complete loss to explain it. No, it declares that the “things *of the Spirit of God*” are foolishness: and what has been said above only serves to illustrate the minute accuracy of this verse. The “things of God,” these men profess to believe; the “things of Christ,” they appear to valiantly champion; but the “things *of the Spirit of God*” they are personal strangers unto; and therefore when His secret and mysterious work upon the souls of God’s elect is pressed upon them, they appear to be so much “foolishness” unto them—either “mysticism” or “fanaticism.” But to the renewed it is far otherwise.

The Spirit’s supernatural operations in the implanting of faith in God’s elect (Col. 2:12) produces a “new creation.” Salvation by faith is wrought through the Spirit’s working effectually with the Gospel. Then it is that He *forms* Christ in the soul (Gal. 4:19), and lets in the Object of faith through the eye of faith, a real “image” of Christ being directly stamped upon the newly quickened soul, which quickening has given ability to discern Christ. Thus, Christ is “formed” in the heart, after the manner that an outward object is formed in the eye. When I say that I have a certain man or object in my eye, I do not mean that this man or object is in my eye *locally*—

that is impossible; but they are in my eye objectively—I see them. So, when it is said that Christ is “formed *in us*,” that Christ is “*in us* the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), it is not to be understood that He who is now corporeally at the right hand of God, is *locally and substantially* formed in us. No, but that Christ at the right hand of God, the substance and *Object* of faith, is by the Spirit let in from above, so that the soul sees Him by the eye of faith, exactly as He is represented in the Word. So Christ is “formed” in us; and thus He “dwells in our hearts by faith” (Eph. 3:17).

What we have endeavoured to set forth above is beautifully adumbrated in the lower and visible world. It is indeed striking to discover how much of God’s spiritual works are shadowed out in the material realm. If our minds were but more spiritual, and our eyes engaged in a keener lookout, we should find signs and symbols on every side of the invisible realities of God. On a sunny day, when a man looks into clear water, he sees there a face (his own), formed by representation, which directly answers to the fact outside and above the water; there are not two faces, but one, original and yet represented. But only one face is seen, casting its own single image upon the water. So it is in the soul’s history of God’s elect: “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, *are changed into the same image* from glory to glory, even *as by the Spirit* of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). Oh that His image in us may be more evident to others.

4. Coming to Christ with Our Affections

“All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me” (John 6:37), declared the Lord Jesus. He who, before the foundation of the world, gave the *persons* of His people unto Christ, now gives them, in regeneration, a *heart* for Christ. The “heart” includes the affections as well as the understanding. In our last article we pointed out how that no man will (or can) “come to Christ” while ignorant of Him; it is equally true that no man will (or can) “come to Christ” while his affections are alienated from Him. Not only is the understanding of the natural man shrouded in total darkness, but his heart is thoroughly opposed to God. “The carnal mind is enmity (not merely “at enmity,” but “enmity” itself) against God” (Rom. 8:7); and “enmity” is something more than a train of hostile

thoughts, it is the hatred of the affections themselves. Therefore when the Holy Spirit makes a man a “new creature in Christ,” He not only renews his understanding, but He radically changes the heart.

When faith gives us a sight of spiritual things, the heart is warmed with love to them. Note the order in Hebrews 11:13, where, in connection with the patriarchs’ faith in God’s promises, we are told, “were persuaded of them, and *embraced* them,” which is a term denoting great affection. When the understanding is renewed by the Spirit, then the heart is drawn unto Christ with a tender desire for Him. When the Holy Spirit is pleased to make known in the soul the wondrous love of Christ to me, then love unto Him is begotten and goes out toward Him in return. Observe the order in 1 John 4:16, “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him:” the Apostle places knowledge (not intellectual, but spiritual) before faith, and both before a union and communion with Divine love. The light and knowledge of Christ and Heaven which we have by tradition, education, hearing or reading, never fires the affections. But when the love of God is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 5:5) O what a difference is produced!

Far too little emphasis has been placed upon this aspect of our subject. In proof of this assertion, weigh carefully the following question: Why is it that “he that *believeth not* shall be damned” (Mark 16:16) is quoted a hundred times more frequently by preachers and tract-writers than “if any man *love not* the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” [accursed] (1 Cor. 16:22)? If we are to properly preserve the balance of truth, we must note carefully the manner in which the Holy Spirit has rung the changes on “believe” and “love” in the New Testament. Consider the following verses: “all things work together for good to them that (not “trust,” but) *love* God” (Rom. 8:28); “the things which God hath prepared for them that (not only “believe,” but) *love* Him” (1 Cor. 2:9); “if any *love* God, the same is known (or “approved”) of him” (1 Cor. 8:3); “a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that (not “believe in,” but) *love* His appearing” (2 Tim 4:8); “the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them

that *love* Him” (James 1:12); “heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that *love* Him” (James 2:5); “He that *loveth not* knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

“No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). In our last article we saw that this “drawing” consists, in part, of the Spirits’ supernatural enlightenment of the understanding. It also consists in the Spirit’s inclining the affections unto Christ. He acts upon sinners agreeably to their nature: not by external force, such as is used on an unwilling animal, but by spiritual influence or power moving their inward faculties: “I drew them with cords of a *man*, with bands of *love*” (Hosea 11:4)—by rational conviction of their judgment, by showing them that there is infinitely more goodness and blessedness in Christ than in the creature or the sinful gratification of carnal desires; by winning their hearts to Christ, by communicating to them a powerful sense of His superlative excellency and complete suitability unto all their needs. “To them that believe, He is *precious*” (1 Peter 2:7)—so precious, they are willing to part with the world and everything, that they may “win Christ” (Phil. 3:8).

As was shown at some length in the opening article, the affections of the natural man are alienated from God, wedded to the things of time and sense, so that he will not come to Christ. Though God’s servants seek to charm him with the lovely music of the Gospel, like the adder he closes his ear. It is as the Lord portrayed it in the parable of the Great Supper: “they all with one consent began to make excuse” (Luke 14:18), one preferring his lands, another his merchandise, another his social recreation. And nothing short of the Almighty power and working of the Holy Spirit in the heart can break the spell which sin and Satan has cast over man, and turn his heart from perishing objects to an imperishable one. This He does in God’s elect by His secret and invincible operations, sweetly working in and alluring them by revealing Christ to them in the winsomeness of His person and the infinite riches of His grace, by letting down His love into their hearts, and by moving them to lay hold of His kind invitations and precious promises.

Most blessedly is this represented to us in “My Beloved put in His hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for Him” (Song. 5:4). Here the door of the heart (Acts 16:14), or more

specifically, the “door of faith” (Acts 14:27), is seen shut against Christ, and the object of His love being so loath and unwilling as to rise and open to Him. But though unwelcome, His love cannot be quenched, and He gently enters (He does not burst the door open!) uninvited. His “hand” opening the “door” is a figure of His efficacious grace removing every obstacle in the heart of His elect (compare with Acts 11:21), and winning it to Himself. The effect of His gracious entry, by His Spirit, is seen in the “and my bowels were moved for Him,” which is a figure of the stirring of the affections after Him—compare with Isaiah 63:15, Philemon 12. For the thoughts of this paragraph we are indebted to the incomparable commentary of John Gill on the Song of Solomon.

O what a miracle of grace has been wrought when the heart is truly turned from the world unto God, from self unto Christ, from love of sin unto love of holiness! It is this which is the fulfilment of God’s covenant promise in Ezekiel 36:26, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.” There is no man that loves money so much, but that he is willing to part with it, for that which he values more highly than the sum he parts with to purchase it. The natural man esteems material things more highly than he does spiritual, but the regenerated loves Christ more than all other objects beside, and this, because he has been made a “new creature.” It is a spiritual love which binds the heart to Christ.

It is not simply a knowledge of the Truth which saves, but a *love* of it which is the essential prerequisite. This is clear from 2 Thessalonians 2:10, “Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” Close attention must be paid unto those words, or a wrong conclusion may be drawn: it is not a love *for* the Truth, but a love *of* the Truth. There are those who have the former, who are destitute of the latter. We have met Russelites, and have boarded with Christadelphians, who put many a real Christian to shame: people who after a long day’s work, spent the whole evening in diligently studying the Bible. Nor was it just to satisfy curiosity. Their zeal had lasted for years. Their Bible was as precious to them as a devout Romanist’s “beads” or “rosary” are. So too there is a *natural* “love” for Christ, an ardent devotion for Him,

which springs not from a renewed heart. Just as one reared among devout Romanists, grows up with a deep veneration and genuine affection for the Virgin; so one carefully trained by Protestant parents, told from infancy that Jesus loves him, grows up with a real but natural love for Him.

There may be an historical faith in all the doctrines of Scripture, where the power of them is never experienced. There may be a fleshly zeal for portions of God's Truth (as there was in the case of the Pharisees) and yet the heart not be renewed. There may be joyous emotions felt by a superficial reception of the Word (as there was in the stonyground hearers: Matthew 13:20), where the "root of the matter" (Job 19:28) be lacking. Tears may flow freely at the pathetic sight of the suffering Saviour (as with the company of women who bewailed Christ as He journeyed to the Cross: Luke 23:27, 28), and yet the heart be as hard as the nether millstone toward God. There may be a rejoicing in the light of God's Truth (as was the case with Herod: Mark 6:20), and yet Hell never be escaped from.

Since then there is a "love for the Truth" in contradistinction from a "love of the Truth," and a natural love for Christ in contrast from a spiritual love of Him, how am I to be sure which mine is? We may distinguish between these "loves" thus: first, the one is partial, the other is impartial: the one esteems the doctrines of Scripture but not the duties it enjoins, the promises of Scripture but not the precepts, the blessings of Christ but not His claims, His priestly office but not His kingly rule; but not so with the spiritual lover. Second, the one is occasional, the other is regular: the former balks when personal interests are crossed; not so the latter. Third, the one is evanescent and weak, the other lasting and powerful: the former quickly wanes when other delights compete, and prevails not to control the other affections; the latter rules the heart, and is strong as death. Fourth, the former betters not its possessor; the latter transforms the life.

That a saving "coming to Christ" *is* the affections being turned to and fixed upon Him, may be further demonstrated from the nature of backsliding, which begins with the heart's departure from Christ. Observe how this is traced to its real source in Revelation 2:4, "Thou hast left (not "lost") thy first *love*." The reality and genuineness of our *returning* to Christ is evidenced by the *effects*

which the workings of the understanding produce upon the affections. A striking example of this is found in Matthew 26:75, “And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly:” that “remembrance” was not merely an historical, but a gracious one—his heart was melted by it. So it ever is when the Holy Spirit works in and “renews” us. I may recall a past sin, without being duly humbled thereby. I may “remember” Christ’s death in a mechanical and speculative way, without the affections being truly moved. It is only as the faculty of our understanding is quickened by the Holy Spirit that the heart is powerfully impressed.

5. Coming to Christ with the Will

The man within the body is possessed of three principal faculties: the understanding, the affections, and the will. As was shown in the first article, all of these were radically affected by the Fall: they were defiled and corrupted, and in consequence, they are used in the service of self and sin, rather than of God and of Christ. But in regeneration, these faculties are quickened and cleansed by the Spirit: not completely, but initially, and continuously so in the life-long process of sanctification, and perfectly so at our glorification. Now each of these three faculties is subordinated to the others by the order of nature, that is, as man has been constituted by his Maker. One faculty is influenced by the other. In Genesis 3:6 we read, “the woman saw (perceived) that the tree was good for food”—that was a conclusion drawn by the understanding; “and that it was *pleasant* to the eyes”—there was the response of her affections; “and a tree to be desired”—there was the moving of the will; “she took”—there was the completed action.

Now the motions of Divine grace work through the apprehensions of faith in the understanding, these warming and firing the affections, and they in turn influencing and moving the will. Every faculty of the soul is put forth in a saving “coming to Christ:” “If thou believest with *all* thine heart, thou mayest”—be baptized (Acts 8:37). “Coming to Christ” is more immediately an act of the will, as John 5:40 shows; yet the will is not active toward Him until the understanding has been enlightened and the affections quickened.

The Spirit first causes the sinner to perceive his deep need of Christ, and this, by showing him his fearful rebellion against God, and that none but Christ can atone for the same. Secondly, the Spirit creates in the heart a desire after Christ, and this, by making him sick of sin and in love with holiness. Third, as the awakened and enlightened soul has been given to see the glory and excellency of Christ, and His perfect suitability to the lost and perishing sinner, then the Spirit draws out the will to set the highest value on that excellency, to esteem it far above all else, and to close with Him.

As there is a Divine order among the three Persons of the Godhead in providing salvation, so there is in the applying or bestowing of it. It was God the Father's good pleasure appointing His people from eternity unto salvation, which was the most full and sufficient *impulsive* cause of their salvation, and every whit able to produce its effect. It was the incarnate Son of God whose obedience and sufferings were the most complete and sufficient *meritorious* cause of their salvation, to which nothing can be added to make it more apt and able to secure the travail of His soul. Yet neither the one nor the other can *actually* save any sinner except as the Spirit *applies* Christ to it: His work being the *efficient* and immediate cause of their salvation. In like manner, the sinner is not saved when his understanding is enlightened, and his affections fired: there must also be the act of the will, surrendering to God and laying hold of Christ.

The order of the Spirit's operations corresponds to the three great offices of Christ, the Mediator, namely, His prophetic, priestly, and kingly. As Prophet, He is first apprehended by the understanding, the Truth of God being received from His lips. As Priest, He is trusted and loved by the heart or affections, His glorious Person being first endeared unto the soul by the gracious work which He performed for it. As Potentate, our will must be subdued unto Him, so that we submit to His government, yield to His sceptre, and heed His commandments. Nothing short of the throne of our hearts will satisfy the Lord Jesus. In order to this, the Holy Spirit casts down our carnal imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), so that we freely and gladly take His yoke upon us; which yoke is, as one of the

Puritans said, “lined with love.”

“No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him” (John 6:44). This “drawing” is accomplished by the Spirit: first, in effectually enlightening the understanding; secondly, by quickening the affections; third, by freeing the will from the bondage of sin and inclining it toward God. By the invincible workings of grace, the Spirit turns the bent of that will, which before moved only toward sin and vanity, unto Christ. “Thy people,” said God unto the Mediator, “shall be willing in the day of Thy power” (Psa. 110:3). Yet though Divine power be put forth upon a human object, the Spirit does not infringe the will’s prerogative of acting freely: He morally persuades it. He subdues its sinful intractability. He overcomes its prejudice, wins and draws it by the sweet attractions of grace.

“God never treats man as though he were a brute; He does not drag him with cart ropes; He treats men as men; and when He binds them with cords, they are the cords of love and the bands of a man. I may exercise power over another’s will, and yet that other man’s will may be perfectly free; because the constraint is exercised in a manner according with the laws of the human mind. If I show a man that a certain line of action is much for his advantage, he feels bound to follow it, but he is perfectly free in so doing. If man’s will were subdued or chained by some physical process, if man’s heart should, for instance, be taken from him and be turned round by a manual operation, that would be altogether inconsistent with human freedom, or indeed with human nature; and yet I think some few people imagine that we mean this when we talk of constraining influence and Divine grace. We mean nothing of the kind; we mean that Jehovah Jesus knows how, by irresistible arguments addressed to the understanding, by mighty reasons appealing to the affections, and by the mysterious influence of His Holy Spirit operating upon all the powers and passions of the soul, so to subdue the whole man, that whereas it was once rebellious it becomes obedient; whereas it stood stoutly against the Most High, it throws down the weapons of its rebellion and cries, ‘I yield! I yield! subdued by sovereign love, and by the enlightenment which Thou hast bestowed upon me, I yield myself to Thy will’” (C.H. Spurgeon, on John 6:37).

The perfect consistency between the freedom of a regenerated

man's spiritual actions and the efficacious grace of God moving him thereto, is seen in 2 Corinthians 8:16, 17. "But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being moved forward, of his own accord he went unto you." Titus was moved to that work by Paul's exhortation, and was "willing of his own accord" to engage therein; and yet it was "God which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus" for them. God controls the inward feelings and acts of men without interfering either with their liberty or responsibility. The zeal of Titus was the spontaneous effusion of his own heart, and was an index to and element of his character; nevertheless, God wrought in him both to will and to do of *His* good pleasure.

No sinner savingly "comes to Christ," or truly receives Him into the heart, until the will freely consents (not merely "assents" in a theoretical way) to the severe and self-denying terms upon which He is presented in the Gospel. No sinner is prepared to forsake all for Christ, take up "the cross," and "follow" Him in the path of universal obedience, until the heart genuinely esteems Him "The Fairest among ten thousand," and this none ever do before the understanding has been supernaturally enlightened and the affections supernaturally quickened. Obviously, none will espouse themselves with conjugal affections to that person whom they account not the best that can be chosen. It is as the Spirit convicts us of our emptiness and shows us Christ's fullness, our guilt and His righteousness, our filthiness and the cleansing merits of His blood, our depravity and His holiness, that the heart is won and the resistance of the will is overcome.

The holy and spiritual Truth of God finds nothing akin to itself in the unregenerate soul, but instead, everything that is opposed to it (John 15:18, Rom. 8:7). The demands of Christ are too humbling to our natural pride, too searching for the callous conscience, too exacting for our fleshly desires. And a miracle of grace has to be wrought within us before this awful depravity of our nature, this dreadful state of affairs, is changed. That miracle of grace consists in overcoming the resistance which is made by indwelling sin, and creating desires and longings Christward; and then it is that the will cries,

*“Nay but I yield, I yield,
I can hold out no more;
I sink, by dying love compell’d,
And own Thee Conqueror.”*

A beautiful illustration of this is found in Ruth 1:14-18. Naomi, a backslidden saint, is on the point of leaving the far country, and (typically) returning to her Father’s House. Her two daughters-in-law wish to accompany her. Faithfully did Naomi bid them “count the cost” (Luke 14:28); instead of at once urging them to act on their first impulse, she pointed out the difficulties and trials to be encountered. This was too much for Orpah: her “goodness” (like that of the stony-ground hearers, and myriads of others) was only “as a morning cloud,” and “as the early dew” it quickly went away (Hosea 6:4). In blessed contrast from this we read, “But Ruth clave unto her, saying, Intreat me not to leave thee, to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

What depth and loveliness of affection was here! What whole-hearted self-surrender! See Ruth freely and readily leaving her own country and kindred, tearing herself from every association of nature, turning a deaf ear to her mother-in-law’s begging her to return to her gods (verse 15) and people. See her renouncing idolatry and all that flesh holds dear, to be a worshipper and servant of the living God, counting all things but loss for the sake of His favour and salvation; and her future conduct proved her faith was genuine and her profession sincere. Ah, naught but a miraculous work of God in her soul can explain this. It was God working in her “both to will and to do of *His* good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). He was drawing her with the bands of love: grace triumphed over the flesh. This is what every genuine conversion is—a complete surrender of the mind, heart and will to God and His Christ, so that there is a desire to “follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth” (Rev. 14:4).

The relation between our understanding being enlightened and the affections quickened by God and the resultant consent of the will, is seen in Psalm 119:34, “Give me understanding and I shall keep Thy law; yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart.” “The sure result of regeneration, or the bestowal of understanding, is the devout

reverence for the law and a reverent keeping of it in the heart. The Spirit of God makes us to know the Lord and to understand somewhat of His love, wisdom, holiness, and majesty; and the result is that we honour the law and yield our hearts to the obedience of the faith. The understanding operates upon the affections; it convinces the heart of the beauty of the law, so that the soul loves it with all its powers; and then it reveals the majesty of the law-Giver, and the whole nature bows before His supreme will. He alone obeys God who can say ‘my Lord, I would serve Thee, and do it with all my heart;’ and none can truly say this till they have received as a free grant the inward illumination of the Holy Spirit” (C.H. Spurgeon).

Ere turning to our final section, a few words need to be added here upon 1 Peter 2:4-5, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone . . . ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house.” Has the sovereign grace of God inclined me to come unto Christ? then it is my duty and interest to “abide” in Him (John 15:4). Abide in Him by a life of faith, and letting His Spirit abide in me without grieving Him (Eph. 4:30) or quenching His motions (1 Thess. 5:19). It is not enough that I once believed on Christ, I must live in and upon Him by faith daily: Galatians 2:20. It is in this way of continual coming to Christ that we are “built up a spiritual house.” It is in this way the life of grace is maintained, until it issue in the life of glory. Faith is to be always receiving out of His fullness “grace for grace” (John 1:16). Daily should there be the renewed dedication of myself unto Him and the heart’s occupation with Him.

6. Tests

Unto those who never savingly “come to Christ,” He will yet say “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels.” The contemplation of those awful words ought to almost freeze the very blood in our veins, searching our consciences and aweing our hearts. But, alas, it is much to be feared that Satan will blunt their piercing force unto many of our readers, by assuring them that *they have already* come to Christ, and telling them they are fools to doubt it for a moment. But, O dear friend, seeing that there is no less than your immortal soul at stake, that whether you spend eternity in Heaven with the blessed or in Hell

with the cursed, hinges on whether or no you really and truly “come to Christ,” will you not read the paragraphs which follow with double care.

1. How many rest on their sound doctrinal views of Christ. They believe firmly in His Deity, His holy humanity, His perfect life, His vicarious death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension to God’s right hand, His present intercession on high, and His second advent. So too did many of those to whom James addressed his Epistle, but he reminded them that, the “demons also believe and tremble” (2:19). O my reader, saving faith in Christ is very much more than assenting to the teachings of Scripture concerning Him; it is the giving up of the soul unto Him to be saved, to renounce all else, to yield fully unto Him.

2. How many mistake the absence of doubts for a proof they have savingly come to Christ. They take for granted that for which they have no clear evidence. But, reader, a man possesses not Christ by faith as he does money in a strong-box or title-deeds of land which are preserved by his lawyer, and which he never looks at once in a year. No, Christ is as “bread” which a man feeds upon, chews, digests, which his stomach works upon continually, and by which he is nourished and strengthened: John 6:53. The empty professor feeds upon a good opinion of himself, rather than upon Christ.

3. How many mistake the stirring of the emotions for the Spirit’s quickening of the affections. If people weep under the preaching of the Word, superficial observers are greatly encouraged, and if they go forward to the “mourners’ bench” and sob and wail over their sins, this is regarded as a sure sign that God has savingly convicted them. But a supernatural work of Divine grace goes much deeper than that. Tears are but on the surface, and are a matter of temperamental constitution—even in nature, some of those who feel things the most give the least outward sign of it. It is the weeping of the heart which God requires; it is a godly sorrow for sin which breaks its reigning power over the soul that evidences regeneration.

4. How many mistake a fear of the wrath to come for an hatred of sin. No one wants to go to Hell. If the intellect be convinced of its reality, and the unspeakable awfulness of its torments are in a measure believed, then there may be great uneasiness of mind, fear of conscience, and anguish of heart, over the prospect of suffering

its eternal burnings. Those fears may last a considerable time, yea, their effects may never completely wear off. The subject of them may come under the ministry of a faithful servant of God, hear him describe the deep plowing of the Spirit's work, and conclude that he has been the subject of them, yet have none of that love for Christ which manifests itself in a life, all the details of which seek to honour and glorify Him.

5. How many mistake a false peace for a true one. Let a person who has had awakened within him a natural dread of the lake of fire, whose own conscience has made him wretched, and the preaching he has heard terrify him yet more, then is he not (like a drowning man) ready to clutch at a straw. Let one of the false prophets of the day tell him that all he has to do is believe John 3:16 and salvation is his, and how eagerly will he—though unchanged in heart—drink in such “smooth things.” Assured that nothing more is required than to firmly believe that God loves him and that Christ died for him, and his burden is gone; peace now fills him. Yes, and nineteen times out of twenty, that “peace” is nothing but Satan's opiate, drugging his conscience and chloroforming him into Hell. “There is no (true, spiritual) peace, saith my God, to the wicked,” and unless the heart has been purified no man will see God (Matt. 5:8).

6. How many mistake self-confidence for spiritual assurance. It is natural for each of us to think well and hope well of ourselves, and to imagine with Haman “I am the man whom the King delighteth to honour.” Perhaps the reader is ready to say, That is certainly not true of me: so far from having a high esteem, I regard myself as a worthless, sinful creature. Yes, and so deceitful is the human heart, and so ready is Satan to turn everything to his own advantage, these very lowly thoughts of self may be feasted on, and rested on to assure the heart that all is well with you. The apostate king Saul began by having a lowly estimate of himself (1 Sam. 9:21).

7. How many make a promise the sole ground of their faith, and look no further than the letter of it. Thus the Jews were deceived by the letter of the law, for they never saw the spiritual meaning of Moses' ministry. In like manner, multitudes are deceived by the letter of such promises as Acts 16:31, Romans 10:13, etc., and look not to Christ in them: they see that He is the jewel in the casket, but

rest upon the superscription without, and never lay hold of the Treasure within. But unless the *Person* of Christ be apprehended, unless there be a real surrendering to His Lordship, unless He be Himself received into the heart, then believing the letter of the promises will avail nothing.

The above paragraphs have been written in the hope that God may be pleased to arouse some empty professors out of their false security. But lest any of Christ's little ones be stumbled, we close with an excerpt from John Bunyan's *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*: "How shall we know that such men are coming to Christ? Answer: do they cry out at sin, being burdened with it, as an exceedingly bitter thing? Do they fly from it, as from the face of a deadly serpent? Do they cry out of the insufficiency of their own righteousness, as to justification in the sight of God? Do they cry out after the Lord Jesus to save them? Do they see more worth and merit in one drop of Christ's blood to save them, than in all the sins of the world to damn them? Are they tender of sinning against Jesus Christ? Do they favour Christ in this world, and do they leave all the world for His sake? And are they willing (God helping them) to run hazards for His name, for the love they bear to Him? Are His saints precious to them? If these things be so, these men *are* coming to Christ."

