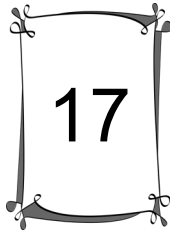


The background of the cover is a photograph of a scenic landscape. A gravel road curves through the foreground, bordered by a fence. To the left, a railway track with overhead power lines runs parallel to the road. The surrounding area is filled with trees in various shades of autumn, including yellows, oranges, and greens. In the distance, a large, rugged mountain peak rises against a sky filled with grey, overcast clouds. The entire image is framed by a green border with decorative, rounded corners.

Sermons of Robert Murray M'Cheyne

**17. Turn You at My
Reproof**

Sermons
of
Robert Murray
M'Cheyne



Turn You at My
Reproof

“Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief places of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers, delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you” Proverbs 1:20-23.

That none other than our Lord Jesus Christ is intended to be painted to us under the majestic figure of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs, is evident from the passage before us. Of whom but the Saviour could it be said so truly that he stood with outstretched hands in the streets, in the markets, and in the openings of the gates, crying after the simple ones—the publicans and sinners: and the scorers, the Scribes and Pharisees; and those haters of knowledge—the Jewish priesthood? And again, of whom but the Saviour could it be said, with any truth at all, that he offered to *“pour out his Spirit upon the returning sinner, and to make known His words unto him?”* Christ alone *“hath ascended up on high, leading captivity captive; and hath received gilts for men, yea, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them”*

Before pressing home upon you, brethren, this earnest and soul piercing call of the Saviour, there are two explanations which I anxiously desire you to bear in mind.

First, That the call of the Saviour, in the words before us, and the promise with which it is accompanied, are addressed *to sinners*, and not to saints. Nay more, they are not addressed to all sinners promiscuously; they are not addressed to those who have been awakened to know their sin and danger, and are crying out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” but they are addressed to the simple ones, who are loving their simplicity; to the scorers, who delight in their scorning; to the fools, that hate knowledge.

The Bible is full of most precious promises to Christ’s “hidden ones,” his peculiar people, his body, his bride; and there are many pressing calls and most winning encouragements to those

in whom God hath begun the good work by convincing them of sin. But the words before us belong to neither of these; they are addressed to those who are dead in trespasses and sins; to those who are so much lost that they do not know that they are lost; to those who are happy and comfortable in their sins; to those who have not a doubt as to the sufficiency of their worldly decency and respectability as a righteousness before God, and who do not so much as move the question whether they are saved or unsaved — *the simple ones loving their simplicity*, the scorers who delight in scorning, the fools who hate knowledge.

Is there none of you who has a secret suspicion that he may be just one of these characters which we have described? I would beseech that man to feel that He, *then*, is this day addressed by the Saviour, not in the accents of wrath, but of tenderest kindness. It is to you that Jesus stretches out these beseeching hands. It is *to you* that Jesus speaks these gentle words. Oh! how blinded you are to the bowels and compassions of the Saviour. Oh! how you dishonour him every day by your hard and blasphemous thoughts of him. You think that because you delight in going away from him, therefore he hath nothing but messages of anger and of coming judgment for you. But, oh! how much wiser to gather his thoughts toward you from his own words: “*Turn you at my reproof.*” “Behold, I will pour out, [not judgment but] my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.”

My second explanation is, That the call of Christ is to an immediate conversion. He doth not say: Why will ye love your simplicity? but, “*How long will ye love your simplicity?*” And again, he doth not say, Turn *at any time*, and I will pour out my Spirit unto you; but, “*Turn at my reproof;*” that is, Turn *this day while I am reproofing you*. Immediate turning unto God — immediate application to the blood of Christ — immediate acceptance of the righteousness of God — a movement this day — conversion this day — this, and nothing but this, is the doctrine of the text. Let none of you say, I will take the gracious

offer into consideration — I will take up the question *some day soon* with all due deliberation — I will set apart *some future day* for the very purpose of settling it. That man of you is as effectually casting a mockery on the words of the Saviour, as if he were to say, I will have neither part nor lot in this matter. It is not resolutions for the future that Christ asks of you, and to which he attaches the promise of the Spirit: it is a turning *this day* — conversion *this day*, whilst he is reproving you.

Having premised these things, it is now my desire to press home upon you the call of the Saviour by means of three arguments.

I. The call of the Saviour ought to be obeyed by you, because of the rich promise with which it is seconded:

“Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.”

Often in the Bible are sinners intreated to turn and believe on Jesus, for the sake of the peace and the pardon to be found in believing; but the argument here is a more rare, and perhaps a still more moving one. Here you are besought to turn and believe, that you may be made new creatures: “Turn you at my reproof: behold I will pour out my Spirit unto you.”

1. Think how essential such a change is to your well-being: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” To dwell in the new heavens and the new earth, we must be made new creatures. There will be exquisite scenery in heaven, when the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem appear; but a blind man could not enjoy it. There will be exquisite melody in heaven, from the golden harps of angels and the redeemed; but a man without an ear for music could not enjoy it. And just so there will be spotless holiness in heaven — it will be the very atmosphere of heaven — how, then, could an unholy soul enjoy it? “Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again.” But if this be an essential change:

2. Think how impossible it is with man. Search every sect and system of philosophy, search every plan of education, search from one end of the earth to the other, where will you find a power to make you holy?

***“The depth saith, It is not in me:
And the sea saith, It is not with me.
It cannot be gotten for gold,
Neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof.
No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls:
For the price of Wisdom is above rubies.”***

A man may be able to change his sins, but, ah! what man can change his heart? The reason why this is utterly impossible with man, is, that he is not only fond of the objects of sin, but he is fond of his sinful heart; he is not only simple, but he loves his simplicity; not only scornful, but delights in scorning; not only a fool, but he hates the very knowledge that would make him wise unto salvation. Which of you, then, does not feel the power of the Saviour’s tenderness in the offer which he makes this day to the most careless and unawakened of you all: “Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you.” If you will only turn and accept of Christ this day, he offers to give you that Spirit which alone can make you a new creature — which alone can give you a heart that will do for heaven.

You utterly mistake the matter, if you think that Christ here offers to put you under a system of strictness and restraint. You utterly mistake the matter, if you think the gift of the Spirit is to make you walk in ways of preciseness and of pain; for the whole Bible testifies, that the ways in which the Spirit leads us are ways of pleasantness and peace.

Suppose a man happened to be so foolish and inconsiderate as to have an invincible relish for some poisonous drug, because of the sweetness and agreeableness of the taste; and had formed the habit of making such constant use of it that death would, through time, be the inevitable consequence. I can imagine two

ways in which the friends of that inconsiderate man, anxious for his life, might cure him of his strange and most destructive appetite. *first*, They might forcibly restrain and keep him away from the use of the poison, forbidding it even to be brought within his sight. This would be the system of restriction; *the appetite would remain*, but it would be crossed and denied. Or, *secondly*, Instead of forcibly taking away the poison, they might bring new and wholesome objects before him, the taste of which was far more agreeable and excellent; so that, when once he had tasted these, there would be no fear of his so much as desiring the poison any more. A new taste has been introduced, so that the drug which seemed sweet and agreeable before, seems now no longer palatable.

Now, though this parable be a very imperfect one, yet it shows distinctly the one feature in sanctification which I wish to bring into view, namely, *its pleasantness*. The Spirit which Christ offers sanctifies us never in the first way, but always in the second way; not by restraining us, but by making us new. By nature we love sin, the world and the things of the world, though we know that the wages of sin is death. Now, to cure this I can imagine a man setting himself down deliberately to cross all his corrupted passions, to restrain all his appetites, to reject and trample on all the objects that the natural heart is set upon. This is the very system recommended by Satan, by anti-Christ, and the world, but there is a far more excellent way, which the Holy Ghost makes use of in sanctifying us; not the way of changing the objects, but the way of changing the affections; not by an *external* restraint, but by an *internal* renewing. As it is said in Ezekiel; “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 will give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.”

Ah! then, brethren, if there be one poor sinner here who has been deceived by the detestable heresy of the world — as if the

keeping of the commandments by the saints, were a grievous and unwilling service — let that man, this day, open his eyes to the true nature of Gospel holiness — that God does not offer to work in you to *do*, without first working in you to *will*. He does not offer to pluck from you your favourite objects; but he offers to give you a new taste For higher objects; and just as the boy finds it no hardship to cast away the toys and trifles that were his bosom friends in childhood, so the saint feels no hardship in casting away the wretched playthings that so long amused and cheated the soul; for behold a new world hath been opened up by the Spirit of God, to the admiring, enamoured gaze of the believer in Jesus.

Behold, then, ye simple ones, that are loving your, simplicity, what an argument is here to move you to immediate conversion; to immediate acceptance of Jesus! If you will only put on Christ, behold he offers this day to begin the work of creating you anew; not of crossing and restraining you, and tying you down to services which you loathe, but of giving you a taste and a delight in objects which angels, which every holy and happy being delights in. “Turn you at my reproof.”

II. The call of the Saviour to *turn now* ought to be obeyed by us, because conversion becomes every day harder.

There is no law of our nature that works with a surer and more silent power than the law of habit. That which at first we find the utmost difficulty in accomplishing, becomes easier upon every trial, till habit becomes as it were, a second nature. Thus, in learning to read, how slow and how gradual is the progress made! until, trained by oft-repeated trial, the stammering tongue becomes the tongue of grace and fluency. Nay, so easy does the art become, that we at length forget to notice the very letters which compose the words we read. Just similar is the growth of habit in sinning.

Depraved as is the natural heart, yet the ingenuous mind of youth finds something painful and revolting in acquiring the first oath which fashion or companionship obliges him to learn. The

loose jest and the irreligious sneer, will generally summon up the blush of indignation in the cheek of the simple-hearted boy, newly ushered into the busy world. But who does not know the power of habit in rubbing off the fine varnish of the delicate mind? who 'has not within a few months, heard the oath drop as if with native vivacity from the tongue? who has not seen vice and profanity pass unprovoked, even by the silent blush of shame?

As it is with these sins, so it is with the greatest sin of which humanity is guilty; the sin of rejecting the Saviour. There is a time in youth when the mind seems peculiarly open to the reception of a Saviour. There is a time when the understanding and the affections suddenly burst forth into maturity, like the rose-bud bursting into the full-blown rose; a time when all the passions of our nature spurn control, and break forth with a reckless impetuosity; and all experience testifies that that is the time when conviction of sin may most easily be wrought in the soul; the time when the work and sufferings of the Saviour may with greatest hope of success be presented to the mind. It is then that the whole scene of Gospel truth flashes upon the mind with a freshness and a power which, in all human probability, it never will do again. The tenderness of a Saviour's love, if resisted then, will every day lose more of its novelty and of its power to touch the heart; the habit of resistance to the word and testimony of a beseeching God will every day become more predominant; the stony heart will every day become more a heart of adamant; the triple brass of unbelief will every day become more impenetrable.

Oh! my friends, it is fearful to think how many among us are every hour subjecting our hearts to this sure and silent process of hardening. Look back, brethren, as many of you may do, to the time when Christ and his sufferings had first an awakening interest to your soul. Look back to the first death in your family, or the first time you prepared to sit down at the holy sacrament. Were there not arousing, quickening feelings stirred in your

breast, which now you have not? Had you not some struggle of conscience; something like a felt *kicking against the pricks*, in rejecting Christ, in putting away the tenderness of the tenderest of beings? But you were successful in the struggle, you smothered every disquieting whisper, you lulled every pang of uneasiness. The Spirit was striving with you; but you quenched his awakening influences. And now, do you not feel that these days of feeling are well-nigh past; that spirit-stirring seasons are becoming every year rarer and rarer to you? Deaths are more frequent around you; but they speak with less power to your conscience. Every sacrament seems to lose something of its affecting energy; every Sabbath becomes more dull and monotonous.

It is true you may Not feel all this. There is a state of the conscience in which it is said to be *past feeling*. But if there be any truth in the Bible, and any identity in human nature, this process of hardening is going on day after day in every unconverted mind. Oh! it is the saddest of all sights that a godly minister can behold, to see his flock, Sabbath after Sabbath, waiting most faithfully on the stirring ministrations of the Word, and yet going away unawakened and unimpressed; for well he knows that the heart that is not turned, is all the more hardened.

How simple and how mighty an argument is here to persuade you to turn to God *this day*. This day we hold out to you all the benefits to be found in Christ; *forgiveness* through his blood, acceptance through his righteousness, *sanctification* by his Spirit. Reject them, and you add not only another act of sin to the burden of your guilt, but you add another hardening crust to your impenetrable heart. *This day* refuse Christ, and, by all human calculation, you will more surely refuse him *the next day*; so that, without at all meaning to question the sovereignty of the Spirit of God, who worketh whensoever and on whomsoever it pleaseth him, the only conclusion that any reasonable man has a right to come to, is, that this day, of all days between this and judgment, is the best and likeliest for your

conversion; and your dying day — that sad season of tossings and heavings, before the spirit is torn from its earthly tenement — is, in all human calculation, the worst day of your life for turning unto God. When the minister of Christ pulls aside the curtains of your bed, to speak the word of Jesus Christ, the ear that for a whole lifetime has heard the glad message of salvation all unmoved, will, in that hour, hear as if it did not hear. The heart that has so long turned aside the edge of the Word of Life, will then be like the nether millstone. “*To-day*, then, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”

III. The call of the Saviour to turn now ought to be obeyed by us, because the Saviour will not always call.

“My Spirit will not always strive with man,” was the warning of God given to the antediluvian world. “Now they are hid from thine eyes.” was a similar warning given by the Saviour to Jerusalem. And the passage immediately following the text, expresses the same sentiment in still more fearful language. And who does not see the solemnity and power which it gives to the call of the Saviour, that the time is at hand when he will not call any more?

Behold yon majestic figure bearing on his body the marks of the Man of Sorrows; but bearing in his eye and words the aspect of Him “who liveth, and was dead, and behold he is alive forevermore.” Behold, how he stands in an attitude of unmingled tenderness to sinners, even the chief! Behold, how the beseeching hands are stretched out! Harken to the soft accents of mercy, of invitation, of promise: “*I will pour out my spirit unto you.*”

But remember that attitude of mercy is but *for a time*: these beseeching hands are stretched out *only for a time*; these accents of gentleness are but *for a time*. “The day is at hand when he shall come with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.” This is Christ’s *attitude of judgment*. No more are the inviting hands stretched out beseechingly; for the rod of

iron is in his right hand, and his enemies are before him as a potter's vessel. His right hand teacheth him terrible things; his arrows are sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies, whereby the people fall under him. And oh! how fearfully shall his accents of tenderness be changed!

***“I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when your fear cometh;
When your fear cometh as desolation,
And your destruction cometh as a whirlwind;
When distress and anguish cometh upon you.”***

Oh! what a day will it be, when the tender-hearted Jesus, that wept at the grave of Lazarus, shall laugh at your calamity, and mock at your terrors! The contrast between these two representations is so striking, that it cannot escape the notice of any one. But what I wish you to observe is, that it is not only a very striking change, but *a very sudden one*. The transition from kindness to indignation is here not gradual, like the change from day into night. There is no twilight, as it were; the transition *is sudden* as it is terrible. May not this be intended to teach us that God frequently ceases to strive with men, not gradually, but *suddenly*? not only that death is frequently sudden, and that the coming of the Son of Man shall surely be sudden, as a thief in the night, but that the withdrawing of the beseeching Saviour from living men who long resist his call, is often sudden and irremediable?

Awake, then, brethren, those of you who think it is all one when you repent and embrace the Saviour, provided it be done before you die. Awake, those of you who say: “A little more sleep, and a little more slumber; a little more folding of the hands to sleep.” The sun of grace may set not like the sun of nature; there may be no calm and tranquil twilight, when thou mightiest bethink thee of the coming darkness, and flee to Him who is the *light of the world*. However this may be, there is enough surely in the fact, *that the Spirit withdraws from those*

who resist him, whether suddenly or gradually, to move every one of you this day to immediate conversion. It must be now, or it may be never,

On a winter evening, when the frost is setting in with growing intensity, and when the sun is now far past the meridian, and gradually sinking in the western sky, there is a double reason why the ground grows every moment harder and more impenetrable to the plough. On the one hand, the frost of evening, with ever increasing intensity, is indurating the stiffened clods. On the other hand, the genial rays, which alone can soften them, are every moment withdrawing and losing their enlivening power. Oh! brethren, take heed that it be not so with you. As long as you are unconverted, you are under a double process of hardening. The frosts of an eternal night are settling down upon your souls; and the Sun of Righteousness, with westering wheel, is hastening to set upon you for evermore. If, then, the plough of grace cannot force its way into your *ice-bound hearts today*, what likelihood is there that it will enter in *tomorrow?* Amen.

