

I WAS BEFORE NO. 1574

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.*

*“Who was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious.”
1 Timothy 1:13.*

I AM not going to dwell, at this time, upon the special items of the text as to what Paul was before his conversion because none of us have been exactly as he was. We have all gone astray like lost sheep, but each one of us has taken a distinct course from all the rest. You might have to describe your transgressions in very different words from those used by the Apostle because yours have been a different form of guilt from his. Paul said of himself that he, “was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious.” Saul of Tarsus was a blasphemer. He does not say that he was an unbeliever and an objector, but he uses a very strong word, though not too strong, and says that he was a blasphemer.

He was a down-right, thorough-going blasphemer who also caused others to blaspheme. From blasphemy, which is a sin of the lips, Saul proceeded to persecution, which is a sin of the hands. Hating Christ, he hated His people, too. He was also injurious, which I think Bengel considers to mean that he was a despiser. That eminent critic says, “blasphemy was his sin towards God, persecution was his sin towards the Church and despising was his sin in his own heart.” He was injurious—that is, he did all he could to damage the cause of Christ and, thereby, injured himself. He kicked against the pricks and by doing so injured his own conscience. Having sinned thus grievously, Paul makes a full confession of his guilt in order that he may magnify the Divine Grace which saved, even, the chief of sinners.

Note here, before we come to the special purpose we have in view, that godly men never think or speak lightly of their sins. When they know that they are forgiven, they repent of their iniquities even more heartily than before. They never infer the lightness of sin from the freeness of Grace, but quite the contrary—and you shall find it as one trait in the character of every true penitent that he is rather inclined to blacken himself than to whitewash his transgressions. He sometimes speaks of himself in terms which others think must be exaggerated, though to him and, indeed, to God, they are simply true.

You have probably read biographies of John Bunyan in which the biographer says that Bunyan labored under a morbid conscientiousness and accused himself of a degree of sin of which he was not guilty. Exactly so, in the view of the *biographer*, but not so in the view of John Bunyan, who, startled into sensitiveness of conscience, could not find words strong enough to express all his reprobation of himself. Job once said, “I abhor myself.” That is a very strong expression but, when he saw his own sin in the Presence of God, the man of whom the Lord said unto Satan, “There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that fears God and eschews evil,” the man against whom the devil, himself, could not bring an accusation, yet says that when he saw God, the brightness of the Divine Holiness made him so conscious of his sin that he exclaimed, “Now my eye sees You, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

Those who have seen the exceeding sinfulness of sin by the light of the Holy Spirit and who have been made truly penitent are the last persons to speak lightly of evil! They dwell upon their own criminality with many terms to set forth how greatly they have felt it. We will consider the case of Paul for just a minute or two because it is a type and pattern of the work of God’s Grace in other Believers. He tells us in the 16th verse of this chapter, “For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.” He was a model convert, a typical instance of Divine long-suffering, a pattern and specimen of all who believe on Christ and all conversions are, to a large extent, similar to that which transformed the blaspheming, persecuting, despising Saul of Tarsus into the great Apostle of the Gentiles!

Now, notice when he is describing his own past life how he dwells upon it with painful minuteness. He is not speaking before God in private, as Job was in the words we have quoted, else I can conceive that he would paint his sin in still darker colors. But he is answering for himself before king Agrippa, touching the things of which he had been accused by the Jews and you will see that he puts his offense against Christ and His Church in as strong a light as he very well could. His enemies have no such accusation to bring against him as that which he voluntarily makes against himself! First, he

says in the 10th verse of the 26th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, which we read just now, “Many of the saints did I shut up in prison.”

Those whom he shut up in prison were *saints*. To imprison the guilty is no fault, but to maltreat and shut up holy men was, indeed, blameworthy. He confessed that they were saints, saintly persons, but he committed them to prison for that very reason, because they were Christians and, therefore, their saintly lives did not protect them from his malice, but made them so much the more objects of his cruel hatred. He says that he hunted the saints—and not merely a few of them, but, “Many of the saints did I shut up in prison.” He lays stress upon the word, “many”—not half-a-dozen here and there—but scores and hundreds suffered through him and his persecuting band. He crowded the prisons with the followers of Jesus Christ! “He that touches you touches the apple of His eye,” says the Lord of Hosts when addressing captive Zion.

One touch of a saint of God injuriously given will be painful to the Lord—how much more, then, when there are many such touches and when he whose hand has done the evil deed has to confess—“Many of the saints did I shut up in prison”? We may be quite sure that he did this because they were Christians, for the 9th verse puts it thus, “I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” It was Jesus of Nazareth he was aiming at, though his blows were directed against His followers. It was because the name of Jesus was named upon these people that they were put in prison!

Now, this is no small sin—to persecute holy men, to imprison many of them and to do so simply because they believed in Jesus Christ. The Apostle felt that this put exceeding bitterness into the gall of his transgression—that he had lifted up unholy hands against the members of Christ’s body and through them had wounded their ever-glorious Head. More than this, he did not merely put them in prison, but, he says, “Many of the saints did I shut up in prison.” Some persons in prison have had a measure of liberty, as Joseph had, but Saul took care that these Believers should be *shut up*—that they should have no liberty at all! He put them into the common jails, locked them up and made their feet fast in the stocks, causing them to suffer even as he and his companion, Silas, afterwards did in the prison at Philippi.

Continuing the summary of his evil against the servants of the Lord, he says, “I was not content with their imprisonment, but I was eager for their death. When they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. When the Sanhedrim wanted a vote I, young Saul, was there to give my maiden vote against Stephen or any other saint. If the chief priests wanted a knife to cut the Christians’ throats with, there was I ready to do the deed. If they needed one who would drag them away to prison and to death, there stood I, the eager messenger, only too glad if I might lay hands upon them, believing that I was, thereby, doing God service.”

“No,” he says, “that is not all. I often punished them in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme.” This, indeed, was a very horrible part of Saul’s sinfulness. To destroy their bodies was bad enough, but to destroy their souls if that were possible—to compel them to blaspheme, to speak evil of that name which they confessed to be their joy and their hope—surely that was the worst form that persecution could assume! He forced them under torture to renounce the Christ whom their hearts loved! As it were, he was not content to kill them, but he must damn them, if it were possible, too. “I compelled them to blaspheme.” This was a dreadful sin and Paul mentions it as such. He does not extenuate his crime, nor attempt to find excuses for his conduct.

And then he adds, once more, that he did all this wickedness with the greatest possible enthusiasm—“And being exceedingly mad against them,” like a raging madman in his fits, like a violent maniac who cannot be held in—seized with frenzy, tearing right and left, finding no rest unless he could be harrying and worrying the sheep like a bloody wolf, as he was to the sheep of Christ’s flock. “Being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.” He scattered them far and wide and then sought to get authority that even when they were in exile they might not be beyond his reach!

Saul seems to have grown proficient in the science of persecution and to have become a very master in the cruel art of crushing the people of God. We do not learn this from James, or John, or any of the other Apostles. Who tells us of all this? Who makes out this long, black catalog of crimes of which the man who committed them might well be ashamed? Why, Paul himself! It is Paul himself that puts it so and I would that, in like manner, the worst character you could have, my Brother, might come from your own lips. “Let another man praise you and not your own mouth; a stranger and not your own lips.” But, when there is an accusation that must be made against you, be you the first to make it with tears of repentance before the living God!

I think I have thus, from the example of Paul before Agrippa, justified the expression with which I started—that true penitents do not seek to extenuate or diminish the sin which has been forgiven them, but they acknowledge how great it is and set it forth in all its enormity as it appears before their enlightened eyes. Now, I want you, dear Friends, who know the Lord, to follow me in a very simple way, rather by your emotions than by anything else. I want the text of my sermon to be, “I was.” The Apostle tells us what he was—what he was before conversion. Now, I want you to think what *you* were before the Grace of God met with you and changed you.

I do not know that I shall help you much to remember the details of your sin, for pretty near the last time I stood here, I did that when we spoke of Peter from the words—“When he thought thereon, he wept,” [*Fountain of Repentant Tears*—Sermon #2735, Volume 47—Read July 14, 1901—Preached October 24, 1880.] but I want you to see seven very profitable inferences which will arise out of an impartial retrospect of your life before conversion.

I. The first, I think, will be that IF WE THINK OF WHAT WE WERE, IT WILL EXCITE IN US ADORING GRATITUDE. Paul was full of gratitude, for he thanked Christ Jesus that He counted him faithful, putting him into the ministry. He is so glad of the favor of God that when he comes to the 17th verse he must put down his pen while he sings, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” If, then, you and I look back upon what we were before the Lord saved us, we, too, shall be full of adoring gratitude as we think of even the *least* of all the favors that He has bestowed upon us!

“I am not worthy,” said the Patriarch, Jacob, when he was returning to his country at the command of God—“I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown unto Your servant.” And we can, each one, say the same. Is it not a wonderful thing that you who were—I will not say what—you know what you were and God knows! Isn’t it wonderful, I say, that you should be a teacher of others? That you should be permitted to stand up and speak of pardon bought with blood? That you should be allowed to talk of holiness though your lips used to speak of any other theme but that?

Isn’t it wonderful that you should be allowed to extol the Christ for whom you had no words of praise a little while ago, for whom, indeed, you had only words of contempt and scorn? Paul was astonished to think that he was put into the ministry! And when I look back upon my own life before I knew the Lord, I am amazed that I should ever stand here, seeing that for so long I refused my Lord’s love and put aside His favors and would have none of them! Ah, I did not know what would happen to me one day. Little did I think then that I should ever stand here to—

*“Tell to sinners round,
What a dear Savior
I have found.”*

But it does fill me with gratitude which makes me bow before God in thankful adoration to think that He should have looked on me and to know that, “unto me,” as well as unto Paul, “is this Grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

I ask you, dear Friends, to remember this gratitude in the reception of every blessing. When you enjoy Church privileges; when you come to the Communion Table, think, “Here comes one to sit with the children of God who once was like a dog outside the house.” When you stand up and praise the Lord, think, “And I, too, am permitted to offer the sacrifice of praise—I, who once sang the praises of Bacchus or of Venus—rather than of Christ Jesus!” When you draw near to God in prayer and know that He hears you, too—when you have power in prayer and prevail with the Most High and come back with your hands full of blessings that have been obtained at the Throne of Grace, you may well say, “What shameful things these hands once did when I rendered my members instruments of unrighteousness—and now they are loaded down with the bounties of a gracious God!”

Oh, do bless His name! If you do not, the stones in the street will begin to cry out against some of you! Oh, if your heart does not leap at the very sound of the name of Jesus, surely you cannot possess a heart at all! Such a change, such a wondrous, matchless change has passed upon you that if you do not praise the Lord today and tomorrow and as long as you have any being, what shall be said of your ungrateful silence? “I was”—I was before—all that I ought not to have been, but Grace has changed me and unto the God of Grace be all the glory! Do not all of you who love the Lord unite with me in this utterance of adoring gratitude?

II. A second very blessed inference (we can only speak briefly upon each one) is that A SENSE OF WHAT WE WERE SHOULD SUSTAIN IN US VERY DEEP HUMILITY. It did so in the case of the Apostle Paul and I would refer you to his expression of it in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the 15th chapter and the 9th verse, where he says, “I am

the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle because I persecuted the church of God.” When He was compelled to glory in what he was through the Grace given to him, he said that he supposed he was not a whit behind the very chief Apostles, yet he here says of himself that he was not worthy to be called an Apostle because before his conversion he persecuted the saints of God!

Now, dear Brothers and Sisters, if we have been a little while converted and have united with the Church of God and the Lord has given us a little work to do, we may be tempted to think, “Now, I am somebody! Really, I am not now quite the humble dependent that I used to be. I am getting to be of some service to my Lord and Master and I am of some importance in His Church.” Ah, that is the way many Christians get into sad mischief. “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” You must always strive *against* that kind of spirit and one way to avoid it is to remember what you *were in your unregenerate state*. There are some who might say, “I am a minister of the Gospel, but I am not worthy to be called a minister because of the sins that I committed before my conversion. I am a member of the Church of Christ, but I am scarcely worthy to be called a member because I was a blasphemer, or a Sabbath-breaker, or profane, unchaste, or dishonest.”

Remember what you were and let your spiritual advancements never lead you to unspiritual pride and self-conceit for, “everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.” I have heard of a good man in Germany who used to rescue poor, destitute boys from the streets and he always had them photographed in their rags and filth just as he found them. And then, years afterwards, when they were clothed and washed and educated and their characters began to develop, if they grew proud he would show them what they were and try to teach them what they would have likely been if it had not been for his charity. If you are inclined to lift up your head and boast what a great man you are, now—just look at the likeness of what you were before the Lord made you a new creature in Christ Jesus!

Oh, who can tell what that likeness would have been but for the interpositions of Divine Grace? I think you would say what the Scotsman said to Rowland Hill when he called to see the good man in his study. He sat and looked at him. And Rowland Hill’s face, you know, if you have seen his portrait, is one to be remembered—there is a peculiar comic look about it. So the Scotsman said, in answer to the question, “What are you looking at?” “I have been studying the lines of your face.” “And what do you make out of them?” said Mr. Hill. “Why, that if the Grace of God had not made you a Christian, you would have been one of the worst fellows that ever lived.” “Ah!” said Mr. Hill, “you have hit the mark this time!”

I should not wonder, too, if some of us, when we look in the mirror, were to see somebody there that would have been a very deep-dyed sinner if it had not been for the change of heart which Sovereign Grace has worked. This ought to keep us very humble and very lowly before God. I invite you, Friends, to think this over and when you feel yourselves beginning to swell a little, let the bladder of your foolish and wicked pride be pricked with the needle of conscience as you remember what you used to be and you will be all the better for letting some of the gas escape! Come back as speedily as you can to your fine shape, for what are you, after all? If you are anything that is good, or right, or pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, you must still say, “By the Grace of God I am what I am.”—

*“All that I was, my sin, my guilt,
My death, was all my own.
All that I am, I owe to You,
My gracious God, alone.
The evil of my former state
Was mine and only mine.
The good in which I now rejoice
Is Thine and only Thine.”*

Well, those are two of the inferences which result from looking back at what you were—the retrospect excites gratitude and sustains humility.

III. The next is this—THE REMEMBRANCE OF OUR FORMER CONDITION SHOULD RENEW IN US GENUINE REPENTANCE. When we look back upon what we used to be before the Lord met with us, it should breed in us a perpetual repentance. There are some who seem to think that we only repent of sin when we are first converted. Do not be deluded by any such false notion! When you leave off repenting, you have left off living! You are not living for God as you ought to do unless you daily repent. Remember that we are not saved by a single act of faith which terminates the moment we receive the assurance of the Divine forgiveness, but by a faith which *continues* as long as we live and,

therefore, as long as we have any faith we must have repentance, too, for these are twin Graces—faith with a bright eye, like Rachel, who was beautiful and well-favored—and repentance, tender-eyed, like Leah, but with a lovely eye for all that.

“Repentance,” says one, “why, I thought that was a bitter thing that was taken away when we believed!” No, it is a sweet thing—I could wish to repent in Heaven, though I suppose I shall not. We cannot carry the tear of penitence in our eyes into Heaven—it will be the only thing we might regret to leave behind. Surely we shall be sorry, even there, for having grieved our God. Even there, I think, we shall repent, but certainly as long as we are here we must *daily* repent of sin! Yes, and repent of the sin that is forgiven—repent *more* because it is forgiven than we did when we had any doubts about its being pardoned—

*“My sins, my sins, my Savior!
How sad on You they fall,
Seen through Your gentle patience,
I tenfold feel them all.
I know they are forgiven,
But still their pain to me
Is all the grief and anguish
They laid, my Lord, on Thee.”*

Smite on your breasts while you think that it was necessary that Christ should *die* that you might be delivered from sin and its penalty and power—and as your love increases, let your sorrow abound that such a Lord should have needed to be *crucified* for you.

Oh, Sin, as Christ becomes more lovely, you become more hateful and as our soul learns more of the beauty of holiness, it perceives more of your ugliness and so continually loathes you more and more! If you want to draw up the sluices of repentance, sit down and remember what you were by nature and would have remained if Grace had not intervened! So, then, it shall be good for you to say, “I was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious,” or to use any other expression that shall accurately describe you, if it leads you, like Peter, to go out and weep bitterly true tears of repentance.

IV. And now, fourthly, (we have but a word on each inference, you see)—THE RETROSPECT OF OUR PAST LIVES SHOULD KINDLE IN US FERVENT LOVE to the Lord who has redeemed us. You remember Christ went into the house of one of the Pharisees who had a measure of respect for Him—this was Simon who desired Him to eat with him. But when He entered in, Simon treated Him as a common guest and offered Him none of the delicate attentions which men give to choice friends or to superiors. Christ took no note of this, nor had He need to do so, for there was another who stole into that room who did for Him all that Simon *ought* to have done and more than Simon *could* have done!

“A woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment and stood at His feet behind Him weeping.” She stood behind the couch upon which He was reclining and let her tears fall down upon His blessed flesh till she had washed His feet with them and then, unbraiding the luxurious tresses of her hair, she wiped those holy feet with them! Her love, her humility, her adoration and her penitence were all mingling as she kissed His feet and anointed them with the ointment which she had brought. Our Lord explained why this woman had performed this extraordinary action. He said it was because she had been forgiven much.

Now, rest assured that there is no exception to this rule—that those who are conscious of having had much forgiven are those who will love Christ much! I do not say—I almost wish I could—that love is always in proportion to the *amount* of sin forgiven, but I do say that it is in proportion to the *consciousness* of sin forgiven. A man may be a less sinner than another, but he may be more conscious of his sin and he will be the man who will love Christ more. Oh, do not forget what you were, lest you should become unmindful of your obligation to Jesus! You are saints, now, but you were not always so. You can talk to others of Christ, now, but you could not once have done it. You can wrestle with the Angel of God in prayer and prevail, now, but once you were more familiar with the devil than you were with the Angel!

At this moment your heart bears witness to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—it is not long ago that the Prince of the power of the air worked within you and the Holy Spirit was not there at all! I beseech you, therefore, forget not this, lest you forget to love Him who has worked this wondrous change in you! I think there is nothing better than to retain a vivid sense of conversion in order to retain a vivid sense of love. Do not be afraid of loving Christ too much. I see the cold

carping criticism of this age objects to any expressions of love to Christ which we use in our hymns because it says that they are sensuous. My only answer to such talk is—God give us more of such blessed sensuousness!

I think that instead of diminishing these utterances it will be a token of growth in Grace when they are more abundant—not if they become so common as to be hypocritical. Then they would be sickening, but as long as they are true and honest, I, for one, would say to you who love the Lord, go on and sing—

*“Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast.”*

Go on and sing—

*“Jesus, I love Your charming name,
'Tis music to my ear.”*

Hesitate not to say—

*“You, dear Redeemer, dying Lamb,
We love to hear of You”*

and if it shall please you and the Spirit shall move you, even say, like the spouse in the song, “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for Your love is better than wine.” The starveling religion of the present day, not content with tearing away the doctrinal flesh from the spiritual body, is now seeking to drag out the very heart of religion and to reduce Christian experience to nothing but a chilly doubting of everything! Let this be far from you! Believe something and love something, for to believe is to live, and to love is to be in health.

Oh for more love arising out of a deep, intense sense of what we once were and of the change which Christ has worked in us! “But,” says one, “I do not know that any great change has been worked in *me*.” No and there are some who tell us that we do not need any. There are certain Paedobaptists preaching, nowadays, that most children of pious parents do not need conversion. We have long had the Church of England teaching us baptismal regeneration—now we have some Nonconformists trying to persuade us that no regeneration at all is needed! This a new kind of doctrine that I know nothing of and that the Word of God knows nothing of and it will not do for us! It will eat out the very life of Christianity if it is believed.

Pious ancestors could not save one of you—even if your fathers and mothers and grandfathers and grandmothers and great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers and great-great-great-great-grandfathers and great-great-great-great-grandmothers—as far back as ever you like—had been all saints, nevertheless, *their* faith could not be of any use to you! You must be born, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” “You must be born again” is as true of one child as of another—as true of you as it was of me and as true of me as of the thief confined in prison today.

But some of us *have* been changed—we are washed, we are sanctified, we are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. It has been a real work of Divine Grace—the turning of us upside down, the reversing of the course of Nature, a turning of night into day, a turning of the powers of our spirit from the dominion of Satan to the dominion of Christ—and we must and will, therefore, love Him who has worked in us such a wondrous transformation!

V. Well now, fifthly, REMEMBERING WHAT WE WERE, ARDENT ZEAL SHOULD BE AWAKENED IN US. Look at Paul. He says, “I was before a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious.” What then? Why, now that he has become a follower of Christ, he cannot do too much! He put many saints in prison—now he goes into many prisons, himself. He hunted them even to strange cities—and now he goes into all manner of strange cities, himself. He dragged them before tribunals and now he, himself goes and stands before Roman proconsuls and before the Roman emperor, himself! Paul can never do too much for Christ because he had done so much for Satan!

I remember one who lived four or five miles away from a place of worship who used to say, “You old legs, it is no use being tired, for you have got to carry me. You used to take me to the place of amusement when I served the devil and you shall carry me, now, to the House of God that I may worship and serve Him.” When sometimes he had an uneasy seat, he used to say, “It is no use grumbling, old bones, you will have to sit here, or else you will have to stand. Years ago you put up with all kinds of inconveniences when I went to the theater, or some other evil place when I served Satan—and you must now be content to do the same now for a better Master and a nobler service.”

I think some of us might take a lesson from that old man and say to ourselves, “Come, Covetousness, you are not going to hinder me from serving the Lord. I used to be liberal to the devil and I do not intend, now, to be stingy with God.” If ever I am tempted in that fashion, I will give twice as much as I had thought of doing, so as to spite the devil, for

he shall not have his way with me! Some, when they serve Satan, go as if they rode a racehorse and whip and spur to get in first. How they will destroy body and soul in the service of the Evil One! But if a Christian gets a little lively they say, “Oh, dear me, dear me, he is excited! He is fanatical! He has grown enthusiastic!”

Why should he not be in earnest? The devil’s servants are enthusiastic and why should not the servants of Christ be the same? Black Prince, Black Prince, are you served by heroes and shall Christ be served by dolts? Oh, let it not be so, my Brothers and Sisters! Surely if anything can wake up all the powers of our nature; if anything can make a lame man leap as a hart; if anything can make a palpitating, trembling heart to be bold and brave for Christ, it should be the love which Christ has shown in looking upon such as we were and changing us by His Grace! “Ah, but you must not do too much,” says one. Did you ever know anybody who did?

If anybody ever does too much for Christ, let us rail off a piece in the cemetery that we may bury him in it. That grave will never be needed—it will be empty till Christ comes! “Ah, but you may have too many irons in the fire.” It depends upon the size of the fire! Get your fire well hot—I mean get your heart well hot and your nature in a blaze—then put all the irons you can ever get, into it! Keep them all at a white heat if possible. Blow away and let the flames be very vehement. Oh, to live for God a life of ecstatic zeal even if it were only for a short space of time! It were better than to have a hundred years of bare existence in which one went crawling along like a snail, leaving slime behind and nothing else. It were better far than driveling out, as oftentimes we do—

*“Our souls can neither fly nor go
To reach eternal joys.”*

The love of Christ to us, then, suggests great zeal in His service.

VI. Now, sixthly, I am sure that another inference that should be drawn from it is this—If we remember what we were and how Divine Grace has changed us, IT OUGHT TO MAKE US VERY HOPEFUL ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE. Paul was, for he says, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.” Well, Friend, are *you* saved? Then *anybody* can be! You never ought to despair of the salvation of anyone, for you know yourself and feel yourself to have been the most undeserving of men—and yet God’s Grace has made you love Him. Well, then, that Grace can light on anybody. Already it has fallen on the most unlikely spot possible!

Now, from this moment on, never indulge the idea that it is useless to attempt to benefit any of your fellow men. I remember—indeed, I have often met with persons who tell me of being asked, “Why did you not ask So-and-So to attend a place of worship?” “Ask him? Oh, I never thought of *him*.” “Why not?” “I did not think it was any use.” It is a very amazing thing that those are the kind of people who, if you get them to hear the Word of God, are generally converted—the people you think it is no use to bring! Men who have been accustomed to speak very disrespectfully of religious things, when once brought under the sound of the Truth of God, are often the first to receive a blessing! Those are the kind of fellows to seek, for there is some hope of reaching men who are in such need of the Gospel we have to proclaim. You know there is virgin soil there, so it is the very place to sow the good Seed of the kingdom.

There is good fishing in a pond that never was fished before and here is a man who, at any rate, is not Gospel-hardened—he has not got used to the sound of the Word so as to take no notice of anything that is said. Bring him in! He is the very man we want—bring him in! “But he is a swearer.” Well, but if you were a swearer before your conversion, you ought never to say anything about *that*. “Oh, but he is a very hardened man.” Yes, but if you were converted, notwithstanding what you were, you ought never to make *that* objection against anyone. “Oh, but he is such a low-bred man.” Well, there are plenty of us who cannot boast much about our aristocratic descent! “Oh, but,” says one, “he is such a proud man, such a haughty man.” Or, “He is a rich man. He is a purse-proud man.” Yes, but there are others like he who have been brought in and while that man has sinned in one way, *you* have sinned in another—and if the Grace of God met your six, it can meet his half-dozen!

Depend upon it, God meant us to be hopeful about other people when He saved us. See that man coming out of the hospital? He has had pretty nearly all the diseases you ever heard of and yet he has been cured. He is not the man to say, “It is no use going in *there*. You will get no good by putting yourself under the treatment of *that* doctor.” On the contrary, whenever he meets with anybody who is suffering, he says, “You go and try the physician that healed me. If you can get a bed under his care; if you can come under his notice, you are almost certain to get cured—your maladies cannot be worse than mine and he met my case exactly and he can meet yours.” He is the man who will advertise Christ and will

proclaim His fame the whole world over—who has tasted that He is gracious and has proven, in his own case, the converting power of the Holy Spirit!

Oh, I pray you, dear Friend, despair of nobody! You who go with your tracts, go into the worst houses! You who talk in the workhouses to those who are, perhaps, as gladly gone as any—who find them dying in the infirmary and rejecting the Word of God as you speak it, yet keep on! Keep on! “Never say die” concerning anyone! Since the Lord has saved you, the Grace of God can save anybody, however far he may have sunk in sin! It can reach even to the very vilest of the sons of men.

VII. The last inference is that **WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US SHOULD CONFIRM OUR CONFIDENCE FOR OURSELVES**—our confidence, not *in ourselves*, but in God who will perfect that which He has begun in us. There is not half as much Grace necessary to bring you to Heaven if you are a Believer as you have had, already, to bring you where you are! You have got to be perfected, but remember that it was the very first step that had the difficulty in it. It always reminds me of the legend of St. Denis who picked up his head after it was cut off and walked, I think, 40 leagues with it. But a wit said that there was no trouble about walking 40 leagues—the difficulty all lay in the first step!

So it did and so all the difficulty of the walk of faith lies in the first step—that first coming of a *dead heart* to life! That first bringing of a reprobate soul—a carnal mind that is enmity against God—into friendship with God. Well, that has been done! That first great work has been worked in you by God the Holy Spirit and now you can say with the Apostle, “If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Do you think the Lord ever converts a man with a view of showing him His Light that he may go back, again, into the thick darkness, forever? Does He drop a spark of heavenly light into our souls that it may go out, never to be rekindled? Does He come and teach us to eat heavenly bread and drink the Water of Life and then leave us to starve or die of thirst? Does He make us members of Christ’s body and then allow us to rot and decay? Has He brought us thus far to put us to shame? Has He given me a heart that cries after Him and pines for Him! Has He given me a sighing after perfection, an inward hunger after everything that is holy and true and does He mean, after all, to desert me? It cannot be—

*“His love in time past forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink.
That gracious conversion I have in review,
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.”*

So let us go on our way rejoicing that it shall be even so with each one of us. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts 26: 1 Timothy 1:11-17.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—30, 233, 235.

END OF VOLUME 26

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