

J.C. Ryle:

A Woman to Be Remembered

"Remember Lot's wife." (Luke 17:32).

There are few warnings in Scripture more solemn than that which heads this page. The Lord Jesus Christ says to us, "Remember Lot's wife."

Lot's wife was a professor of religion; her husband was a "righteous man" (2 Pet. 2:8). She left Sodom with him on the day when Sodom was destroyed; she looked back toward the city from behind her husband, against God's express command; she was struck dead at once and turned into a pillar of salt. And the Lord Jesus Christ holds her up as a beacon to His church; He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the person Jesus names. He does not bid us remember Abraham or Isaac or Jacob or Sarah or Hannah or Ruth. No, He singles out one whose soul was lost forever. He cries to us, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the subject Jesus is upon. He is speaking of His own second coming to judge the world; He is describing the dreadful state of unreadiness in which many will be found. The last days are on His mind when He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the person who gives it. The Lord Jesus is full of love, mercy and compassion; He is one who will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. He could weep over unbelieving Jerusalem and pray for the men that crucified Him; yet even He thinks it good to remind us of lost souls. Even He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we think of the people to whom it was first given. The Lord Jesus was speaking to His disciples; He was not addressing the scribes and Pharisees, who hated Him, but Peter, James and John and many others who loved Him; yet even to them He thinks it good to address a caution. Even to them He says, "Remember Lot's wife."

It is a solemn warning, when we consider the manner in which it was given. He does not merely say, "Beware of following, take heed of imitating, do not be like Lot's wife." He uses a different word: He says, "Remember." He speaks as if we were all in danger of forgetting the subject; He stirs up our lazy memories; He bids us keep the case before our minds. He cries, "Remember Lot's wife."

I propose to examine the lessons which Lot's wife is meant to teach us. I am sure that her history is full of useful instruction to the church. The last days are upon us; the second coming of the Lord Jesus draws near; the danger of worldliness is yearly increasing in the church. Let us be provided with safeguards and antidotes against the disease that is around us and, not least, let us become familiar with the story of Lot's wife.

Let us consider now the religious privileges Lot's wife enjoyed, the particular sin she committed, and the judgement which God inflicted upon her.

1. The religious privileges which Lot's wife enjoyed

In the days of Abraham and Lot, true saving religion was scarce upon earth: there were no Bibles, no ministers, no churches, no tracts, no missionaries. The knowledge of God was confined to a few favored families; the greater part of the inhabitants of the world were living in darkness, ignorance, superstition and sin. Not one in a hundred perhaps had such good example, such spiritual society, such clear knowledge, such plain warnings as Lot's wife. Compared with millions of her fellow creatures in her time, Lot's wife was a favored woman.

She had a godly man for her husband; she had Abraham, the father of the faithful, for her uncle by marriage. The faith, the knowledge and the prayers of these two righteous men could have been no secret to her. It is impossible that she could have dwelt in tents with them for any length of time without knowing whose they were and whom they served. Religion with them was no mere formal business; it was the ruling principle of their lives and the mainspring of all their actions. All this Lot's wife must have seen and known. This was no small privilege.

When Abram first received the promises, it is probable Lot's wife was there. When he built his altar by his tent between Hai and Bethel, it is probable she was there. When her husband was taken captive by Chedorlaomer and delivered by God's interference, she was there. When Melchizedek, king of Salem, came forth to meet Abraham with bread and wine, she was there. When the angels came to Sodom and warned her husband to flee, she saw them; when they took them by the hand and led them out of the city, she was one of those whom they helped to escape. Once more, I say, these were no small privileges.

Yet what good effect had all these privileges on the heart of Lot's wife? None at all. Notwithstanding all her opportunities and means of grace, notwithstanding all her special warnings and messages from heaven, she lived and died graceless, godless, impenitent and unbelieving. The eyes of her understanding were never opened; her conscience was never really aroused and quickened; her will was never really brought into a state of obedience to God; her affections were never really set upon things above. The form of religion which she had was kept up for fashion's sake and not from feeling; it was a cloak worn for the sake of pleasing her company, but not from any sense of its value. She did as others did around her in Lot's house; she conformed to her husband's ways; she made no opposition to his religion; she allowed herself to be passively towed along in his wake; but all this time her heart was wrong in the sight of God. The world was in her heart, and her heart was in the world. In this state she lived, and in this state she died.

In all this there is much to be learned: I see a lesson here which is of the deepest importance in the present day. You live in times when there are many people just like Lot's wife; come and hear the lesson which her case is meant to teach.

Learn, then, that the mere possession of religious privileges will save no one's soul. You may have spiritual advantages of every description; you may live in the full sunshine of the richest opportunities and means of grace; you may enjoy the best of preaching and the choicest instruction; you may dwell in the midst of light, knowledge, holiness and good company. All this may be, and yet you yourself may remain unconverted, and at last be lost forever.

I dare say this doctrine sounds hard to some readers. I know that many fancy they want nothing but religious privileges in order to become decided Christians. They are not what they ought to be at present, they allow; but their position is so hard, they plead, and their difficulties are so many. Give them a godly husband or a godly wife, give them godly companions, or a godly master, give them the preaching of the gospel, give them privileges, and then they would walk with God.

It is all a mistake. It is an entire delusion. It requires something more than privileges to save souls. Joab was David's captain; Gehazi was Elisha's servant; Demas was Paul's companion; Judas Iscariot was Christ's disciple, and Lot had a worldly unbelieving wife. These all died in their sins. They went down to the pit in spite of knowledge, warnings and opportunities; and they all teach us that it is not privileges alone that men need. They need the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Let us value religious privileges, but let us not rest entirely upon them. Let us desire to have the benefit of them in all our movements in life, but let us not put them in the place of Christ. Let us use them thankfully if God grants them to us, but let us take care that they produce some fruit in our heart and life. If they do not do good, they often do positive harm: they sear the conscience, they increase responsibility, they aggravate condemnation. The same fire which melts the wax hardens the clay; the same sun which makes the living tree grow dries up the dead tree and prepares it for burning. Nothing so hardens the heart of man as a barren familiarity with sacred things. Once more I say, it is not privileges alone which make people Christians, but the grace of the Holy Spirit. Without that no man will ever be saved.

I ask the members of evangelical congregations in the present day to mark well what I am saying. You go to Mr. A's, or Mr. B's church; you think him an excellent preacher; you delight in his sermons; you cannot hear anyone else with the same comfort; you have learned many things since you attended his ministry; you consider it a great privilege to be one of his hearers! All this is very good. It is a privilege. I should be thankful if ministers like yours were multiplied a thousandfold. But after all, what have you got in your heart? Have you yet received the Holy Spirit? If not, you are no better than Lot's wife.

I ask the servants of religious families to mark well what I am saying. It is a great privilege to live in a house where the fear of God reigns. It is a privilege to hear family prayers morning and evening, to hear the Word of God regularly expounded, to have a quiet Sunday, and to be able always to go to church. These are the things that you ought to seek after when you try to get a situation; these are the things which make a really good

place. High wages and light work will never make up for a constant round of worldliness, Sabbath-breaking and sin. But take heed that you do not rest content with these things; do not suppose because you have all these spiritual advantages that you will of course go to heaven. You must have grace in your own heart, as well as attend family prayers. If not, you are at present no better than Lot's wife.

I ask the children of religious parents to mark well what I am saying. It is the highest privilege to be the child of a godly father and mother and to be brought up in the midst of many prayers. It is a blessed thing indeed to be taught the gospel from our earliest infancy and to hear of sin and Jesus and the Holy Spirit and holiness and heaven from the first moment we can remember anything. But, oh, take heed that you do not remain barren and unfruitful in the sunshine of all these privileges; beware lest your heart remains hard, impenitent and worldly, notwithstanding the many advantages you enjoy. You cannot enter the kingdom of God on the credit of your parents' religion. You must eat the bread of life for yourself and have the witness of the Spirit in your own heart. You must have repentance of your own, faith of your own and sanctification of your own. If not, you are no better than Lot's wife.

I pray God that all professing Christians in these days may lay these things to heart. May we never forget that privileges alone cannot save us. Light and knowledge and faithful preaching and abundant means of grace and the company of holy people are all great blessings and advantages. Happy are those who have them! But, after all, there is one thing without which privileges are useless: that one thing is the grace of the Holy Spirit. Lot's wife had many privileges; but Lot's wife had no grace.

2. The sin which Lot's wife committed

The history of the sin which Lot's wife committed is given by the Holy Spirit in few and simple words: "She looked back from behind her husband, and she became a pillar of salt." We are told no more than this. There is a naked solemnity about the history. The sum and substance of her transgression lies in these three words: "She looked back."

Does that sin seem small in the eyes of any reader of this message? Does the fault of Lot's wife appear a trifling one to be visited with such a punishment? This is the feeling, I dare say, that rises in some hearts. Give me your attention while I reason with you on the subject. There was far more in that look than strikes you at first sight: it implied far more than it expressed. Listen, and you shall hear.

a. That look was a little thing, but it revealed the true character of Lot's wife. Little things will often show the state of a man's mind even better than great ones, and little symptoms are often the signs of deadly and incurable diseases. The apple that Eve ate was a little thing, but it proved that she had fallen from innocence and become a sinner. A crack in an arch seems a little thing; but it proves that the foundation is giving way, and the whole fabric is unsafe. A little cough in a morning seems an unimportant ailment; but it is often an evidence of failing in the constitution and leads on to decline, consumption and death. A straw may show which way the wind blows, and one look may show the rotten condition of a sinner's heart (Matt. 5:28).

b. That look was a little thing, but it told of disobedience in Lot's wife. The command of the angel was straight and unmistakable: "Look not behind you" (Gen. 19:17). This command Lot's wife refused to obey. But the Holy Spirit says that "to obey is better than sacrifice," and that "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Sam. 15:22, 23). When God speaks plainly by His Word, or by His messengers, man's duty is clear.

c. That look was a little thing, but it told of proud unbelief in Lot's wife. She seemed to doubt whether God was really going to destroy Sodom: she appeared not to believe there was any danger or any need for such a hasty flight. But without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). The moment a man begins to think he knows better than God and that God does not mean anything when He threatens, his soul is in great danger. When we cannot see the reason of God's dealings, our duty is to hold our peace and believe.

d. That look was a little thing, but it told of secret love of the world in Lot's wife. Her heart was in Sodom, though her body was outside. She had left her affections behind when she fled from her home. Her eye turned to the place where her treasure was, as the compass needle turns to the pole. And this was the crowning point of her sin. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

This aspect of our subject deserves special attention; let us focus our minds and hearts upon it. I believe it to be the part to which the Lord Jesus particularly intends to direct us. I believe He would have us observe that

Lot's wife was lost by looking back to the world. Her profession was at one time fair and specious, but she never really gave up the world. She seemed at one time in the road to safety, but even then the lowest and deepest thoughts of her heart were for the world. The immense danger of worldliness is the grand lesson which the Lord Jesus means us to learn. Oh, that we may all have an eye to see and a heart to understand!

I believe there never was a time when warnings against worldliness were so much needed by the church of Christ as they are at the present day. Every age is said to have its own peculiar epidemic disease; the epidemic disease to which the souls of Christians are liable just now is the love of the world. It is a pestilence that walks in darkness and a sickness that destroys at noonday. It "has cast down many wounded; yes, many strong men have been wounded by it." I would sincerely raise a warning voice and try to arouse the slumbering consciences of all who make a profession of religion. I would sincerely cry aloud, "Remember the sin of Lot's wife." She was no murderess, no adulteress, no thief; but she was a professor of religion, and she looked back.

There are thousands of baptized people in our churches who are proof against immorality and infidelity and yet fall victims to the love of the world. There are thousands who run well for a season and seem to bid fair to reach heaven, but by and by give up the race and turn their backs on Christ altogether. And what has stopped them? Have they found the Bible not true? Have they found the Lord Jesus fail to keep His word? No, not at all. But they have caught the epidemic disease: they are infected with the love of this world. I appeal to every true-hearted evangelical minister who reads this message: I ask him to look around his congregation. I appeal to every old-established Christian: I ask him to look around the circle of his acquaintance. I am sure that I am speaking the truth. I am sure that it is high time to remember the sin of Lot's wife.

a. How many children of religious families begin well and end ill! In the days of their childhood they seem full of religion. They can repeat texts and hymns in abundance; they have spiritual feelings and convictions of sin; they profess love to the Lord Jesus and desires after heaven; they take pleasure in going to church and hearing sermons; they say things which are treasured up by their fond parents as indications of grace; they do things which make relations say, "What manner of child will this be?" But, alas, how often their goodness vanishes like the morning cloud and like the dew that passes away! The boy becomes a young man and cares for nothing but amusements, field sports, reveling and excess. The girl becomes a young woman and cares for nothing but dress, gay company, novel reading and excitement. Where is the spirituality which once appeared to promise so fair? It is all gone; it is buried; it is overflowed by the love of the world. They walk in the steps of Lot's wife. They look back.

b. How many married people do well in religion, to all appearance, until their children begin to grow up, and then they fall away! In the early years of their married life they seem to follow Christ diligently and to witness a good confession. They regularly attend the preaching of the gospel; they are fruitful in good works; they are never seen in vain and dissipated society. Their faith and practice are both sound, and walk hand in hand. But, alas, how often a spiritual blight comes over the household when a young family begins to grow up, and sons and daughters have to be brought forward in life. A leaven of worldliness begins to appear in their habits, dress, entertainments and employment of time. They are no longer strict about the company they keep and the places they visit. Where is the decided line of separation which they once observed? Where is the unswerving abstinence from worldly amusements which once marked their course? It is all forgotten. It is all laid aside, like an old almanac. A change has come over them: the spirit of the world has taken possession of their hearts. They walk in the steps of Lot's wife. They look back.

c. How many young women seem to love decided religion until they are twenty or twenty-one and then lose all! Up to this time of their life their conduct in religious matters is all that could be desired. They keep up habits of private prayer; they read their Bibles diligently; they visit the poor, when they have opportunity; they teach in Sunday schools, when there is an opening; they minister to the temporal and spiritual wants of the poor; they like religious friends; they love to talk on religious subjects; they write letters full of religious expressions and religious experience. But, alas, how often they prove unstable as water and are ruined by the love of the world! Little by little they fall away and lose their first love. Little by little the "things seen" push out of their minds the "things unseen" and, like the plague of locusts, eat up every green thing in their souls. Step by step they go back from the decided position they once took up. They cease to be jealous about sound doctrine; they pretend to find out that it is "uncharitable" to think one person has more religion than another; they discover it is "exclusive" to attempt any separation from the customs of society. By and by they give their affections to some man who makes no pretense to decided religion. At last they end by giving up the last remnant of their own Christianity and becoming thorough children of the world. They walk in the steps of Lot's wife. They look back.

d. How many communicants in our churches were at one time zealous and earnest professors and have now

become torpid, formal and cold! Time was when none seemed so much alive in religion as they were; none were so diligent in their attendance on the means of grace; none were so anxious to promote the cause of the gospel and so ready for every good work; none were so thankful for spiritual instruction; none were apparently so desirous to grow in grace. But now, alas, everything seems altered! The "love of other things" has taken possession of their hearts and choked the good seed of the Word. The money of the world, the rewards of the world, the literature of the world, the honors of the world have now the first place in their affections. Talk to them, and you will find no response about spiritual things. Mark their daily conduct, and you will see no zeal about the kingdom of God. A religion they have indeed, but it is living religion no more. The spring of their former Christianity is dried up and gone; the fire of the spiritual machine is quenched and cold; earth has put out the flame which once burned so brightly. They have walked in the steps of Lot's wife. They have looked back.

e. How many clergymen work hard in their profession for a few years and then become lazy and indolent from the love of this present world! At the outset of their ministry they seem willing to spend and be spent for Christ; they are instant in season and out of season; their preaching is lively and their churches are filled. Their congregations are well looked after; cottage lectures, prayer meetings, house-to-house visitation are their weekly delight. But, alas, how often after "beginning in the Spirit" they end "in the flesh" and, like Samson, are shorn of their strength in the lap of that Delilah, the world! They are preferred to some rich living; they marry a worldly wife; they are puffed up with pride and neglect study and prayer. A nipping frost cuts off the spiritual blossoms which once bade so fair. Their preaching loses its unction and power; their weekday work becomes less and less; the society they mix in becomes less select; the tone of their conversation becomes more earthly. They cease to disregard the opinion of man; they imbibe a morbid fear of "extreme views," and are filled with a cautious dread of giving offense. And at last the man who at one time seemed likely to be a real successor of the apostles and a good soldier of Christ settles down on his lees as a clerical gardener, farmer, or diner out, by whom nobody is offended and nobody is saved. His church becomes half empty; his influence dwindles away; the world has bound him hand and foot. He has walked in the steps of Lot's wife. He has looked back.

It is sad to write of these things, but it is far more sad to see them. It is sad to observe how professing Christians can blind their consciences by specious arguments on this subject and can defend positive worldliness by talking of the "duties of their station," the "courtesies of life" and the necessity of having a "cheerful religion."

It is sad to see how many a gallant ship launches forth on the voyage of life with every prospect of success and, springing this leak of worldliness, goes down with all her freight in full view of the harbor of safety. It is saddest of all to observe how many flatter themselves it is all right with their souls when it is all wrong, by reason of this love of the world. Gray hairs are here and there upon them, and they know it not. They began with Jacob and David and Peter, and they are likely to end with Esau and Saul and Judas Iscariot. They began with Ruth and Hannah and Mary and Persis, and they are likely to end with Lot's wife.

Beware of a half-hearted religion. Beware of following Christ from any secondary motive, to please relations and friends, to keep in with the custom of the place or family in which you reside, to appear respectable and have the reputation of being religious. Follow Christ for His own sake, if you follow Him at all. Be thorough, be real, be honest, be sound, be whole-hearted. If you have any religion at all, let your religion be real. See that you do not sin the sin of Lot's wife.

Beware of ever supposing that you may go too far in religion and of secretly trying to keep in with the world. I want no reader of this message to become a hermit, a monk or a nun: I wish everyone to do his real duty in that state of life to which he is called. But I do urge on every professing Christian who wishes to be happy the immense importance of making no compromise between God and the world. Do not try to drive a hard bargain, as if you wanted to give Christ as little of your heart as possible, and to keep as much as possible of the things of this life. Beware lest you overreach yourself and end by losing all. Love Christ with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. Seek first the kingdom of God and believe that then all other things shall be added to you. Take heed that you do not prove a copy of the character John Bunyan draws, Mr. Facing-both-ways. For your happiness' sake, for your usefulness' sake, for your safety's sake, for your soul's sake, beware of the sin of Lot's wife. Oh, it is a solemn saying of our Lord Jesus: "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

3. The judgment which God inflicted upon her

The Scripture describes the end of Lot's wife in few and simple words. It is written that "she looked back and became a pillar of salt." A miracle was wrought to execute God's judgment on this guilty woman. The same almighty hand which first gave her life took that life away in the twinkling of an eye. From living flesh and blood, she was turned into a pillar of salt.

That was a fearful end for a soul to come to! To die at any time is a solemn thing. To die amid kind friends and relations, to die calmly and quietly in one's bed, to die with the prayers of godly men still sounding in your ears, to die with a good hope through grace in the full Assurance of salvation, leaning on the Lord Jesus, buoyed up by gospel promises, to die even so, I say, is a serious business. But to die suddenly and in a moment, in the very act of sin, to die in full health and strength, to die by the direct interposition of an angry God—this is fearful indeed. Yet this was the end of Lot's wife. I cannot blame the Prayer Book litany, as some do, for retaining this petition: "From sudden death, good Lord, deliver us."

That was a hopeless end for a soul to come to! There are cases where one hopes, as it were, against hope, about the souls of those we see go down to the grave. We try to persuade ourselves that our poor departed brother or sister may have repented unto salvation at the last moment and laid hold on the hem of Christ's garment at the eleventh hour. We call to mind God's mercies; we remember the Spirit's power; we think on the case of the penitent thief; we whisper to ourselves that saving work may have gone on even on that dying bed which the dying person had not strength to tell. But there is an end of all such hopes when a person is suddenly cut down in the very act of sin. Charity itself can say nothing when the soul has been summoned away in the very midst of wickedness, without even a moment's time for thought or prayer. Such was the end of Lot's wife. It was a hopeless end. She went to hell.

But it is good for us all to mark these things. It is good to be reminded that God can punish sharply those who sin willfully and that great privileges misused bring down great wrath on the soul. Pharaoh saw all the miracles which Moses worked; Korah, Dathan and Abiram had heard God speaking from Mount Sinai; Hophni and Phinehas were sons of God's high priest; Saul lived in the full light of Samuel's ministry; Ahab was often warned by Elijah the prophet; Absalom enjoyed the privilege of being one of David's children; Belshazzar had Daniel the prophet hard by his door; Ananias and Sapphira joined the church in the days when the apostles were working miracles; Judas Iscariot was a chosen companion of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. But they all sinned with a high hand against light and knowledge, and they were all suddenly destroyed without remedy. They had no time or space for repentance. As they lived, so they died; as they were, they hurried away to meet God. They went with all their sins upon them, unpardoned, unrenewed and utterly unfit for heaven. And being dead they yet speak. They tell us, like Lot's wife, that it is a perilous thing to sin against light, that God hates sin, and that there is a hell.

I feel constrained to speak freely to my readers on the subject of hell. Suffer me to use the opportunity which the end of Lot's wife affords. I believe the time is come when it is a positive duty to speak plainly about the reality and eternity of hell. A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us that God is too merciful to punish souls forever, that there is a love of God lower even than hell, and that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly some of them may be, will sooner or later be saved. We are invited to leave the old paths of apostolic Christianity. We are told that the views of our fathers about hell, and the devil, and punishment, are obsolete and old-fashioned. We are to embrace what is called a "kinder theology" and treat hell as a pagan fable or a bugbear to frighten children and fools. Against such false teaching I desire, for one, to protest. Painful, sorrowful, distressing as the controversy may be, we must not blink it or refuse to look the subject in the face. I, for one, am resolved to maintain the old position, and to assert the reality and eternity of hell.

Believe me, this is no mere speculative question. It is not to be classed with disputes about liturgies and church government. It is not to be ranked with mysterious problems, like the meaning of Ezekiel's temple or the symbols of Revelation. It is a question which lies at the very foundation of the whole gospel. The moral attributes of God, His justice, His holiness, His purity, are all involved in it. The necessity of personal faith in Christ, and the sanctification of the Spirit, are all at stake. Once let the old doctrine about hell be overthrown, and the whole system of Christianity is unsettled, unscrewed, unpinned and thrown into disorder.

Believe me, the question is not one in which we are obliged to fall back on the theories and inventions of man. The Scripture has spoken plainly and fully on the subject of hell. I hold it to be impossible to deal honestly with the Bible and to avoid the conclusions to which it will lead us on this point. If words mean anything, there is such a place as hell. If texts are to be interpreted fairly, there are those who will be cast into it. If language has any sense belonging to it, hell is forever. I believe that the man who finds arguments for evading the evidence of the Bible on this question has arrived at a state of mind in which reasoning is useless. For my own part, it

seems just as easy to argue that we do not exist, as to argue that the Bible does not teach the reality and eternity of hell.

a. Settle it firmly in your mind that the same Bible which teaches that God in mercy and compassion sent Christ to die for sinners does also teach that God hates sin and must, from His very nature, punish all who cleave to sin or refuse the salvation He has provided. The very same chapter which declares, "God so loved the world," declares also, that "the wrath of God abides" on the unbeliever (John 3:16, 36). The very same gospel which is launched into the earth with the blessed tidings, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved," proclaims in the same breath, "He that believes not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

b. Settle it firmly in your mind that God has given us proof upon proof in the Bible that He will punish the hardened and unbelieving and that He can take vengeance on His enemies, as well as show mercy on the penitent. The drowning of the old world by the flood, the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, the overthrow of Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, the judgment on Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the utter destruction of the seven nations of Canaan—all teach the same dreadful truth. They are all given to us as beacons and signs and warnings, that we may not provoke God. They are all meant to lift up the corner of the curtain which hangs over things to come and to remind us that there is such a thing as the wrath of God. They all tell us plainly that "the wicked shall be turned into hell" (Ps. 9:17).

c. Settle it firmly in your mind that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has spoken most plainly about the reality and eternity of hell. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus contains things which should make men tremble. But it does not stand alone. No lips have used so many words to express the awfulness of hell, as the lips of Him who spoke as never man spoke, and who said, "The word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me" (John 14:24). Hell, hell fire, the damnation of hell, eternal damnation, the resurrection of damnation, everlasting fire, the place of torment, destruction, outer darkness, the worm that never dies, the fire that is not quenched, the place of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, everlasting punishment—these, these are the words which the Lord Jesus Christ Himself employs. Away with the miserable nonsense which people talk in this day, who tell us that the ministers of the gospel should never speak of hell! They only show their own ignorance, or their own dishonesty, when they talk in such a manner. No man can honestly read the four Gospels and fail to see that he who would follow the example of Christ must speak of hell.

d. Settle it, lastly, in your mind that the comforting ideas which the Scripture gives us of heaven are at an end, if we once deny the reality or eternity of hell. Is there no future separate abode for those who die wicked and ungodly? Are all men after death to be mingled together in one confused multitude? Why, then, heaven will be no heaven at all! It is utterly impossible for two to dwell happily together except they be agreed. Is there to be a time when the term of hell and punishment will be over? Are the wicked after ages of misery to be admitted into heaven? Why, then, the need of the sanctification of the Spirit is cast aside and despised! I read that men can be sanctified and made meet for heaven on earth; I read nothing of any sanctification in hell. Away with such baseless and unscriptural theories! The eternity of hell is as clearly affirmed in the Bible as the eternity of heaven. Once allow that hell is not eternal, and you may as well say that God and heaven are not eternal. The same Greek word which is used in the expression "everlasting punishment" is the word that is used by the Lord Jesus in the expression "life eternal," and by Paul, in the expression "everlasting God" (Matt. 25:46; Rom. 16:26).

I know that all this sounds dreadful in many ears. I do not wonder. But the only question we have to settle is this: "Is it scriptural?" Is it true? I maintain firmly that it is so; and I maintain that professing Christians ought to be often reminded that they may be lost and go to hell.

I know that it is easy to deny all plain teaching about hell and to make it odious by invidious names. I have often heard of "narrow-minded views," and "old-fashioned notions," and "brimstone theology," and the like. I have often been told that "broad" views are wanted in the present day. I wish to be as broad as the Bible, neither less nor more. I say that he is the narrow-minded theologian who pares down such parts of the Bible as the natural heart dislikes and rejects any portion of the counsel of God.

God knows that I never speak of hell without pain and sorrow. I would gladly offer the salvation of the gospel to the very chief of sinners. I would willingly say to the vilest and most profligate of mankind on his deathbed, "Repent, and believe on Jesus, and you shall be saved." But God forbid that I should ever keep back from mortal man that Scripture reveals a hell as well as heaven and that the gospel teaches that men may be lost as well as saved. The watchman who keeps silence when he sees a fire is guilty of gross neglect; the doctor who tells us we are getting well when we are dying is a false friend; and the minister who keeps back hell from his people in his sermons is neither a faithful nor a charitable man.

Where is the charity of keeping back any portion of God's truth? He is the kindest friend who tells me the whole extent of my danger. Where is the use of hiding the future from the impenitent and the ungodly? Surely it is like helping the devil if we do not tell them plainly that, "The soul that sins shall surely die." Who knows but the wretched carelessness of many baptized people arises from this, that they have never been told plainly of hell? Who can tell but thousands might be converted if ministers would urge them more faithfully to flee from the wrath to come? Verily, I fear we are many of us guilty in this matter; there is a morbid tenderness among us which is not the tenderness of Christ. We have spoken of mercy, but not of judgment; we have preached many sermons about heaven, but few about hell; we have been carried away by the wretched fear of being thought "low, vulgar and fanatical." We have forgotten that He who judges us is the Lord and that the man who teaches the same doctrine that Christ taught cannot be wrong.

If you would ever be a healthy scriptural Christian, I entreat you to give hell a place in your theology. Establish it in your mind as a fixed principle that God is a God of judgment, as well as of mercy, and that the same everlasting counsels which laid the foundation of the bliss of heaven have also laid the foundation of the misery of hell. Keep in full view of your mind that all who die unpardoned and unrenewed are utterly unfit for the presence of God and must be lost forever. They are not capable of enjoying heaven; they could not be happy there. They must go to their own place: and that place is hell. Oh, it is a great thing in these days of unbelief to believe the whole Bible!

If you would ever be a healthy and scriptural Christian, I entreat you to beware of any ministry which does not plainly teach the reality and eternity of hell. Such a ministry may be soothing and pleasant, but it is far more likely to lull you to sleep than to lead you to Christ or build you up in the faith. It is impossible to leave out any portion of God's truth without spoiling the whole. That preaching is sadly defective which dwells exclusively on the mercies of God and the joys of heaven and never sets forth the terrors of the Lord and the miseries of hell. It may be popular, but it is not scriptural; it may amuse and gratify, but it will not save. Give me the preaching which keeps back nothing that God has revealed. You may call it stern and harsh; you may tell us that to frighten people is not the way to do them good. But you are forgetting that the grand object of the gospel is to persuade men to "flee from the wrath to come," and that it is vain to expect men to flee unless they are afraid. Well would it be for many professing Christians if they were more afraid about their souls than they now are!

If you desire to be a healthy Christian, consider often what your own end will be. Will it be happiness, or will it be misery? Will it be the death of the righteous, or will it be a death without hope, like that of Lot's wife? You cannot live always; there must be an end one day. The last sermon will one day be heard; the last prayer will one day be prayed; the last chapter in the Bible will one day be read; meaning, wishing, hoping, intending, resolving, doubting, hesitating—all will at length be over. You will have to leave this world and to stand before a holy God. Oh, that you would be wise! Oh, that you would consider your latter end!

You cannot trifle forever: a time will come when you must be serious. You cannot put off your soul's concerns forever: a day will come when you must have a reckoning with God. You cannot be always singing and dancing and eating and drinking and dressing and reading and laughing and jesting and scheming and planning and moneymaking. The summer insects cannot always sport in the sunshine. The cold chilly evening will come at last and stop their sport forever. So will it be with you. You may put off religion now and refuse the counsel of God's ministers, but the cool of the day is drawing on when God will come down to speak with you. And what will your end be? Will it be a hopeless one, like that of Lot's wife?

I beseech you, by the mercies of God, to look this question fairly in the face. I entreat you not to stifle conscience by vague hopes of God's mercy, while your heart cleaves to the world. I implore you not to drown convictions by childish fancies about God's love, while your daily ways and habits show plainly that "the love of the Father is not in you." There is mercy in God, like a river, but it is for the penitent believer in Christ Jesus. There is a love in God toward sinners which is unspeakable and unsearchable, but it is for those who hear Christ's voice and follow Him. Seek to have an interest in that love. Break off every known sin; come out boldly from the world; cry mightily to God in prayer; cast yourself wholly and unreservedly on the Lord Jesus for time and eternity; lay aside every weight. Cling to nothing, however dear, which interferes with your soul's salvation; give up everything, however precious, which comes between you and heaven. This old shipwrecked world is fast sinking beneath your feet; the one thing needful is to have a place in the lifeboat and get safe to shore. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Whatever happens to your house and property, see that you make sure of heaven. Oh, better a million times be laughed at and thought extreme in this world, than go down to hell from the midst of the congregation, and end like Lot's wife!

Let me address the reader particularly here, so I may impress a few salient questions upon your conscience. You have seen the history of Lot's wife—her privileges, her sin and her end. You have been told of the uselessness of privileges without the gift of the Holy Spirit, of the danger of worldliness and of the reality of hell. Suffer me to wind up all by a few direct appeals to your own heart. In a day of so much light and knowledge and profession, I desire to set up a beacon to preserve souls from shipwreck. I would sincerely moor a buoy in the channel of all spiritual voyagers and paint upon it, "Remember Lot's wife."

a. Are you careless about the second advent of Christ? Alas, many are! They live like the men of Sodom and the men of Noah's day: they eat and drink and plant and build and marry and are given in marriage and behave as if Christ was never going to return. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

b. Are you lukewarm, and cold in your Christianity? Alas, many are! They try to serve two masters: they labor to keep friends both with God and mammon. They strive to be a kind of spiritual bat, neither one thing nor the other: not quite a thoroughgoing Christian, but not quite men of the world. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

c. Are you halting between two opinions and disposed to go back to the world? Alas, many are! They are afraid of the cross; they secretly dislike the trouble and reproach of decided religion. They are weary of the wilderness and the manna and would sincerely return to Egypt if they could. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

d. Are you secretly cherishing some besetting sin? Alas, many are! They go far in a profession of religion; they do many things that are right and are very like the people of God. But there is always some darling evil habit which they cannot tear from their heart. Hidden worldliness or covetousness or lust sticks to them like their skin. They are willing to see all their idols broken but this one. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

e. Are you trifling with little sins? Alas many are! They hold the great essential doctrines of the gospel. They keep clear of all gross profligacy or open breach of God's law, but they are painfully careless about little inconsistencies and painfully ready to make excuses for them. "It is only a little temper, or a little levity, or a little thoughtlessness, or a little forgetfulness," they tell us; "God does not take account of such little matters. We are none of us perfect; God will never require it." If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

f. Are you resting on religious privileges? Alas, many do! They enjoy the opportunity of hearing the gospel regularly preached and of attending many ordinances and means of grace, and they settle down on their lees. They seem to be "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17), while they have neither faith, nor grace, nor spiritual-mindedness, nor fitness for heaven. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

g. Are you trusting to your religious knowledge? Alas, many do! They are not ignorant, as other men: they know the difference between true doctrine and false. They can dispute, they can reason, they can argue, they can quote texts; but all this time they are not converted, and they are yet dead in trespasses and sins. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

h. Are you making some profession of religion and yet clinging to the world? Alas, many do! They aim at being thought Christians. They like the credit of being serious, steady, proper, regular church-going people; yet all the while their dress, their tastes, their companions, their entertainments tell plainly they are of the world. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

i. Are you trusting that you will have a deathbed repentance? Alas, many do so! They know they are not what they ought to be: they are not yet born again and fit to die. But they flatter themselves that, when their last illness comes, they shall have time to repent and lay hold on Christ and go out of the world pardoned, sanctified and meet for heaven. They forget that people often die very suddenly and that, as they live, they generally die. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

j. Do you belong to an evangelical congregation? Many do and, alas, go no further! They hear the truth Sunday after Sunday and remain as hard as the nether millstone. Sermon after sermon sounds in their ears. Month after month they are invited to repent, to believe, to come to Christ and to be saved. Year after year passes away, and they are not changed. They keep their seat under the teaching of a favorite minister, and they also keep their

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favorite sins. If you are such a one, I say to you this day, "Take care: remember Lot's wife."

Oh, may these solemn words of our Lord Jesus Christ be deeply engraved on all our hearts! May they awaken us when we feel sleepy, revive us when we feel dead, sharpen us when we feel dull, warm us when we feel cold! May they prove a spur to quicken us when we are falling back and a bridle to check us when we are turning aside! May they be a shield to defend us when Satan casts a subtle temptation at our heart and a sword to fight with, when he says boldly, "Give up Christ, come back to the world, and follow me!" Oh, may we say in such hours of trial, "Soul, remember your Savior's warning! Soul, soul, have you forgotten His words? Soul, soul, remember Lot's wife!"