

Charles G. Finney:

"What must I do to be saved?" -- Acts xvi. 30.

I BRING forward this subject today not because it is new to many in this congregation, but because it is greatly needed. I am happy to know that the great inquiry of our text is beginning to be deeply and extensively agitated in this community, and under these circumstances it is the first duty of a Christian pastor to answer it, fully and plainly.

The circumstances which gave occasion to the words of the text were briefly these. Paul and Silas had gone to Philippi to preach the Gospel. Their preaching excited great opposition and tumult; they were arrested and thrown into prison, and the jailer was charged to keep them safely. At midnight they were praying and singing praises -- God came down -- the earth quaked and the prison rocked -- its doors burst open, and their chains fell off; the jailer sprang up affrighted, and, supposing his prisoners had fled, was about to take his own life, when Paul cried out, "Do thyself no harm; we are all here." He then called for a light, and sprang in and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

This is briefly the history of our text; and I improve it now, by showing;

I. What sinners must not do to be saved; and

II. What they must do.

I. What sinners must not do to be saved.

It has now come to be necessary and very important to tell men what they must not do in order to be saved. When the Gospel was first preached, Satan had not introduced as many delusions to mislead men as he has now. It was then enough to give, as Paul did, the simple and direct answer, telling men only what they must at once do. But this seems to be not enough now. So many delusions and perversions have bewildered and darkened the minds of men that they need often a great deal of instruction to lead them back to those simple views of the subject which prevailed at first. Hence the importance of showing what sinners must not do, if they intend to be saved.

1. They must not imagine that they have nothing to do. In Paul's time nobody seems to have thought of this. Then the doctrine of Universalism was not much developed. Men had not begun to dream that they should be saved without doing anything. They had not learned that sinners have nothing to do to be saved. If this idea, so current of late, had been rife at Philippi, the question of our text would not have been asked. No trembling sinner would have cried out, What must I do to be saved?

If men imagine they have nothing to do, they are never likely to be saved. It is not in the nature of falsehood and lies to save men's souls, and surely nothing is more false than this notion. Men know they have something to do to be saved. Why, then, do they pretend that all men will be saved whether they do their duty, or constantly refuse to do it? The very idea is preposterous, and is entertained only by the most palpable outrage upon common sense and an enlightened conscience.

2. You should not mistake what you have to do. The duty required of sinners is very simple, and would be easily understood were it not for the false ideas that prevail as to what religion is, and as to the exact things which God requires as conditions of salvation. On these points erroneous opinions prevail to a most alarming extent. Hence the danger of mistake. Beware lest you be deceived in a matter of so vital moment.

3. Do not say or imagine that you cannot do what God requires. On the contrary, always assume that you can. If you assume that you cannot, this very assumption will be fatal to your salvation.

4. Do not procrastinate. As you ever intend or hope to be saved, you must set your face like a flint against this most pernicious delusion. Probably no other mode of evading present duty has ever prevailed so extensively as this, or has destroyed so many souls. Almost all men in Gospel lands intend to prepare for death -- intend to repent and become religious before they die. Even Universalists expect to become religious at some time -- perhaps after death -- perhaps after being purified from their sins by purgatorial fires; but somehow they expect to become holy, for they know they must before they can see God and enjoy His presence. But you will

observe, they put this matter of becoming holy off to the most distant time possible. Feeling a strong dislike to it now, they flatter themselves that God will take care that it shall be done up duly in the next world, how much soever they may frustrate His efforts to do it in this. So long as it remains in their power to choose whether to become holy or not, they improve the time to enjoy sin; and leave it with God to make them holy in the next world -- if they can't prevent it there! Consistency is a jewel!

And all those who put off being religious now in the cherished delusion of becoming so in some future time, whether in this world or the next, are acting out this same inconsistency. You fondly hope that will occur which you are now doing your utmost to prevent.

So sinners by myriads press their way down to hell under this delusion. They often, when pressed with the claims of God, will even name the time when they will repent. It may be very near -- perhaps as soon as they get home from the meeting, or as soon as the sermon is over; or it may be more remote, as, for example, when they have finished their education, or become settled in life, or have made a little more property, or get ready to abandon some business of questionable morality; but no matter whether the time set be near or remote, the delusion is fatal -- the thought of procrastination is murder to the soul. Ah, such sinners are little aware that Satan himself has poured out his spirit upon them and is leading them whithersoever he will. He little cares whether they put off for a longer time or a shorter. If he can persuade them to a long delay, he likes it well; if only to a short one, he feels quite sure he can renew the delay and get another extension -- so it answers his purpose fully in the end.

Now mark, sinner, if you ever mean to be saved you must resist and grieve away this spirit of Satan. You must cease to procrastinate. You can never be converted so long as you operate only in the way of delaying and promising yourself that you will become religious at some future time. Did you ever bring anything to pass in your temporal business by procrastination? Did procrastination ever begin, prosecute, and accomplish any important business?

Suppose you have some business of vast consequence, involving your character, or your whole estate, or your life, to be transacted in Cleveland, but you do not know precisely how soon it must be done. It may be done with safety now, and with greater facility now than ever hereafter; but it might possibly be done although you should delay a little time, but every moment's delay involves an absolute uncertainty of your being able to do it at all. You do not know but a single hour's delay will make you too late. Now in these circumstances what would a man of sense and discretion do? Would he not be awake and up in an instant?

Would he sleep on a matter of such moment, involving such risks and uncertainties? No. You know that the risk of a hundred dollars, pending on such conditions, would stir the warm blood of any man of business, and you could not tempt him to delay an hour. O, he would say, this is the great business to which I must attend, and everything else must give way. But suppose he should act as a sinner does about repentance, and promise himself that tomorrow will be as this day and much more abundant -- and do nothing today, nor tomorrow, nor the next month, nor the next year -- would you not think him beside himself? Would you expect his business to be done, his money to be secured, his interests to be promoted?

So the sinner accomplishes nothing but his own ruin so long as he procrastinates. Until he says, "Now is my time -- today I will do all my duty" -- he is only playing the fool and laying up his wages accordingly. O, it is infinite madness to defer a matter of such vast interest and of such perilous uncertainty!

5. If you would be saved you must not wait for God to do what He commands you to do. God will surely do all that He can for your salvation. All that the nature of the case allows of His doing, He either has done or stands ready to do as soon as your position and course will allow Him to do it. Long before you were born He anticipated your wants as a sinner, and began on the most liberal scale to make provision for them. He gave His Son to die for you, thus doing all that need be done by way of an atonement. Of a long time past He has been shaping His providence so as to give you the requisite knowledge of duty -- has sent you His Word and Spirit. Indeed, He has given you the highest possible evidence that He will be energetic and prompt on His part -- as one in earnest for your salvation. You know this. What sinner in this house fears lest God should be negligent on His part in the matter of his salvation? Not one. No, many of you are not a little annoyed that God should press you so earnestly and be so energetic in the work of securing your salvation. And now can you quiet your conscience with the excuse of waiting for God to do your duty?

The fact is, there are things for you to do which God can not do for you. Those things which He has enjoined and revealed as the conditions of your salvation, He cannot and will not do Himself. If He could have done them Himself, He would not have asked you to do them. Every sinner ought to consider this. God requires of you

repentance and faith because it is naturally impossible that any one else but you should do them. They are your own personal matters -- the voluntary exercises of your own mind; and no other being in heaven, earth, or hell, can do these things for you in your stead. As far as substitution was naturally possible, God has introduced it, as in the case of the atonement. He has never hesitated to march up to meet and to bear all the self-denials which the work of salvation has involved.

6. If you mean to be saved, you must not wait for God to do anything whatever. There is nothing to be waited for. God has either done all on His part already, or if anything more remains, He is ready and waiting this moment for you to do your duty that He may impart all needful grace.

7. Do not flee to any refuge of lies. Lies cannot save you. It is truth, not lies, that alone can save. I have often wondered how men could suppose that Universalism could save any man.

Men must be sanctified by the truth. There is no plainer teaching in the Bible than this, and no Bible doctrine is better sustained by reason and the nature of the case.

Now does Universalism sanctify anybody? Universalists say you must be punished for your sins, and that thus they will be put away -- as if the fires of purgatory would thoroughly consume all sin, and bring out the sinner pure. Is this being sanctified by the truth? You might as well hope to be saved by eating liquid fire! You might as well expect fire to purify your soul from sin in this world, as in the next! Why not?

It is amazing that men should hope to be sanctified and saved by this great error, or, indeed, by any error whatever. God says you must be sanctified by the truth. Suppose you could believe this delusion, would it make you holy? Do you believe that it would make you humble, heavenly-minded, sin-hating, benevolent? Can you believe any such thing? Be assured that Satan is only the father of lies, and he cannot save you -- in fact, he would not if he could; he intends his lies not to save you, but to destroy your very soul, and nothing could be more adapted to its purpose. Lies are only the natural poison of the soul. You take them at your peril!

8. Don't seek for any self-indulgent method of salvation. The great effort among sinners has always been to be saved in some way of self-indulgence. They are slow to admit that self-denial is indispensable -- that total, unqualified self-denial is the condition of being saved. I warn you against supposing that you can be saved in some easy, self-pleasing way. Men ought to know, and always assume, that it is naturally indispensable for selfishness to be utterly put away and its demands resisted and put down.

I often ask -- Does the system of salvation which I preach so perfectly chime with the intuitions of my reason that I know from within myself that this Gospel is the thing I need? Does it in all its parts and relations meet the demands of my intelligence? Are its requisitions obviously just and right? Does its prescribed conditions of salvation obviously befit man's moral position before God, and his moral relations to the government of God?

To these and similar questions I am constrained to answer in the affirmative. The longer I live the more fully I see that the Gospel system is the only one that can alike meet the demands of the human intelligence, and supply the wants of man's sinning, depraved heart. The duties enjoined upon the sinner are just those things which I know must in the nature of the case be the conditions of salvation. Why, then, should any sinner think of being saved on any other conditions? Why desire it even if it were ever so practicable?

9. Don't imagine you will ever have a more favourable time. Impenitent sinners are prone to imagine that just now is by no means so convenient a season as may be expected hereafter. So they put off in hope of a better time. They think perhaps that they shall have more conviction, and fewer obstacles, and less hindrances. So thought Felix. He did not intend to forego salvation, any more than you do; but he was very busy just then -- had certain ends to be secured which seemed peculiarly pressing, and so he begged to be excused on the promise of very faithful attention to the subject at the expected convenient season. But did the convenient season ever come? Never. Nor does it ever come to those who in like manner resist God's solemn call, and grieve away His Spirit. Thousands are now waiting in the pains of hell who said just as he did, "Go thy way for this time, when I have a convenient season I will call for thee." Oh, sinner, when will your convenient season come? Are you aware that no season will ever be "convenient" for you, unless God calls up your attention earnestly and solemnly to the subject? And can you expect Him to do this at the time of your choice, when you scorn His call at the time of His choice? Have you not heard Him say, "Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; 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; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me." O, sinner,

that will be a fearful and a final doom! And the myriad voices of God's universe will say, amen.

10. Do not suppose that you will find another time as good, and one in which you can just as well repent as now. Many are ready to suppose that though there may be no better time for themselves, there will at least be one as good. Vain delusion! Sinner, you already owe ten thousand talents, and will you find it just as easy to be forgiven this debt while you are showing that you don't care how much and how long you augment it? In a case like this, where everything turns upon your securing the good-will of your creditor, do you hope to gain it by positively insulting him to his face?

Or take another view of the case. Your heart you know must one day relent for sin, or you are forever damned. You know also that each successive sin increases the hardness of your heart, and makes it a more difficult matter to repent. How, then, can you reasonably hope that a future time will be equally favourable for your repentance? When you have hardened your neck like an iron sinew, and made your heart like an adamant stone, can you hope that repentance will yet be as easy to you as ever?

You know, sinner, that God requires you to break off from your sins now. But you look up into His face and say to Him, "Lord, it is just as well to stop abusing Thee at some future convenient time. Lord, if I can only be saved at last, I shall think it all my gain to go on insulting and abusing Thee as long as it will possibly answer. And since Thou art so very compassionate and long-suffering, I think I may venture on in sin and rebellion against Thee yet these many months and years longer. Lord, don't hurry me -- do let me have my way; let me abase Thee if Thou pleasest, and spit in Thy face -- all will be just as well if I only repent in season so as finally to be saved. I know, indeed, that Thou art entreating me to repent now, but I much prefer to wait a season, and it will be just as well to repent at some future time."

And now do you suppose that God will set His seal to this -- that He will say, "You are right, sinner, I set my seal of approbation upon your course -- it is well that you take so just views of your duty to your Maker and your Father; go on; your course will ensure your salvation." Do you expect such a response from God as this?

11. If you ever expect to be saved, don't wait to see what others will do or say. I was lately astonished to find that a young lady here under conviction was in great trouble about what a beloved brother would think of her if she should give her heart to God. She knew her duty; but he was impenitent, and how could she know what he would think if she should repent now! It amounts to this. She would come before God and say, "O Thou great God, I know I ought to repent, but I can't; for I don't know as my brother will like it. I know that he too is a sinner, and must repent or lose his soul, but I am much more afraid of his frown than I am of Thine, and I care more for his approbation than I do for Thine, and consequently, I dare not repent till he does!" How shocking is this! Strange that on such a subject men will ever ask "What will others say of me?" Are you amenable to God? What, then, have others to say about your duty to Him? God requires you and them also to repent, and why don't you do it at once?

Not long since, as I was preaching abroad, one of the principal men of the city came to the meeting for inquiry, apparently much convicted and in great distress for his soul. But being a man of high political standing, and supposing himself to be very dependent upon his friends, he insisted that he must consult them, and have a regard for their feelings in this matter. I could not possibly beat him off from this ground, although I spent three hours in the effort. He seemed almost ready to repent -- I thought he certainly would; but he slipped away, relapsed by a perpetual backsliding, and I expect will be found at last among the lost in perdition. Would you not expect such a result if he tore himself away under such an excuse as that?

O, sinner, you must not care what others say of you -- let them say what they please. Remember, the question is between your own soul and God, and "He that is wise shall be wise for himself, and he that scorneth, he alone shall bear it." You must die for yourself, and for yourself must appear before God in judgment! Go, young woman, ask your brother, "Can you answer for me when I come to the judgment? Can you pledge yourself that you can stand in my stead and answer for me there?" Now until you have reason to believe that he can, it is wise for you to disregard his opinions if they stand at all in your way. Whoever interposes any objection to your immediate repentance, fail not to ask him -- Can you shield my soul in the judgment? If I can be assured that you can and will, I will make you my Saviour; but if not, then I must attend to my own salvation, and leave you to attend to yours.

I never shall forget the scene which occurred while my own mind was turning upon this great point. Seeking a retired place for prayer, I went into a deep grove, found a perfectly secluded spot behind some large logs, and knelt down. All suddenly, a leaf rustled and I sprang, for somebody must be coming and I shall be seen here at prayer. I had not been aware that I cared what others said of me, but looking back upon my exercises of mind

here, I could see that I did care infinitely too much what others thought of me.

Closing my eyes again for prayer, I heard a rustling leaf again, and then the thought came over me like a wave of the sea, "I am ashamed of confessing my sin!" What! thought I, ashamed of being found speaking with God! O, how ashamed I felt of this shame! I can never describe the strong and overpowering impression which this thought made on my mind. I cried aloud at the very top of my voice, for I felt that though all the men on earth and all the devils in hell were present to hear and see me I would not shrink and would not cease to cry unto God; for what is it to me if others see me seeking the face of my God and Saviour? I am hastening to the judgment: there I shall not be ashamed to have the Judge my friend. There I shall not be ashamed to have sought His face and His pardon here. There will be no shrinking away from the gaze of the universe. O, if sinners at the judgment could shrink away, how gladly would they; but they cannot! Nor can they stand there in each other's places to answer for each other's sins. That young woman, can she say then -- O, my brother, you must answer for me; for to please you, I rejected Christ and lost my soul? That brother is himself a guilty rebel, confounded, and agonized, and quailing before the awful Judge, and how can he befriend you in such an awful hour! Fear not his displeasure now, but rather warn him while you can, to escape for his life ere the wrath of the Lord wax hot against him, and there be no remedy.

12. If you would be saved, you must not indulge prejudices against either God, or His ministers, or against Christians, or against anything religious.

There are some persons of peculiar temperament who are greatly in danger of losing their souls because they are tempted to strong prejudices. Once committed either in favour of or against any persons or things they are exceedingly apt to become so fixed as never more to be really honest. And when these persons or things in regard to which they become committed, are so connected with religion, that their prejudices stand arrayed against their fulfilling the great conditions of salvation, the effect can be nothing else than ruinous. For it is naturally indispensable to salvation that you should be entirely honest. Your soul must act before God in the open sincerity of truth, or you cannot be converted.

I have known persons in revivals to remain a long time under great conviction, without submitting themselves to God, and by careful inquiry I have found them wholly hedged in by their prejudices, and yet so blind to this fact that they would not admit that they had any prejudice at all. In my observation of convicted sinners, I have found this among the most common obstacles in the way of the salvation of souls. Men become committed against religion, and remaining in this state it is naturally impossible that they should repent. God will not humour your prejudices, or lower His prescribed conditions of salvation to accommodate your feelings.

Again, you must give up all hostile feelings in cases where you have been really injured. Sometimes I have seen persons evidently shut out from the kingdom of heaven, because having been really injured, they would not forgive and forget, but maintained such a spirit of resistance and revenge, that they could not, in the nature of the case, repent of the sin toward God, nor could God forgive them. Of course they lost heaven. I have heard men say, "I cannot forgive -- I will not forgive -- I have been injured, and I never will forgive that wrong." Now mark: you must not hold on to such feelings; if you do, you cannot be saved.

Again, you must not suffer yourself to be stumbled by the prejudices of others. I have often been struck with the state of things in families, where the parents or older persons had prejudices against the minister, and have wondered why those parents were not more wise than to lay stumbling-blocks before their children to ruin their souls. This is often the true reason why children are not converted. Their minds are turned against the Gospel, by being turned against those from whom they hear it preached. I would rather have persons come into my family, and curse and swear before my children, than to have them speak against those who preach to them the Gospel. Therefore I say to all parents -- take care what you say, if you would not shut the gate of heaven against your children!

Again, do not allow yourself to take some fixed position, and then suffer the stand you have taken to debar you from doing any obvious duty. Persons sometimes allow themselves to be committed against taking what is called "the anxious seat;" and consequently they refuse to go forward under circumstances when it is obviously proper that they should, and where their refusal to do so, places them in an attitude unfavourable, and perhaps fatal to their conversion. Let every sinner beware of this!

Again, do not hold on to anything about which you have any doubt of its lawfulness or propriety. Cases often occur in which persons are not fully satisfied that a thing is wrong, and yet are not satisfied that it is right. Now in cases of this sort it should not be enough to say, "such and such Christians do so;" you ought to have better reasons than this for your course of conduct. If you ever expect to be saved, you must abandon all practices

which you even suspect to be wrong. This principle seems to be involved in the passage, "He that doubteth is damned if he eat; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." To do that which is of doubtful propriety is to allow yourself to tamper with the divine authority, and cannot fail to break down in your mind that solemn dread of sinning which, if you would ever be saved, you must carefully cherish.

Again, if you would be saved, do not look at professors and wait for them to become engaged as they should be in the great work of God. If they are not what they ought to be, let them alone. Let them bear their own awful responsibility. It often happens that convicted sinners compare themselves with professed Christians, and excuse themselves for delaying their duty, because professed Christians are delaying theirs. Sinners must not do this if they would ever be saved. It is very probable that you will always find guilty professors enough to stumble over into hell if you will allow yourself to do so.

But on the other hand, many professors may not be nearly so bad as you suppose, and you must not be censorious, putting the worst constructions upon their conduct. You have other work to do than this. Let them stand or fall to their own master. Unless you abandon the practice of picking flaws in the conduct of professed Christians, it is utterly impossible that you should be saved.

Again, do not depend upon professors -- on their prayers or influence in any way. I have known children hang a long time upon the prayers of their parents, putting those prayers in the place of Jesus Christ, or at least in the place of their own present efforts to do their duty. Now this course pleases Satan entirely. He would ask nothing more to make sure of you. Therefore, depend on no prayers -- not even those of the holiest Christians on earth. The matter of your conversion lies between yourself and God alone, as really as if you were the only sinner in all the world, or as if there were no other beings in the universe but yourself and your God.

Do not seek for any apology or excuse whatever. I dwell upon this and urge it the more because I so often find persons resting on some excuse without being themselves aware of it. In conversation with them upon their spiritual state, I see this and say, "There you are resting on that excuse." "Am I?" say they, "I did not know it."

Do not seek for stumbling-blocks. Sinners, a little disturbed in their stupidity, begin to cast about for stumbling-blocks for self-vindication. All at once they become wide awake to the faults of professors, as if they had to bear the care of all the churches. The real fact is, they are all engaged to find something to which they can take exception, so that they can thereby blunt the keen edge of truth upon their own consciences. This never helps along their own salvation.

Do not tempt the forbearance of God. If you do, you are in the utmost danger of being given over forever. Do not presume that you may go on yet longer in your sins, and still find the gate of mercy. This presumption has paved the way for the ruin of many souls.

Do not despair of salvation and settle down in unbelief, saying, "There is no mercy for me." You must not despair in any such sense as to shut yourself out from the kingdom. You may well despair of being saved without Christ and without repentance; but you are bound to believe the Gospel; and to do this is to believe the glad tidings that Jesus Christ has come to save sinners, even the chief, and that "Him that cometh to Him He will in no wise cast out." You have no right to disbelieve this, and act as if there were no truth in it.

You must not wait for more conviction. Why do you need any more? You know your guilt and know your present duty. Nothing can be more preposterous, therefore, than to wait for more conviction. If you did not know that you are a sinner, or that you are guilty for sin, there might be some fitness in seeking for conviction of the truth on these points.

Do not wait for more or for different feelings. Sinners are often saying, "I must feel differently before I can come to Christ," or, "I must have more feeling." As if this were the great thing which God requires of them. In this they are altogether mistaken.

Do not wait to be better prepared. While you wait you are growing worse and worse, and are fast rendering your salvation impossible.

Don't wait for God to change your heart. Why should you wait for Him to do what He has commanded you to do, and waits for you to do in obedience to His command?

Don't try to recommend yourself to God by prayers or tears or by anything else whatsoever. Do you suppose your prayers lay God under any obligation to forgive you? Suppose you owed a man five hundred talents, and

should go a hundred times a week and beg him to remit to you this debt; and then should enter your prayers in account against your creditor, as so much claim against him. Suppose you should pursue this course till you had canceled the debt, as you suppose -- could you hope to prove anything by this course except that you were mad? And yet sinners seem to suppose that their many prayers and tears lay the Lord under real obligation to them to forgive them.

Never rely on anything else whatever than Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. It is preposterous for you to hope, as many do, to make some propitiation by your own sufferings. In my early experience I thought I could not expect to be converted at once, but must be bowed down a long time. I said to myself, "God will not pity me till I feel worse than I do now. I can't expect Him to forgive me till I feel a greater agony of soul than this." Not even if I could have gone on augmenting my sufferings till they equalled the miseries of hell, it could not have changed God. The fact is, God does not ask of you that you should suffer. Your sufferings cannot in the nature of the case avail for atonement. Why, therefore, should you attempt to thrust aside the system of God's providing, and thrust in one of your own?

There is another view of the case. The thing God demands of you is that you should bow your stubborn will to Him. Just as a child in the attitude of disobedience, and required to submit, might fall to weeping and groaning, and to every expression of agony, and might even torture himself, in hope of moving the pity of his father, but all the time refuses to submit to parental authority. He would be very glad to put his own sufferings in the place of the submission demanded. This is what the sinner is doing. He would fain put his own sufferings in the place of submission to God, and move the pity of the Lord so much that He would recede from the hard condition of repentance and submission.

If you would be saved you must not listen at all to those who pity you, and who impliedly take your part against God, and try to make you think you are not so bad as you are. I once knew a woman who, after a long season of distressing conviction, fell into great despair; her health sank, and she seemed about to die. All this time she found no relief, but seemed only to wax worse and worse, sinking down in stern and awful despair. Her friends, instead of dealing plainly and faithfully with her, and probing her guilty heart to the bottom, had taken the course of pitying her, and almost complained of the Lord that He would not have compassion on the poor agonized, dying woman. At length, as she seemed in the last stages of life -- so weak as to be scarcely able to speak in a low voice, there happened in a minister who better understood how to deal with convicted sinners. The woman's friends cautioned him to deal very carefully with her, as she was in a dreadful state and greatly to be pitied; but he judged it best to deal with her very faithfully. As he approached her bed-side, she raised her faint voice and begged for a little water. "Unless you repent, you will soon be," said he, "where there is not a drop of water to cool your tongue." "O," she cried, "must I go down to hell?" "Yes, you must, and you will, soon, unless you repent and submit to God. Why don't you repent and submit immediately?" "O," she replied, "it is an awful thing to go to hell!" "Yes, and for that very reason Christ has provided an atonement through Jesus Christ, but you won't accept it. He brings the cup of salvation to your lips, and you thrust it away. Why will you do this? Why will you persist in being an enemy of God and scorn His offered salvation, when you might become His friend and have salvation if you would?"

This was the strain of their conversation, and its result was, that the woman saw her guilt and her duty, and turning to the Lord, found pardon and peace.

Therefore I say, if your conscience convicts you of sin, don't let anybody take your part against God. Your wound needs not a plaster, but a probe. Don't fear the probe; it is the only thing that can save you. Don't seek to hide your guilt, or veil your eyes from seeing it, nor be afraid to know the worst, for you must know the very worst, and the sooner you know it the better. I warn you, don't look after some physician to give you an opiate, for you don't need it. Shun, as you would death itself, all those who would speak to you smooth things and prophesy deceits. They would surely ruin your soul.

Again, do not suppose that if you become a Christian, it will interfere with any of the necessary or appropriate duties of life, or with anything whatever to which you ought to attend. No; religion never interferes with any real duty. So far is this from being the case, that in fact a proper attention to your various duties is indispensable to your being religious. You cannot serve God without.

Moreover, if you would be saved you must not give heed to anything that would hinder you. It is infinitely important that your soul should be saved. No consideration thrown in your way should be allowed to have the weight of a straw or a feather. Jesus Christ has illustrated and enforced this by several parables, especially in the one which compares the kingdom of heaven to "a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price went and sold all that he had and bought it." In another parable, the kingdom of

heaven is said to be "like treasure hid in a field, which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field." Thus forcibly are men taught that they must be ready to make any sacrifice whatever which may be requisite in order to gain the kingdom of heaven.

Again, you must not seek religion selfishly. You must not make your own salvation or happiness the supreme end. Beware, for if you make this your supreme end you will get a false hope, and will probably glide along down the pathway of the hypocrite into the deepest hell.

II. What sinners must do to be saved.

1. You must understand what you have to do. It is of the utmost importance that you should see this clearly. You need to know that you must return to God, and to understand what this means. The difficulty between yourself and God is that you have stolen yourself and run away from His service. You belong of right to God. He created you for Himself, and hence had a perfectly righteous claim to the homage of your heart, and the service of your life. But you, instead of living to meet His claims, have run away -- have deserted from God's service, and have lived to please yourself. Now your duty is to return and restore yourself to God.

2. You must return and confess your sins to God. You must confess that you have been all wrong, and that God has been all right. Go before the Lord and lay open the depth of your guilt. Tell Him you deserve just as much damnation as He has threatened.

These confessions are naturally indispensable to your being forgiven. In accordance with this the Lord says, "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity, then will I remember my covenant." Then God can forgive. But so long as you controvert this point, and will not concede that God is right, or admit that you are wrong, He can never forgive you.

You must moreover confess to man if you have injured any one. And is it not a fact that you have injured some, and perhaps many of your fellow-men? Have you not slandered your neighbour and said things which you have no right to say? Have you not in some instances, which you could call to mind if you would, lied to them, or about them, or covered up or perverted the truth; and have you not been willing that others should have false impressions of you or of your conduct? If so, you must renounce all such iniquity, for "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; while he that confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." And, furthermore, you must not only confess your sins to God and to the men you have injured, but you must also make restitution. You have not taken the position of a penitent before God and man until you have done this also.

God cannot treat you as a penitent until you have done it.

I do not mean by this that God cannot forgive you until you have carried into effect your purpose of restitution by finishing the outward act, for sometimes it may demand time, and may in some cases be itself impossible to you. But the purpose must be sincere and thorough before you can be forgiven of God.

3. You must renounce yourself. In this is implied,

(1.) That you renounce your own righteousness, forever discarding the very idea of having any righteousness in yourself.

(2.) That you forever relinquish the idea of having done any good which ought to commend you to God, or be ever thought of as a ground of your justification.

(3.) That you renounce your own will, and be ever ready to say not in word only, but in heart, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." You must consent most heartily that God's will shall be your supreme law.

(4.) That you renounce your own way and let God have His own way in everything. Never suffer yourself to fret and be rasped by anything whatever; for since God's agency extends to all events, you ought to recognize His hand in all things; and of course to fret at anything whatever is to fret against God who has at least permitted that thing to occur as it does. So long, therefore, as you suffer yourself to fret, you are not right with God. You must become before God as a little child, subdued and trustful at His feet. Let the weather be fair or foul, consent that God should have His way. Let all things go well with you, or as men call it, ill; yet let God do His pleasure, and let it be your part to submit in perfect resignation. Until you take this ground you cannot be saved.

4. You must come to Christ. You must accept of Christ really and fully as your Saviour. Renouncing all thought of depending on anything you have done or can do, you must accept of Christ as your atoning sacrifice, and as your ever-living Mediator before God. Without the least qualification or reserve you must place yourself under His wing as your Saviour.

5. You must seek supremely to please Christ, and not yourself. It is naturally impossible that you should be saved until you come into this attitude of mind -- until you are so well pleased with Christ in all respects as to find your pleasure in doing His. It is in the nature of things impossible that you should be happy in any other state of mind, or unhappy in this. For, His pleasure is infinitely good and right. When, therefore, His good pleasure becomes your good pleasure, and your will harmonizes entirely with His, then you will be happy for the same reason that He is happy, and you cannot fail of being happy any more than Jesus Christ can. And this becoming supremely happy in God's will is essentially the idea of salvation. In this state of mind you are saved. Out of it you cannot be.

It has often struck my mind with great force, that many professors of religion are deplorably and utterly mistaken on this point. Their real feeling is that Christ's service is an iron collar -- an insufferably hard yoke. Hence, they labour exceedingly to throw off some of this burden. They try to make it out that Christ does not require much, if any, self-denial -- much, if any, deviation from the course of worldliness and sin. O, if they could only get the standard of Christian duty quite down to a level with the fashions and customs of this world! How much easier then to live a Christian life and wear Christ's yoke!

But taking Christ's yoke as it really is, it becomes in their view an iron collar. Doing the will of Christ, instead of their own, is a hard business. Now if doing Christ's will is religion, (and who can doubt it?) then they only need enough of it; and in their state of mind they will be supremely wretched. Let me ask those who groan under the idea that they must be religious -- who deem it awful hard -- but they must -- how much religion of this kind would it take to make hell? Surely not much! When it gives you no joy to do God's pleasure, and yet you are shut up to the doing of His pleasure as the only way to be saved, and are thereby perpetually dragooned into the doing of what you hate, as the only means of escaping hell, would not this be itself a hell? Can you not see that in this state of mind you are not saved and cannot be?

To be saved you must come into a state of mind in which you will ask no higher joy than to do God's pleasure. This alone will be forever enough to fill your cup to overflowing.

You must have all confidence in Christ, or you cannot so saved. You must absolutely believe in Him -- believe all His words of promise. They were given you to be believed, and unless you believe them they can do you no good at all. So far from helping you without you exercise faith in them, they will only aggravate your guilt for unbelief. God would be believed when He speaks in love to lost sinners. He gave them these "exceeding great and precious promises, that they, by faith in them, might escape the corruption that is in the world through lust." But thousands of professors of religion know not how to use these promises, and as to them or any profitable use they make, the promises might as well have been written on the sands of the sea.

Sinners, too, will go down to hell in unbroken masses, unless they believe and take hold of God by faith in His promise. O, His awful wrath is out against them! And He says, "I would go through them, I would burn them up together; or let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me, and he shall make peace with Me." Yes, let him stir up himself and take hold of My arm, strong to save, and then he may make peace with Me. Do you ask how take hold? By faith. Yes, by faith; believe His words and take hold; take hold of His strong arm and swing right out over hell, and don't be afraid any more than if there were no hell.

But you say -- I do believe, and yet I am not saved. No, you don't believe. A woman said to me, "I believe, I know I do, and yet here I am in my sins." No, said I, you don't. Have you as much confidence in God as you would have in me if I had promised you a dollar? Do you ever pray to God? And, if so, do you come with any such confidence as you would have if you came to me to ask for a promised dollar? Oh, until you have as much faith in God as this, aye and more -- until you have more confidence in God than you would have in ten thousand men, your faith does not honour God, and you cannot hope to please Him. You must say -- Let God be true though every man be a liar."

But you say, "O, I am a sinner, and how can I believe? I know you are a sinner, and so are all men to whom God has given these promises. "O, but I am a great sinner!" Well, "It is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom," Paul says, "I am the chief." So you need not despair.

7. You must forsake all that you have, or you cannot be Christ's disciple. There must be absolute and total self-denial.

By this I do not mean that you are never to eat again, or never again to clothe yourself, or never more enjoy the society of your friends -- no, not this; but that you should cease entirely from using any of these enjoyments selfishly. You must no longer think to own yourself: your time, your possessions, or anything you have ever called your own. All these things you must hold as God's, not yours. In this sense you are to forsake all that you have, namely, in the sense of laying all upon God's altar to be devoted supremely and only to His service. When you come back to God for pardon and salvation, come with all you have to lay all at his feet. Come with your body, to offer it as a living sacrifice upon His altar. Come with your soul and all its powers, and yield them in willing consecration to your God and Saviour. Come, bring them all along -- everything, body, soul, intellect, imagination, acquirements -- all, without reserve. Do you say -- Must I bring them all? Yes, all -- absolutely ALL; do not keep back anything -- don't sin against your own soul, like Ananias and Sapphira, by keeping back a part, but renounce your own claim to everything, and recognize God's right to all. Say -- Lord, these things are not mine. I had stolen them, but they were never mine. They were always Thine; I'll have them no longer. Lord, these things are all Thine, henceforth and forever. Now, what wilt Thou have me to do? I have no business of my own to do -- I am wholly at Thy disposal. Lord, what work hast Thou for me to do?

In this spirit you must renounce the world, the flesh, and Satan. Your fellowship is henceforth to be with Christ, and not with those objects. You are to live for Christ, and not for the world, the flesh, or the devil.

8. You must believe the record God hath given of His Son. He that believes not does not receive the record -- does not set to his seal that God is true. "This is the record, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son." The condition of your having it is that you believe the record, and of course that you act accordingly. Suppose here is a poor man living at your next door, and the mail brings him a letter stating that a rich man has died in England, leaving him 100,000 pounds sterling, and the cashier of a neighbouring bank writes him that he has received the amount on deposit for him, and holds it subject to his order. Well, the poor man says, I can't believe the record. I can't believe there ever was any such rich man; I can't believe there is 100,000 pounds for me. So he must live and die as poor as Lazarus, because he won't believe the record.

Now, mark; this is just the case with the unbelieving sinner. God has given you eternal life, and it waits your order; but you don't get it because you will not believe, and therefore will not make out the order, and present in due form the application.

Ah, but you say, I must have some feeling before I can believe -- how can I believe till I have the feeling? So the poor man might say -- How can I believe that the 100,000 pounds is mine; I have not got a farthing of it now; I am as poor as ever. Yes, you are poor because you will not believe. If you would believe, you might go and buy out every store in this country. Still you cry, I am as poor as ever. I can't believe it; see my poor worn clothes -- I was never more ragged in my life; I have not a particle of the feeling and the comforts of a rich man. So the sinner can't believe till he gets the inward experience! He must wait to have some of the feeling of a saved sinner before he can believe the record and take hold of the salvation! Preposterous enough! So the poor man must wait to get his new clothes and fine house before he can believe his documents and draw for his money. Of course he dooms himself to everlasting poverty, although mountains of gold were all his own.

Now, sinner, you must understand this. Why should you be lost when eternal life is bought and offered you by the last will and testament of the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you not believe the record and draw for the amount at once! Do for mercy's sake understand this and not lose heaven by your own folly!

I must conclude by saying, that if you would be saved you must accept a prepared salvation, one already prepared and full, and present. You must be willing to give up all your sins, and be saved from them, all, now and henceforth! Until you consent to this, you cannot be saved at all. Many would be willing to be saved in heaven, if they might hold on to some sins while on earth -- or rather they think they would eke heaven on such terms. But the fact is, they would as much dislike a pure heart and a holy life in heaven as they do on earth, and they deceive themselves utterly in supposing that they are ready or even willing to go to such a heaven as God has prepared for His people. No, there can be no heaven except for those who accept a salvation from all sin in this world. They must take the Gospel as a system which holds no compromise with sin -- which contemplates full deliverance from sin even now, and makes provision accordingly. Any other gospel is not the true one, and to accept of Christ's Gospel in any other sense is not to accept it all. Its first and its last condition is sworn and eternal renunciation of all sin.

REMARKS.

1. Paul did not give the same answer to this question which a consistent Universalist would give. The latter would say, You are to be saved by being first punished according to your sin. All men must expect to be punished all that their sins deserve. But Paul did not answer thus. Miserable comforter had he been if he had answered after this sort: "You must all be punished according to the letter of the law you have broken." This could scarcely have been called gospel.

Nor again did Paul give the Universalist's answer and say, "Do not concern yourself about this matter of being saved, all men are sure enough of being saved without any particular anxiety about it." Not so Paul; no -- he understood and did not forbear to express the necessity of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as the condition of being saved.

2. Take care that you do not sin willfully after saying you understood the truth concerning the way of salvation. Your danger of this is great precisely in proportion as you see your duty clearly. The most terrible damnation must fall on the head of those who "knew their duty, but who did it not." When, therefore, you are told plainly and truly what your duty is, be on your guard lest you let salvation slip out of your hands. It may never come so near your reach again.

3. Do not wait, even to go home, before you obey God. Make up your mind now, at once, to close in with the offers of salvation. Why not? Are they not most reasonable?

4. Let your mind act upon this great proposal and embrace it just as you would any other important proposition. God lays the proposition before you; you hear it explained, and you understand it; now the next and only remaining step is -- to embrace it with all your heart. Just as any other great question (we may suppose it a question of life or death) might come before a community -- the case be fully stated, the conditions explained, and then the issue is made. Will you subscribe? Will you engage to meet these conditions? Do you heartily embrace the proposition? Now all this would be intelligible.

Just so, now, in the case of the sinner. You understand the proposition. You know the conditions of salvation. You understand the contract into which you are to enter with your God and Saviour. You covenant to give your all to God -- to lay yourself upon His altar to be used up there just as He pleases to use you. And now the only remaining question is, Will you consent to this at once? Will you go for full and everlasting consecration with all your heart?

5. The jailer made no excuse. When he knew his duty, in a moment he yielded. Paul told him what to do, and he did it. Possibly he might have heard something about Paul's preaching before this night; but probably not much. But now he fears for his life. How often have I been struck with this case! There was a dark-minded heathen. He had heard, we must suppose, a great deal of slang about these apostles; but notwithstanding all, he came to them for truth; hearing, he is convinced, and being convinced, he yields at once. Paul uttered a single sentence -- he received it, embraced it, and it is done.

Now you, sinner, know and admit all this truth, and yet infinitely strange as it is, you will not, in a moment, believe and embrace it with all your heart. O, will not Sodom and Gomorrah rise up against you in the judgment and condemn you! That heathen jailer -- how could you bear to see him on that dread day, and stand rebuked by his example there!

6. It is remarkable that Paul said nothing about the jailer's needing any help in order to believe and repent. He did not even mention the work of the Spirit, or allude to the jailer's need of it. But it should be noticed that Paul gave the jailer just those directions which would most effectually secure the Spirit's aid and promote his action.

7. The jailer seems to have made no delay at all, waiting for no future or better time; but as soon as the conditions are before him he yields and embraces; no sooner is the proposition made than he seizes upon it in a moment.

I was once preaching in a village in New York, and there sat before me a lawyer who had been greatly offended with the Gospel. But that day I noticed he sat with fixed eye and open mouth, leaned forward as if he would seize each word as it came. I was explaining and simplifying the Gospel, and when I came to state just how the Gospel is offered to men, he said to me afterwards: I snatched at it -- I put out my hand, (suited the action to the thought), and seized it -- and it became mine.

So in my own case while in the woods praying, after I had burst away from the fear of man, and began to give

scope to my feelings, this passage fell upon me, "Ye shall seek for Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart." For the first time in the world I found that I believed a passage in the Bible. I had supposed that I believed before, but surely never before as I now did. Now, said I to myself, "This is the word of the everlasting God. My God, I take Thee at Thy word. Thou sayest I shall find Thee when I search for Thee with all my heart, and now, Lord, I do search for Thee, I know, with all my heart." And true enough, I did find the Lord. Never in all my life was I more certain of anything than I was then that I had found the Lord.

This is the very idea of His promises -- they were made to be believed -- to be laid hold of as God's own words, and acted upon as if they actually meant just what they say. When God says, "Look unto Me and be ye saved," He would have us look unto Him as if He really had salvation in His hands to give, and withal a heart to give it. The true spirit of faith is well expressed by the Psalmist, "When Thou saidst, 'Seek ye my face,' my heart replied -- 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.'" This is the way -- let your heart at once respond to the blessed words of invitation and of promise.

Ah, but you say, I am not a Christian. And you never will be till you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. If you never become a Christian, the reason will be because you do not and will not believe the Gospel and embrace it with all your heart.

The promises were made to be believed, and belong to any one who will believe them. They reach forth their precious words to all, and whoever will, may take them as his own. Now will you believe that the Father has given you eternal life? This is the fact declared; will you believe it?

You have now been told what you must not do and what you must do to be saved; are you prepared to act? Do you say, I am ready to renounce my own pleasure, and henceforth seek no other pleasure than to please God? Can you forego everything else for the sake of this?

Sinner, do you want to please God, or would you choose to please yourself? Are you willing now to please God and to begin by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation? Will you be as simple-hearted as the jailer was? And act as promptly?

I demand your decision now. I dare not have you go home first, lest you get to talking about something else, and let slip these words of life and this precious opportunity to grasp an offered salvation. And whom do you suppose I am now addressing? Every impenitent sinner in this house -- every one. I call heaven and earth to record that I have set the Gospel before you today. Will you take it? Is it not reasonable for you to decide at once? Are you ready, now, to say before high heaven and before this congregation, "I will renounce myself and yield to God! I am the Lord's, and let all men and angels bear me witness -- I am forevermore the Lord's." Sinner, the infinite God waits for your consent!