

Some Personal Thoughts

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MY DEAR BRETHREN IN THE LORD JESUS

I do not think I could more appropriately or profitably devote this, the last of my new series of Tracts, than to a brief review of my ministerial labours during the twenty-four years, just now expiring, in which I have taught you, and endeavoured to build you up in your most holy Faith.

And may the Lord, the Holy Spirit, guide my pen, and make me faithful, faithful to you, and faithful to myself!

It doubtless appears to some that, in my writings, I speak too much of myself. However the Lord knows it is farthest from my desire to do so; but in speaking or writing as a public man, I feel I should be altogether forgetful of the boundless mercies of my Covenant-keeping God if I did not make mention of His peculiarly wonderful dealings with me individually. This cannot be done without being forced, as Paul was forced, to apparently boast over his contemporaries. Yet that glorious monument of Sovereign Grace took care to check himself with the confession, 'I speak as a fool'.

I do the same. I have nothing to boast of but my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. In Him, and Him alone, do I make my boast all the day long, and shall never cease to do so, as long as life lasts!

Now, in what I am about to write, I beg of all candid readers to bear this in mind. I am less than the least of all God's ministers, I am not worthy to be called a minister, yet God being my Helper, I will speak out, I will speak the Truth, I will put on Record what I believe to be true respecting both Preachers and Hearers.

Twenty-four years of ministerial work, through much Tribulation and Persecution, ought to give a man deep experience, and entitle him to a voice in the Church of God. I am no novice then, so give me your best attention whilst I relate to you some of the scenes of my eventful life in this place.

When I first came amongst you I was determined to know nothing but Christ crucified. I purposed to glory in nothing, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus.

But I no sooner showed my colours, no sooner declared 'by grace are ye saved, not of works, lest any man should boast' (Ephesians 2:8, 9) than a storm of hatred and rage was raised against me! The clearer I made the doctrine of the cross, the worse I was liked, till at last vicious and decided opposition was manifested, which ended in the greater portion of the influential members of the congregation leaving my ministry altogether!

This was a severe blow to me. I now began to realize the Saviour's and the Apostle's solemn prognostications, 'Ye shall be hated of all men (i.e. all unconverted men) for my name's sake' (Matthew 10:22; John 15:18-20); 'Through much tribulation shall ye enter the kingdom of God,' and 'If any man will live godly he shall suffer persecution' (Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 2:12).

Ah, how often had I read these words, never dreaming that I had ought to do with them! Like many others, I either had some confused ideas in my mind regarding hatred and persecution, or thought those warnings were especially meant for the original disciples; but to my cost, I soon found out the true meaning.

How many ministers in the present day know anything about hatred and persecution for the Truth's sake? Not many I am sure! Where are the bishops, the deans, the archdeacons, the dignitaries of our church, where are the clergy who know what hatred and persecution for God's Truth is? I know of but few such amongst the ordinary rank and file of ministers, and as for the dignitaries, none! If some of these suffer for their religious views, they have the consolation of a princely income, high position, and aristocratic sympathisers; but a man may suffer thus, and know nothing of 'the truth as it is in Jesus'. Untruthful ministers with popular talent have the world's applause, unholy ministers without talent have the world's sufferance, but it is otherwise with the men of God. They are like their Master, literally despised and rejected of all unconverted persons, men of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). Ay, and it must be so for He has declared it, 'The servant shall be as his Master' (John 15:20).

Well, the iron entered my very Soul through the treatment I received at the hands of God's enemies. I was hated, maligned and abused, nonymously and anonymously, and this last piece of strategy was to starve me out, or to frighten me away. But the parties altogether mistook their man. I kept on preaching the Word regardless of all consequences, and though my worldly prospects looked gloomy, and I was often at my wits' end, the Lord always came most opportunely to my relief, and supported me in a way of grace and providence.

At this time, some half dozen old and established believers came to the rescue. They had heard my preaching, and there being no truth in the pulpits nearer Openshaw, they gladly threw in their lot amongst us, and sat down under my ministry. Those dear children of the Lord I shall never forget. They listened to my childlike lisplings, they drank in the milk of

babes for years, and unconscious to themselves taught me the way of God more perfectly. How many precious hints did these people let drop from time to time which proved a comfort to my Soul, and a light to my understanding! Some of them are gone to their rest in full assurance of union with the Lord, others of them still remain with hearts warm as ever, and hands as liberal as grace can make them. My dearly beloved, accept this slight acknowledgement for all you have done for me. You will remember when first you came how feebly and imperfectly I preached 'the gospel of the grace of God', but you bore with it all, seeing that the root of the matter was in me, and now you can testify to my growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How different is my preaching now to what it was twenty-four years ago! So must it be with every God-sent minister. If a man does not advance in knowledge and experience as he advances in years, he is a dead minister, a poor fingerpost that points out the way but never moves an inch himself. God forbid that it should ever be so with me!

And now let me not be misunderstood. I do not mean to convey that I was free from blame in my treatment of the enemies of the gospel to whom I referred. No: I have frequently been harsh, and have used the rod unsparingly. I never took into consideration the fact that those parties had never heard the gospel preached (except one truth-hating man, who declared to me with his own lips that he had heard the doctrines advanced from his childhood, but never could abide them). It was no wonder then, that they were amazed and confounded at the rough way in which I tore up by the roots all their former fancies, false doctrines and fallacies. I ought to have made some allowance for their ignorance; for if a man naturally recoils from God's truth when placed before him in the mildest accents, how much more will he writhe and hate and curse when he is violently assailed, and clutched with an iron hand? The Lord pardon thy servant in this thing!

I do not wish to aggravate the heavy reckoning against my opponents, but I must state this fact, viz., that not one of them ever prospered in this world afterwards, some of them died the saddest deaths, and not one of them all could say believingly and experimentally upon his dying bed, 'I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day' (2 Timothy 2:12).

Alas! such is, and will be to the end of all who dare to touch the Lord's anointed, and do His prophets harm!

But there is a bright side to the picture. Very many have learnt the precious gospel through me, and have died rejoicing, and many live to this day to thank God for ever having granted them the privilege of hearing of a finished Salvation! O this FINISHED WORK! This is the refuge from the storm, and the shadow from the heat! What can the poor wretched mutilators of holy writ speak or write to comfort perishing sinners? Their

tale is, 'Do, and God will finish!' 'Work and He will work!' Miserable comforters are ye all! Blind guides! Poor parrots who can repeat what you hear others say, but never having had any experimental knowledge of the sovereign grace of God yourselves, you darken counsel with words without knowledge! Besides all this, the blessings God has heaped upon me are not confined to my own parish. I have had hundreds of testimonies from all parts of the kingdom as to the acceptableness, the truth, and the savouriness of my writings! Many of these parties have never seen me: many of them had never heard of the gospel till they saw it in my tracts, but now can call me their father in God!

Do I write thus to magnify myself! God knoweth! It is all of His grace sovereignly displayed in the chiefest of sinners, and my example proves again and again that the Lord loves to do wonders by the feeblest and most unworthy of His creatures!

I now have a solemn question to put to the various ministers of our day— Which of you all can say as I have said, How many Souls have you had for your hire? Have you ever found one of Christ's sheep lost in this naughty world? It is a question not to be shirked! If not answered here it must be answered elsewhere! Be assured that the truth will come out at the last day, that if you have not a testimony to put favourably to your usefulness— You have run when no man sent you! You were never called by God the Holy Ghost to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ! O, pardon me for my plain dealing! I do it, as the Lord is my witness, as an experiment to awaken you. I do it as Paul did it, in order that by any means I might save some!

My conviction with respect to the clergy and religious professors in general is very gloomy. I believe that all the converted clergy in this diocese might be accommodated comfortably in my house! I believe Methodism to be a huge Delusion. I believe that Nonconformists are rotten to the core, for they are free-willers to a man, if I except a small knot of Baptists who rejoice in the truths of distinguished grace. Is not this a sad state of things? And what have I to gain by thus speaking out? Nothing but further obloquy and hatred and contempt, but so it is! I write as it were on a dying bed. My physicians give me but small hope of recovery. If I chose to be unfaithful, I might sneak out of this world without any more war, or tumult, but I dare not. That which the Lord has given me to speak, I must give vent to, let men think of me as they please! Yet, mark you, I believe too, that many Nonconformists are converted men, but they are in bondage, they know not the sweets of Christian liberty, but will arrive at heaven at last, though through darkness and difficulty and confusion: but saved they must be, yet so as by fire, if the Lord has converted them, for whom Jesus once loves He has always loved, and will love unto the end (John 13:1).

'Ah, how you spoil your writings by meddling with others! Why not leave the unconverted clergy, ministers, and laymen to their Judge? Why should you trouble your head by interfering with other people's business? Who art

thou, O man, that judgest another?' say some, who profess to be orthodox, but would be silent in such cases! In reply to all this, I would observe that the last question quoted from the Epistle of James (James 4:12) is totally wide of the mark. James himself, and Paul, who was even more searching and severe on the judgment by man of his fellow-man (cf. Romans 2:1-29), were both 'meddlers with other people's business'. They both most unsparingly judged and rebuked, but it was the rash in judgment, and the ignorant in judgment they thus judged. I am neither rash nor ignorant in my judgment, but I judge according to knowledge. If I believe a man to be all wrong in his creed, I am bound to tell him so.

Besides, is not suppression of the truth literally an evasion of the 'offence of the cross'? If I were content to hold my creed in secrecy, and let men believe that there was no difference between them and me, would it not be tantamount to being ashamed of the Cross of Christ? O you expediency-mongers, see to it! Believe me 'there is no getting to heaven with a whole skin!'

And now my dear Brethren in the Lord, come with me into the inner precincts of my heart, and let me show you what I have passed through in the way of practice and experience.

Martin Luther said long ago, 'It takes three things to make a divine, viz.

Reading, Mediation, And Temptation

Luther, doubtless, had his cue from Paul, who exhorted Timothy to give attendance to reading and meditation (1 Timothy 4:13-15). What sort of reading this was we may readily imagine. It could not have been the reading of the works of rabbis and doctors of the law, for these were utterly ignorant of the true meaning of God's Word, but the reading insisted upon must have been the prayerful perusal of the Word itself, seeking out the meaning through the teaching of the Holy Ghost.

This is the sort of reading ministers ought to devote themselves to, and not the reading of Commentators, etc., who are fallible and fanciful.

Well, to this reading did I devote myself for years, but it was hard work to understand what I read. There seemed to be such contradictions and such confusion in the scriptures, that it was many a day and many a year 'ere I got the clue. At last, two great truths broke in upon my soul, first, my own complete inability to keep the law, or God's precepts and commandments, if my salvation depended upon my obedience.

The Holiness of God, and the Depravity of man put themselves in array before me, and I said, 'Surely there must be someone to take wretched man's place and answer for him if he ever is to be saved!' That some One I discovered to be Jesus Christ. I reasoned thus, 'I will take Christ's illustration of sin, viz., "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her

hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Of course this equally applies to all the Commandments of God, then, where am I? I have been angry, and therefore have committed murder! I have been untruthful, and therefore have borne false witness! I have been disobedient to my parents, and therefore am under God's curse! I have been a Sabbath breaker, a coveter of other people's goods, dishonest in many of my dealings, besides a cherisher of evil thoughts—what is to become of me?

Thus I am a sinner, both practically and spiritually! The Saviour declares me to be one of the vilest of the vile! I am lost and undone!

But Satan came in with his sly suggestions. He said, 'O repent, reform, turn over a new leaf, and all will be right!'

But, Nay, nay, says Christ, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

Nay, nay, says Paul, 'cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the law to do them' (Galatians 3:10). This completely shuts out all hope through my efforts or doings to make things straight with the all-holy God! There is nothing for it but salvation full and free, wrought out for me by Jesus Christ. I saw the mystery, and believed! O how my heart leaped for joy!

Observe here, that at this time I was quickened by the Holy Ghost. I was a regenerated man. My very anxiety about my soul, and my intense longing to know what the word meant prove this, for no natural man ever troubled his head after this fashion. I was quickened before I gave myself to reading. Very different is this case to that of those who take all for granted, and are carried away by exciting rant, or popular preaching.

Secondly, the other great truth that my reading brought to light was, 'by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified' (Romans 3:20). O what huge obstructions and difficulties did this sweep away at once! Before this, in reading the Old Testament history especially, I was puzzled beyond measure with God's commandments, statutes, and His ordinances. I used to say to myself, 'There must be two ways of Salvation, one by keeping those laws, the other by believing in Christ.' But the blessed Epistle to the Romans taught me that 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth' (Romans 10:4). From that day to this I have had no doubt about God's way of salvation, though I have had doubts of my interest in it. The Old Testament commandments, statutes, and ordinances have nothing whatever to do with salvation. They are conditions, on the observance of which national Israel was to have possession of the land, and enjoy temporal blessings; whereas salvation is wholly, completely, and unreservedly unconditional!

God grants salvation, not of works, but by grace; sheer, gratuitous,

sovereign grace: and this He gives according to the good pleasure of His will!

Brethren in the Lord, thus was I delivered! The work was done first by God the Holy Ghost quickening me, me who never sought Him; secondly, by inciting me to give diligence to reading the word. 'Ah', say many, 'we don't like those extreme views!' Like them or dislike them, I reply, I am going to heaven with them in full assurance of understanding! How common is this objection to the doctrines of distinguishing grace! 'Extreme—extreme!' the Enemy cries, 'let us have something more in accordance with man's notions of right and wrong!'

I answer, what the word teaches, and not what man wishes, are two different things. The word distinctly declares that God's thoughts are not man's thoughts, and the whole tenor of God's dealings with man, proves that God's ways are diametrically opposed to man's. 'Who by searching can find out God?' (Job 11:7). But let us have a word upon 'extreme views'. What folly and inconsistency lie at the bottom of this objection!

What greater extreme than the Eternal Love of God for His poor sinning Church?—Jeremiah 31:3.

What greater extreme than the assumption on the part of Jehovah Jesus of the form of sinful man?—Philippians 2:6-8.

What greater extreme than Jesus becoming a beggar that His Church might be rich?—2 Corinthians 8:9.

What greater extreme than the Creator of the universe submitting to be maltreated by His own creatures?—John 1:3; 19:18.

What greater extreme than God in Redemption work passing by angels, and rescuing and saving men, who by nature are worse than devils?—Hebrews 2:16; James 2:19.

What greater extreme than God giving grace to His Church in Christ Jesus before the world began, to save it irrespective of all sorts of works whatever?—2 Timothy 1:9.

These are truths known and acknowledged by every beginner in divinity, truths so amazing as to nonplus the highest intellectual power of man! Yet we have preachers professing to hold them, hesitating, parleying, shifting, shirking, and evading in connection with other truths as clearly revealed, such as predestination, election, particular redemption, and final perseverance!

What can these men mean? They who heartily believe in the first set of truths, might readily believe with their heads in the second. The reason they do not is simply this:—the first set of truths do not call in question any

individual's expectation of salvation; the second do. No man would object to the doctrines called 'extreme' if he knew he was an elect vessel of mercy prepared for glory, but it is from his doubting about it that puts him up in arms against it.

I would speak briefly upon particular redemption. This truth has staggered even many of the Lord's Family, partly on account of the word 'world' being so often mixed with redemption, and partly from the desire of the carnal mind that every man may have a chance of salvation.

General redemption, to me, is a figment of the father of lies to take men's minds off thinking and lull them to sleep. No man can hold it without insulting Christ. It may appear to the superficial to tend to a contrary effect, but if it secures nothing, what is the use of it? Christ's work on earth was a stupendous work, a work that must produce what it was intended to produce, otherwise it would have been an unwise work. No wise man wastes his strength, or beats the air: but this 'man Christ Jesus' did evidently waste His strength and beat the air, all to no purpose, if He redeemed every one of the human family, and the majority be lost. 'To make redemption larger than electing love is to overlay the foundation, which is a very momentous error in building.'

I am willing to grant the non-elect are gainers by redemption; but it is just as rebellious and traitorous subjects are gainers by a wise government. They participate in the blessings of the loyal and beloved; but to say they are loved, and kept, and secured as well as the loyal and beloved is an extreme view indeed, but it is the extreme of absurdity!

Elisha Coleson the Sovereignty of God, combating the folly of the popular sense of redemption, well observes, 'Redemption may be said to be a general in this sense: It obtains a general reprieve extensive to all the sons of Adam; the sin of the world was so far expiated that vengeance was not presently executed, which must have been had not the Son of God interposed Himself. His being slain from the foundation of the world was the foundation of the world's standing, and of all the good things of which the world in general is a partaker.' The men who hold general redemption, except in this sense, are certainly most confused thinkers, and very unsound divines. Being muddled in their own heads, they lead their poor hearers into all sorts of puzzles and perplexities. Bad logic in the pulpit produces mental confusion in the pew, and hence it is we have whole congregations like blind men groping for the wall, and, as the Saviour has said, as a natural consequence, both ministers and people tumbling into the ditch.

Pardon this digression, my dear elder Brethren in the Lord, I write for the young here.

We will now pass on to meditation. 'Give thyself to meditation', says Paul. 'Meditation helps to make a divine', says Martin Luther. Ay, and true it is,

for without meditation the reading is not mellowed, and the teaching is not edifying.

What hours, and days, and nights have I meditated upon what the Word has taught me! I don't think that ten minutes of my life have passed for the last twenty-four years (except in sleep) during which I have not thought upon the Lord. I make no boast of this. I was forced to it. I wanted to make things plain to my own soul, and also to you, my dear hearers, in my preaching. It is for want of meditation on the deep things of God that we are to attribute the wretched gabble, or painful dullness, or self-stultification of what I may term 'the electro-plated Evangelicals'. They do not read the word, they consequently do not meditate upon it; hence we have silliness, or stupidity, or garrulousness, or self-seeking in our pulpits. But the man of God is compelled to meditate, and this makes him profitable, humble, and honest, thoroughly furnished for every good work (1 Timothy 4:15; 2 Timothy 2: 15).

Sovereign choice was one of the chief subjects of my meditation. It amazed me! It prostrated me in the very dust! How is it Lord, I have often asked my Father, how is it that I have been chosen out of the mass of my relatives, companions, and friends? I have seen relatives consigned to the tomb without a shadow of a hope of salvation! I have seen companions of my youth cut off in their unbelief! I have stood by the newly opened grave, and seen the familiar associate consigned thereto, who died as he lived, unbelieving and unsaved. And I now know of men who were my class-fellows at school and at the university, occupying a far higher position in this world than I, who are living in the world as exemplary individuals!

And here am I plucked as a brand out of the burning sought out by the Lord, a monument of mercy permitted and privileged to proclaim the Glorious Gospel of the Grace of God! Surely there must be a cause! The cause, I tell you, was not in me, for I hated God and religion, but in the sovereign choice of JEHOVAH who will have mercy on whom He will have mercy (Romans 9:15).

O, as I have meditated on this one fact, and as I have looked back upon the way God has led me, and kept me during my life, I needed no other proof of electing love!

The continuance of divine love was another subject of meditation with me during the night watches. I wondered would God continue this love to me. I have said to the Lord, 'Lord, Thou knowest I am still a poor frail sinner; perhaps I may sin away this love, I may weary Thee; after having been indulgent to me for years, haply Thou wilt cast me off though I were the signet on Thy right hand!'

No: answered the Lord, 'For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the

mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy upon thee' (Isaiah 54:9, 10).

I shall tell you another phase of this truth that mediation brings out. It is this: God foreknew before He ever actually called a sinner what that sinner was made of. He knew his disposition, He knew his failings, He knew he would sin, and play the rebel: yet God took pity on him, and God loved him, and now the poor sinner has proved himself to be precisely what God foreknew he would be, surely God will not cast him off! No, never! Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever: and the blessed truth is continually reiterated by Him, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee!' (Hebrews 13:5). Listen, beloved Brethren, to what the Lord has said with respect to His poor rebellious children, 'I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a transgressor from the womb. For my name's sake I will now defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction' (Isaiah 48:8-10).

O, what a considerate God! This one text speaks volumes, no putting away, no casting out, no change of mind, and simply because the Lord foreknew all the baseness and treachery His children would be guilty of, and though God hates sin, He will not cut off because of it. This of course alludes only to spiritual Israel, the seed of Abraham, both Jew and Gentile. But I will tell you what the Lord will do to His rebellious children: He will chasten them as a loving Father, and treat them as a wise parent. He will use the rod, and make them kiss it. When the chastening comes it surprises God's chosen one. He says, 'Lord, I could do with thy love, but this chastening is grievous to me!' 'Ah,' says the Lord, 'Whom I love, I chasten; and scourge every son whom I receive' (Hebrews 12:6). This puts an end to the controversy between the Father and the Child, and the latter when in his right mind rejoices that he is the subject of chastening and rebuke.

Temptation has now to be dealt with. Some years ago an old Christian man whom I never saw, wrote to me thus, 'My dear brother in the Lord Jesus, you have need of many prayers, for I am certain you are the object of fierce attack on the part of Satan, whose cause you have much injured.' Never was a truer word written! Every man who will speak the truth as it is in Jesus is sure to be fiercely opposed by the father of lies. The reason why preachers and professors in general spend such quiet and apparently happy lives is, they never oppose Satan. Poor deluded souls! They eat, and drink, and are merry with their fellows, never for a moment alluding to serious things, but speaking of the news of the day, and are 'hail fellows, well met,' with the world at large! Why should such suffer persecution? They oppose nothing, therefore Satan leaves them unmolested. But it is not so with a truth speaking minister. He must identify himself with God, and consequently he is shunned, and hated, and tempted.

Some of you little know, and little dream of the depths of temptation that I

have waded through! O what horrid thoughts! What filthy and blasphemous thoughts have been poured into my soul by Satan! Thoughts more than enough to sweep my soul into hell! Peter with his lying and swearing was nothing in comparison with me! I have all but cursed the day that I was born, and would gladly have exchanged my existence with that of the brute that perisheth. I have wished to be annihilated, or to sleep eternally. And, though some will hardly believe me, I have been a coward toward my Saviour! What! you say! after your conversion? Yes, I answer, after my conversion! Men talk of having been in Satan's sieve, because they have been notorious profligates, or remarkable sinners, before some moral change has taken place in them, but let me tell them that Satan's sieve is only for the living children of God. Every unconverted man is under the influence of Satan, but this sieve is only for the blessed of the Lord, the redeemed and saved! Peter's case illustrates what I assert. 'Blessed art thou Simon Barjonah;' declared Jesus of Peter, a very little while before he was sifted as wheat! (Luke 22:31, 32).

But my Saviour stood by and reminded me of His prayer, 'I have prayed for thee that thy Faith fail not.' The result of all this (as you with discernment have detected) was experimental preaching. Through my own failings and infirmities, I knew that you, dear Brethren in the Lord, have been in the same position, and thus was I enabled to preach acceptably to you, and to remind you of my Commission, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins' (Isaiah 40:1, 2).

Ah! there is no preaching like experimental preaching! It is like face answering to face in a glass! The anxious hearer beholds the facsimile of himself in the honest preacher, and thus is he built up in his most holy faith, and strengthened for further conflict. It is this knowledge of self that enables a minister to describe the ins and outs of the heart, to declare the absolute necessity of a finished salvation, and to say with authority, 'I have seen an end of all perfection!' (Psalm 119:96).

My space warns me to conclude. And now for a word or two on:

Visiting One's Parishioners

Much fault has been found with me for not having visited from house to house, and preached in private as well as in public. There are decided enemies of God's truth both here and elsewhere, parties who have no creed of their own, but are unanimous in picking some hole in my character, who cry out against my neglect in 'working my parish', as it is called. 'Working a parish!' I exclaim. Why this is the very essence of Arminian rubbish! Besides, many of those who are loudest in their outcry against me on this score, do not themselves visit any more than I! Frankly, do I confess, I am not a visitor, for I am not cut out for the work. I no more could visit from house to house than I could sit down and make my own clothes! Yet I do

not set my face against visiting. Let those whose tastes are bent that way visit as much as they please, but mark those men in the pulpit, and what are they? Why they are the very personification of puerility, painful dullness, and commonplace! They cannot edify, for they cannot instruct. But besides which, objectors forget that all ministers are not adapted for the same work. It was never intended they should. The Apostle to the Ephesians tells us as much, 'Christ gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ' (Ephesians 4:11, 12). There are men who could no more do my work than they could square the circle; and there are men whose work I no more could do than I can change my nature. We cannot transform gold into lead, or lead into gold. But let us take an honest and common sense view of this question. The popular idea is this, that a parson is to be on the streets the greater part of the day, calling at one house after another, reading and praying with the inmates. But I want to know how this is to be done? If visiting consisted in a mere mechanical process of walking so much, and talking so much, then the parson might be saved a deal of trouble by employing the celebrated Indian machine, which, at the will of the priest, and by an increase of pay from the devotee, can be made to repeat as many prayers as are desired; but if visiting for spiritual instruction consists in a spiritual act of drawing nigh to God with the spirit and the understanding, I defy a man to act according to the popular idea. No really godly man can possibly visit ten houses a day, and not be convinced at the close that he has played the formalist and the hypocrite for the time being, for he cannot read the scriptures in the spirit, he cannot pray in the spirit, all that time, and wherever there is reading or praying without the spirit, God is mocked, and Satan triumphs!

Then, again, the lower classes are as jealous of the sanctity of their homes as their more privileged fellows; they hate to be intruded upon, or interrupted, especially whilst at their business. And why should they not? Suppose I were to visit the doctors, the lawyers, the merchant princes at their establishments within a certain district, and say, 'I am come to read the word of life to you', what would be my reception? Should I not be politely or impolitely bowed out of the place, with the intimation that they could read for themselves, or they were too busy then to grant me a hearing? Surely so! And why should not the working man or the humble cottager have the same liberty? Let no man deceive himself by saying, 'O, the rich and well-to-do are well educated, and know the value of spiritual instruction, (would to God they did!) it is not so with the lower classes, they need to be stirred up.' Education has nothing whatever to do with vital godliness. I could pick out men and women who do not know how to read, write, or spell, who are truly 'taught of God', and I could point to learned individuals who are totally in the dark with respect to spiritual things.

'What would you do then?' someone asks. 'Would you not visit at all? Would you not employ the means?' I answer, again, visiting for spiritual instruction is altogether a spiritual act. An unconverted man cannot do it,

except mechanically; but a godly man knows where and when to visit, for the Lord has been before him, and intimates in some way or other, by some agent or another, or by some secret influence or drawing out of the heart, either on the part of the visitor or him to be visited, that there is such a one at such a house who really seeks the Lord and wants spiritual instruction, comfort, and consolation. That person will send for a godly minister. This is the way the thing is done. Parties who advocate the indiscriminate, pell mell, mechanical mode of 'working a parish', may sneer and scoff at these views, but such deny the power of the Holy Ghost. I can tell the objectors that I could point out numbers of instances where men and women have been brought out of darkness into marvellous light, without forced means, but not one where vital religion has ever developed itself by the compulsory method. Someone has well said, 'We read of Christ whipping multitudes out of the temple, but never of His whipping any in.'

Of course the old tale will be brought to bear against me about 'compelling them to come in', but this is too childish to waste my paper upon.

And now, my dear Brethren in the Lord, I bid you farewell. My prospects on earth do not seem very bright, but this matters little whilst the glorious inheritance above is ready for my possession, and not only for mine but for that of all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth. I could go to sleep in Jesus to-night with but one regret, and that is not expedient to relate here.

But with regard to what I have written above, you who can separate the precious from the vile (Jeremiah 15:19), you who can distinguish between godly experience and natural excitement, you who have had your own senses exercised by the Holy Spirit will be able to appreciate the solemn truths laid before you.

The poor world, both religious and profane, will read this tract with incredulity and contempt, because it cannot understand the ways of the Lord. Doubtless I shall be charged with arrogance, and antinomianism, but God is my witness that I am far, far from both.

The living children of God are no boasters, no loose livers. They know that their salvation is all of the Lord, and their desire is to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit: and though they cannot do as they would wish, 'for evil is ever present with them, yet their delight is in the law of God, after the inward man' (Romans 7:15-25).

Brethren, you know this, you know that for twenty-four years I have taught you thus, so it matters not what the world either thinks or says respecting you or me. The experience of the Church of God often seems bordering on enthusiasm, and even daring liberty, but it is only to the world, and it no more can understand the inner or outer life of a truly regenerated man, than can the peasant understand a problem in science!

Strive, my Brethren, to walk consistently, give no occasion to the enemies

of the Lord to blaspheme, and you will have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:11).

Once more, Farewell!

Your faithful Pastor,

WILLIAM PARKS

August, 1867

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