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CHAPTER 5: DEALING WITH ANXIOUS SOULS – AN ADDRESS TO CHRISTIAN WORKERS

I HAVE long desired to say a few words on the subject of dealing with the anxious. It seems to me that if there is one work in the vineyard more important than another it is that of guiding souls in this the most momentous crisis of their being. A mistake here will probably prove a fatal mistake, blighting all the joy and strength of future life.

I fear thousands have been mistaken here. Mere impression has been mistaken for conviction, and an intellectual faith for saving faith of the heart; hence so much of the spurious Christianity prevalent amongst us.

We should be very careful, in all our dealings with anxious souls, first to find out their exact position with regard to sin. In all spiritual awakenings there are always numbers of individuals who are partially awakened and sufficiently impressed to become anxious, like the young ruler and Agrippa, but who, like them, are not sufficiently so to be willing to give up their sins. Such individuals frequently present themselves as penitents desiring to be saved, and too often those who have to deal with them, instead of finding out their true state, and working together with the Holy Ghost to deepen conviction and drive them up to real submission to God, begin at once to talk of Christ having paid their debt and done everything for them, so that they have nothing to do but to believe and they are saved. Now it seems to me that to prevent such a grievous mistake, with all its bitter consequences, every one who deals with souls should have a clear and definite understanding of the conditions on which alone God pardons and receives repenting sinners. These conditions always have been, and ever must remain, the same, seeing that the principles of the Divine government can never change.

Hence we find that, alike under the old and new dispensations, GOD'S UNALTERABLE CONDITION OF PARDON IS THE FORSAKING OF EVIL.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him and to our God, and He will abundantly pardon." Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel." "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked may die? saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways and live?" Of



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course the wicked, were then to return in the appointed way of sacrifice and offering, but the condition of the acceptance of the offering, and the pardon of the transgressor, was the forsaking of evil. Just so now; the sinner must return to God by the new and living way, the "sacrifice once offered," but the condition of his acceptance through this sacrifice is the forsaking of evil. Unless he is willing to let go his sins and be separated from his idols, the sacrifice of Christ will avail him nothing but to increase his condemnation tenfold. It seems astounding that, with the Bible in their hands, so many professing to be guides of souls should mistake here; and, oh! it makes one's heart bleed to think of the consequences. We have thousands self-deceived, counting themselves believers, who never knew the pangs of real repentance; whose hearts never really turned from sin to righteousness, from Satan to God, who suppose they have been converted, but who have manifestly never been regenerated: who live as the slaves and votaries of the world while they profess to be children of God; in short, who regard themselves as Christians while they are still in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. Let us mind not to be partakers of other men's sins in this matter. Let us settle in our minds that there can be no conversion without conviction of sin, and such conviction as makes the soul willing to abandon evil. Casting ourselves on the Spirit for the necessary tenderness in doing it, let us not be afraid to probe the wounds with which every unregenerate soul is covered, and above all things let us avoid giving false comfort and pressing the inquirer into a mere intellectual faith, while he is cleaving to idols. Let us ever remember that saving faith is impossible while the soul's desires are set on that which is evil. It must be so awakened and convicted as to turn its face towards God, and so intensely desire His favour and love as to be willing to give up all evil as a condition of attaining it.

I repeat, it is astounding that, with the Bible in their hands, some teachers can so confound things that differ, and so wrongly "divide the word of truth" as to make "Christ the minister of sin," by preaching "only believe" to people who are holding onto sin. You will hear some of these good people asserting that we have nothing to do with conditions now, that repentance is not necessary to faith, &c. "Only believe and you shall be saved." "Jesus did it all, long, long ago." Truly! But what was it Jesus did? His own work, not mine? He lived, laboured, wept, suffered, and died and atoned for me, and He did it all—till He cried, "It is finished;" but I nowhere read that He "repented" and "turned to God," and did "works meet for repentance," and "believed" and "obeyed the Gospel" for me. This He commands every soul to do for itself, or perish. The only way in which Jesus is represented as saving men is in "turning them away from their iniquities," and until a soul is willing to let Him save it from sin, He cannot save it at all. Let us always try to find out, whether inquirers are willing or desire to be saved from evil, and are coming to Christ for this end, or whether they are only



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desirous of being saved from hell, and consequently holding on to sin. Here is just the difference between the true and spurious repentance, and on this hinges the result whether we shall bring into the Church another mere professor, a Simon Magus, or one who will follow Christ in the regeneration of the spirit, having his heart purified by a living faith. 'Oh,' but say some, 'what did Paul say to the jailor? He did not say anything about conditions or repentance, but simply, 'Believe,' &c. I answer we do not know all that Paul said on this occasion, for in the next verse we read that "they (Paul and Silas) spake unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all his house." Mark! this was before his profession of faith and baptism.

Now who can tell how much this Word of the Lord implied? Doubtless the Apostle explained on this, as on other occasions, what constituted that "obedience to the truth" through which the jailor, in common with all other penitents, was to be purified. But, supposing that the Apostle had spoken no other words than "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," this would only prove that in this particular instance no other counsel was necessary, because the jailor was prepared for it. He had come to the point of full submission where saving faith first becomes possible. The whole tenor of the narrative shows that the jailor was a fully awakened, truly repenting, deeply humbled sinner, ready to do anything. "He 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?" Observe, "He brought them out." He began immediately to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. The earthquake had torn the bandages from his eyes, and the Spirit, through its instrumentality, had shaken his guilty soul and made him realise his danger in the hands of a God who could avenge the wrongs of His people after such a fashion. He was so deeply convicted, so fully turned round "from darkness to light," that he was ready to do anything. He was not ashamed to confess his wickedness—to kneel before his prisoners and plead with them to show him what to do. And if Paul had told him, as Jesus did the young ruler, to sell his goods and give to the poor, there cannot be a doubt but he would have embraced the command at once, as Zacchæus did the obligation to make restitution. The intense earnestness of his gesture and question shows that he was willing to be saved at any cost—ready to do anything—and, therefore, nothing more remained to be done but to believe.

Now, wherever we find a soul in this attitude, be it our highest privilege—our chief joy—to point him to the Lamb of God, and to show him the way of faith more perfectly; but, oh! let us mind not to do it (except as a motive to submission) until this attitude is attained. Let us beware of a theoretical or sentimental faith, which leaves the heart unwashed, unrenewed, unsanctified. It is just here that thousands get the faith of devils, which is like the body without the spirit—dead! From this bitter root



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springs nearly all the Antinomianism of this age. With this untempered slime of the old serpent half the superstructure of the professing Church is joined together. Let us spurn it, and warn souls against it.

Let us mind the ORDER OF GOD in our dealing with souls. He made them, and He knows best how to dissect them. It seems astonishing that any difference of view can have obtained on the point with passages so direct, fall, and relevant as Acts 26:18,20. Surely our glorified Lord understood the constitution of the human soul, and knew best as to the method or order in which his truth and spirit operate upon it.

There are two or three considerations which give this passage special weight. It comes from the lips of our risen Lord. It was given after the Gospel dispensation was opened in all its fulness. It was given to Paul, the principal expounder of the doctrine of justification by faith, and therefore his views of faith could not have been contradictory to its teaching.

It was applied alike to Jews and Gentiles. "To open their eyes"—to awaken and make them realise their danger as sinners, "and to turn them from darkness"—or evil—"to light"—or righteousness—that is, from the choice or embrace of evil, to the choice or embrace of righteousness, and "From the power of Satan unto God"—that is, from being committed to the power of Satan to committal to the power of God. "That they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Observe here what a deal has to be done in the soul before it can receive forgiveness of sins. Its eyes must be opened—to what? Its own sinfulness and danger and misery. Then, under the sight of this, it must be turned right round from the embrace or desire of evil, to the embrace or desire of righteousness (though yet powerless to DO, it must choose and desire, righteousness). The attitude of the WILL MUST CHANGE with respect to evil and good. It must turn round from the one to the other in purpose and desire. Then "it must be turned from committal to the power of Satan unto God." It must abjure Satan as its rightful sovereign, and at least WILL to put itself under the power of God. And all this in order that it may receive forgiveness of sin. This is made an absolute condition of its receiving forgiveness. Now, I maintain that this is the only possible interpretation of this important text, not only of our version but of the original in all its purity; and if so, what becomes of the theory that there are no conditions, and that repentance and forsaking of evil and choosing good is not necessary to saving faith! Further, we see in the 18th verse how literally Paul understood, and how implicitly he followed, this Divine order, for he says he "showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to



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the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Now, certainly Paul knew what he preached, and there could not be any contradiction in his mind between these necessary conditions of faith, and faith itself. Therefore, when he speaks of faith only being necessary to a sinner's justification, he must always assume that these conditions are complied with, otherwise he contradicts himself and sets aside the order of this Divine commission.

I know that Paul teaches that faith alone is the hand that takes hold of Christ, but of course he assumes that the feet of repentance and submission have brought the soul near enough for this hand to reach Him; in other words, that, by the Spirit's power, he is so convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, as to be willing to forsake every evil way, and to flee for refuge to the hope set before him. It seems difficult to imagine how any idea of pardon and reconciliation can have obtained in the Church which does not pre-suppose these conditions, seeing that Jesus laid it down again and again as a fundamental principle that no man could become His disciple, or follow Him, till he was willing to renounce every thing, and every being, antagonistic to His supreme love and dominion in the soul (Luke 14:26,30; Matt. 5:29-30; 10:37). We find also that the Apostles invariably acted on the assumption that until the soul turned round from evil to God it could not believe (Acts 24:25). I would ask, Why did not Paul press Felix to believe on the Lord Jesus? He trembled, as did the jailor. The reason is evident—he did not submit to God and forsake sin (Acts 8:22-23; Acts 20:21; Luke 24:47; Acts 5:31; Romans 1:18; Romans 2:3-10.) The principle laid down in these texts is recognised by Jesus in His messages to the seven churches: there is no promise of pardon, even to backsliders, without such repentance as leads to the putting away of evil. This, then, is the test of genuine repentance, WILLINGNESS TO PUT AWAY SIN. Until this is attained, let us not dare to attempt to comfort any soul, for in so doing we shall not be workers together with God, but the tools of Satan, doing exactly what he desires to be done. My dear friends, ponder on these suggestions: they will bear examination. Carefully compare Scripture with Scripture on this point, seeking the light of the Holy Spirit, and you will be saved from healing the health of the Lord's people slightly—from increasing the number of those who have a form of godliness without the power.

The next important step in dealing with anxious souls is to present to them THE PROPER OBJECT OF FAITH, which is CHRIST JESUS HIMSELF, and not merely the Divine testimony concerning Him.

There is a vast difference between these two objects of faith. The one ends with the intellect, the



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other purifies the heart. That method of leading souls into faith which presents the truth as a system, or declaration, on the reception or belief of which the soul is to reckon itself saved, fails to bring the soul into contact with a living personal Christ, and possesses no living principle by which to graft it into the vine as a living branch.

Truly the Divine testimony concerning Christ must be received and believed; but this is not to be the ultimate object of faith, but, only the medium through which the soul's trust is to be transferred to the living person testified of. Here arises another fatal error of this day, through which, I fear, numbers never realise any other God than the Bible, or any other Saviour than a powerless, intellectual belief in the letter of it. They believe the truth about Christ, about His life and death, His sacrifice and intercession; they believe, as enquirers often tell me they do, that Jesus died for them and that He intercedes for them; but they do not believe that His sacrifice actually satisfies the Father for their sins, or that His intercession so far prevails with God for them that He does now actually pardon and receive them because of it. If they believe this, of course their anxiety would immediately cease, and they would begin to sing the new song of praise and thanksgiving.

The mind is too often occupied with the theory of Divine truth instead of the living person whom the truth sets forth. Now, it seems clear to me that the Divine testimony concerning Christ may be believed, and frequently is believed, without their existing a particle of saving trust in Him as a personal Saviour. Here is the secret of so many apparently believing and devout people living in systematic disobedience to God. Their minds are convinced of the truth, and their emotions are frequently stirred by it; but they have no life, no spiritual power in them by which to resist temptation or live above the world, because their faith does not embrace a living Saviour able to save them to the uttermost, but only the truth about Him.

Take an illustration. Suppose you are sick almost unto death. A friend brings you a testimony concerning some wonderful physician who has cured many such cases, and is fully able and willing to undertake yours. Now, you may receive the record of your friend concerning the skill and success of this physician's treatment, and you may fully believe it, and yet there may be some reason why you shrink from putting yourself into his hands and trusting him with your life. You may believe all that is said about him, and yet fail so to trust in his person as to give yourself up fully into his power. Just so there are numbers who believe God's testimony concerning His Son, that Jesus has atoned for their sin, and that His treatment would cure them of its disease, who do not trust Him to do it for them—no, not for a single moment. Here is the difference between a dead and a living faith; between a faith



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that lies useless on the shelves of the intellect, or bubbles up on the waves of mere emotion, and that which renews the soul in righteousness, and makes it the abode of an indwelling Christ.

The term faith is used in several different senses in the Scripture, but when used to designate that act through which the soul is justified before God, and renewed by His Spirit, it always signifies trust in, or committal to a living Saviour. The word used to signify this trust is sometimes rendered "commit," as in John 2:24: "But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men." He did not believe in them, or trust them with His person—He did not commit Himself into their power. This is just what God requires the sinner to do in order to be saved—to commit himself to the faithfulness and power of Jesus. Again, we have the same word in Luke 16:11: "If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches"—who shall give over into your keeping, or power, the true riches.

Now, it is evident that the Scriptural idea of saving faith is that of the absolute committal of the whole being over to the faithfulness and power of Jesus, and not merely a belief, however firm, of the records of certain facts concerning Him. I may believe that He is the Saviour—that He died for me—that He intercedes for me—that He has promised to save me, as thousands do; and yet I may have no trust in Him as now doing all this for me, and consequently draw no sap, no spiritual virtue, from Him.

Saving faith consists in a firm trust in the person of Jesus, and committal of the soul to Him by an unwavering act of confidence in Him for all that the Bible presents Him to be, as the Redeemer and Saviour of men "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). And as soon as this trust is exercised, the testimony of the Spirit is given to adoption, and the soul knows that it has passed from death unto life. Of course this trust is exercised through the testimony of God to His Son, but the SON is the object of trust, and not the testimony merely. This is most important to bear in mind in our efforts to lead souls into saving faith.

And now it becomes a question of deepest interest—how best to lead true penitent sinners to exercise this trust. The first thing generally to be done is to present Jesus as willing to meet the realised desperateness of the sinner's case, as every true penitent thinks himself the chief of sinners, and his own a peculiarly bad case. We should try to show him that the question of salvation does not hinge on the greatness or smallness of a sinner's guilt, but on the fact of his accepting Jesus as a



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sufficient atonement for it. We should try to show him how almost all the instances of conversion recorded in the Bible were great sinners, and how Jesus came to seek that which was absolutely lost, and how the depths of His love can only be shown on very bad cases.

When we have succeeded in leading the soul to apprehend the sufficiency of the atonement to cover, and the willingness of Jesus to pardon the past, unbelief will generally fasten on the future, and the inquirer will say, 'Ah! but if I were forgiven, I should fall again into sin.' Now is the time to bring the soul face to face with a personal, living Saviour. We must present Christ's ABILITY to save to the uttermost—of the soul's need and circumstances—all them who come unto God by Him. We must get the soul's eye fixed on Jesus, not only as a sacrifice but as a SAVIOUR, a Deliverer, an Almighty Friend, who has promised to dwell and abide with the believer, delivering him out of the hands of all his enemies. We should not give up till, by the help of the Spirit, we can lead the soul to expect in Jesus the supply of all its needs. When this is accomplished, we should lead the soul on to claim this Saviour NOW.

When arrived at this point, I have sometimes found it very helpful to ask, 'Well, now, when did Jesus pardon and receive the penitents who came to Him in the days of His flesh?' Waiting for an answer, thus compelling the mind's attention to the point, the inquirer will generally say, 'I suppose when they came to Him.' I reply, Of course that was the only time to receive them—when they came, not an hour before or an hour after, but at the moment they came, and it is the same now. He receives returning sinners when they come. Now, you come, confessing and forsaking all your sins, and willing to follow Him wherever He may lead you. Does he receive you? He said He would in no wise cast you out if you came. Does He cast you out? The penitent will generally say, 'No, I trust not.' Then what does He? He must. either take you in or cast you out just now, because you come just now. Which is it? Sometimes we get the answer, 'I hope He takes me in.' Then we try to show that this is not the place for hope. Only to HOPE that Jesus means what He says is to insult Him and drive Him away. You must trust Him and believe now that He takes you in. Oh, what struggles I have often witnessed just at this point! Satan understands the power of this committal, and withstands it with all his subtlety and malice; but if we are firm, and armed with the power of the Spirit, and persistently and relentlessly press the soul up to present trust, the result is certain. Condemnation is taken away, light breaks on the soul, and the new song bursts spontaneously from the lips, even praise and thanksgiving to our God.

In some cases it requires no little sympathy, tact, and firmness to meet the wiles of unbelief and the



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stratagems of Satan even in dealing with very sincere and truly submissive souls. Fear of being deceived is generally one of the greatest difficulties. In such cases it is well to explain to the penitent that there is no ground for this fear, seeing that this way of salvation is of God's own appointing, and that, although it seems an easy way to be saved, after living so long in sin and rebellion—the ease of it is all on the sinner's side, and not on the side of the Saviour—we should explain at what a terrible cost of sacrifice and suffering to the Son of God this simple, easy way was opened, and how ungrateful it is to put it away, as if it were too good to be true, because God has made it so simple.

It is well to encourage the inquirer to trust by reminding him that every truly saved soul on earth, and every redeemed spirit in heaven, was saved in this way—by simple faith alone. It is often very helpful to get the penitent to use the language of faith with his lips, even before his heart can fully go with it. I have seen many a one rise into faith, while repeating after me the text, rendered in the first person, "He was wounded for my transgressions," &c.; or, 'Thou hast said, Him that cometh to Thee Thou wilt in no wise cast out. Lord, I come; Thou dost not cast me out; Thou takest me in;' or, "Tis done—the great transaction done; I am my Lord's, and He is mine;" or, "I can believe—I do believe—that Jesus saves me now," repeating such passages or stanzas over and over again till the heart follows the tongue and the venture is made.

Of course we cannot give counsels for every individual case; there are great diversities in the temperaments and circumstances of different individuals requiring a wise adaption of treatment at the moment for which the spirit alone can endow us. Let us, however, only be clear and faithful on the two momentous points of a TRUE AND THOROUGH REPENTANCE, and an intelligent and implicit TRUST IN A LIVING SAVIOUR, and every minor question will easily be met, and the souls whom the Lord shall honour us to bring into His family will not be still-born ghosts of a sinewless sentimentalism; but strong, hardy, cross-bearing, Christ-honouring, soul-winning men and women, able to open heaven and shake hell by their faith and zeal and effort in our Redeemer's kingdom.

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