

SHOWERS UPON THE GRASS

A companion volume to As the Small Rain

by

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CHAPTER THREE

“ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY”

DISEASED WITHIN

How easy and how human it is to blame everyone and everything except ourselves for our sins and shortcomings! We are so prone, when we yield to temptation, to blame the sin upon any circumstance except ourselves.

Adam, having sinned, made an excuse which all too many of his children have echoed, when he said, “**The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat**” (Genesis 3:12). Instead of simply confessing his sin and saying, “I am guilty. I disobeyed,” he, if we may be excused the use of a modern expression of slang, “passed the buck” to his wife.

The tendency of human nature is always to blame sin upon something outside ourselves—if not upon an individual, upon circumstances. We excuse ourselves for certain habits which are wrong by saying, “Well, I am just weak on that point. You see, I have inherited temptations along that line.” Or again, “My environment and surroundings were all against me. After all, if I had been in different circumstances or had not had to associate with certain people, I would never have done that thing.” Mothers, with the natural instinct of their heart, seldom admit that their children are bad. They say, “Well, my son is not a bad boy; but he got in the wrong company.”

While our companions and surroundings and our environment may be a contributing factor to our misdoing, we should not fail to admit that the source of sin is within ourselves. Were it not, the outward influence would have nothing upon which to work. It is the corrupt nature which is acted upon by temptations from without.

That is why God declares of the human heart that it is “**deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked**” (Jeremiah 17:9). That is why the Word is so emphatic when it states: “**In my flesh, dwelleth no good thing**” (Romans 7:18).

The inward desire is the seed of sin. Outward circumstances act upon that seed only as nature and environment act upon the seed planted in the ground. The blossom comes because there is life in the seed, and sin develops because there is a sinful nature within.

When we try to blame “fate” or circumstances or environment, we are, without realizing it, oftentimes trying to make God Himself responsible. We are doing that which we are told in the thirteenth verse of the first chapter of James we should not do—that is, saying when we are tempted, **“We are tempted of God.” “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”** (James 1:14). Our prayer should be: **“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”** (Psalm 51:10). When the heart is right the outward life will indicate that fact.

O for that tenderness of heart
Which bows before the Lord,
Acknowledging how just Thou art,
And trembling at Thy word!

O for those humble, contrite tears,
Which from repentance flow:
That consciousness of guilt which fears
The long-suspended blow!

Saviour, to me in pity give
The sensible distress;
The pledge Thou wilt, at last, receive,
And bid me die in peace.

— Charles Wesley

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ALL GUILTY

In these days of conflicting theories as to the relationship of men and of nations, it is worthwhile to stop and consider what God has to say. He declares, **“There is no difference . . .”** (Romans 10:12). He is not talking about difference in position, in intellect, in color, in creed; He is talking about difference in their standing before Him. In what is there no difference? In this, that **“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). Wealth has nothing to do with our standing here. Nationalism is not taken into account here; but all men, the most debased, primitive savage, and the most cultured and civilized American, find themselves on a plane of absolute equality here, for **“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”** In this point, all men are alike.

Are there degrees of guilt? Yes. The murderer in his cell, condemned and waiting death for a brutal crime, has certainly committed, at least as far as society is concerned, a much more grave offense than the honest, upright and respectable business man whose chief offense may be the coveting of something which belongs to another man. But while the degrees of guilt may be different, these two are equal in the fact that both are condemned; for God’s Word declares that he that offends in one point is guilty in all.

We talk about inhibitions and complexes and maladjustments to avoid the Biblical word sin, and we have largely lost a consciousness of our guilt before God. No man can ever know the joys of salvation until he first recognizes his guilt before God and his need of cleansing. **“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”** (Romans 10:13), but the man or woman who has no consciousness of guilt, no need of divine mercy, will not call upon Him.

Modern psychiatry has proved itself Satan’s ally in many instances, but never more so than in its effort to discount the guilt complex; and admission of guilt must precede the cry for pardon. We are all guilty, for **“all we like sheep have gone astray”** (Isaiah 53:6); but thank God, the verse does not end there. We guilty ones may have freedom from the penalty of our guilt: **“The Lord hath laid on him”** that is, on Christ, **“the iniquity of us all.”** And since **“He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities,”** we can be free forever from the guilt of our sin, if we will accept Him as our Saviour who **“bore our sins in his own body on the tree . . .”** (I Peter 2:24).

I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all and frees us
From the accursed load:

I bring my guilt to Jesus,
To wash my crimson stains
White in His blood most precious,
Till not a stain remains.

I lay my wants on Jesus;
All fullness dwells in Him;
He healeth my diseases,
He doth my soul redeem:

I lay my griefs on Jesus,
My burdens and my cares;
He from them all releases,
He all my sorrows shares.

I long to be like Jesus,
Meek, loving, lowly, mild;
I long to be like Jesus,
The Father’s holy Child:

I long to be with Jesus
Amid the heavenly throng,
To sing with saints His praises,
And learn the angels’ song.

— Horatius Bonar

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SIN'S SOURCE

In the Book of Exodus God speaks to Moses out of the burning bush about His plans for Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. He gives him a sign. He says, “**Put now thine hand into your bosom,**” and Moses put the hand in the bosom. He pulled it out and it was white with leprosy, and the Lord said to him, “**Put thine hand into thy bosom again.**” He put it in again, and this time when he pulled it out, it was no longer leprous.

There is a significance in this sign which God gave Moses. The hand indicates the heart. What the hand does, shows what is in the heart. Leprosy in the Bible is a type of sin, sin which destroys both body and soul.

The first sign of leprosy is a lack of feeling in the part affected. That is what sin does; it deadens the conscience. Gradually the conscience stops hurting the man who practices sin. Moses put his hand in his bosom next to his heart and brought it out full of leprosy, the type of sin—sin which comes from within. All the sin in a life comes from the heart. “**Out of the heart proceed . . . things which defile a man,**” the Lord Jesus tells us. People will see in the open acts of the life what is conceived in the secret places of the heart.

And then God said: “**Put thine hand into thy bosom again.**”

Moses put his hand back in his bosom, and it came out whole, indicating that cleanliness from sin must also come from within. The world has never learned that. The world has tried to fix up society by cleaning up things and trying to make the outside right. We can never do that. The only way a man can get right is to be cleaned up inside.

The grace of the Lord and the blood of Christ applied to a man's heart will bring right living in the outward life. If the thoughts of the heart are clean, then the hand and the life become clean. The healing begins within and not without.

Not by applying reformation to habits and wrong doing, but by applying the cleansing blood of Christ to the heart where the root of the sin has its place, is the heart healed and the life made new.

No, not despairingly
Come I to Thee;
No, not distrustingly
Bend I the knee:
Sin hath gone over me,
Yet is this still my plea,
Jesus hath died.

Ah! mine iniquity
Crimson has been,
Infinite, infinite
Sin upon sin;
Sin of not loving Thee,
Sin of not trusting Thee,
Infinite sin.

Faithful and just art Thou,
Forgiving all;
Loving and kind art Thou
When poor ones call:
Lord, let the cleansing blood,
Blood of the Lamb of God,
Pass o'er my soul.

Then all is peace and light
This soul within:
Thus shall I walk with Thee,
The loved Unseen;
Leaning on Thee, my God,
Guided along the road,
Nothing between.

— Horatius Bonar

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SLIME OF THE SNAIL

The Bible is full of unusual similes and striking metaphors. In the fifty-eighth Psalm, the eighth verse, is found a most interesting figure of speech, where David, pleading with God to protect him from his wicked enemies, cries out, “**As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away.**” Did you ever watch a snail crawl along a sidewalk leaving a slimy trail behind him and growing smaller and smaller until finally he simply disappeared, melting in his own slime? This is the thing David had in mind, and what an accurate description it is of the progress of wickedness! Many times a wicked man seems to be dissolved by his own wickedness. God’s Word says, “**He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption**” (Galatians 6:8).

How often sin takes its toll physically in the consuming disease which burns out the life and destroys the body. Psychologists and physicians tell us that the base passions of hate and envy and jealousy have a definite physiological effect. The body is actually poisoned by them. Anger can cause indigestion. An evil disposition can bring about a nervous tension which will lead to stomach ulcers or a heart attack. So evil, of itself, may bring physical destruction. The ugly, sordid instincts and impulses of a human heart may wreck health and destroy the body.

Evil works in other ways. The first little sin which seems so harmless can grow upon a man until, like a consuming fire, it destroys him. The slime in which the snail travels he secretes, and it, in turn, destroys him. So it is with sin.

When sin springs up in the human heart, the man who sets out along a pathway of evil finds himself, soul and body, destroyed by the evil one in whose way he travels.

Hate never wins its own purpose. God takes the wrath of men and makes it praise Him. He who takes the sword perishes by the sword. Men and nations are seldom destroyed from without; they destroy themselves.

The conflagrations which have consumed the nations of the past have generally sprung in spontaneous combustion from the filth and corruption hoarded within them. Like the slime, self-secreted and self-destroying, in which the snail travels, evil destroys the men who set out to work evil.

How sad our state by nature is!
Our sin, how deep it stains!
And Satan binds our captive souls
Fast in his slavish chains.

But there's a voice of sovereign grace
Sounds from the sacred word:
"Ho! ye despairing sinners, come,
And trust a faithful Lord."

My soul obeys the gracious call,
And runs to this relief:
I would believe Thy promise, Lord,
O help my unbelief!

To the blest fountain of Thy blood,
Incarnate God, I fly:
Here let me wash my spotted soul
From crimes of deepest dye.

A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
Into Thy arms I fall:
Be Thou my strength and righteousness,
My Jesus and my all.

— Isaac Watts

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BUY WITHOUT MONEY

“Ye have sold yourselves for nought” (Isaiah 52:3). With these words Isaiah brings home to the people of Jerusalem the reality of their enslavement by Babylon and the fact that they have thus sold themselves into foreign servitude for nothing. They had wandered away from God, had broken His law and violated His commandments. The result of all this was bondage. In exchange for the freedom which they had enjoyed as a nation they had nothing but servitude. No price is too high to pay for freedom. How foolish to throw away so priceless a possession and receive nothing in exchange!

The man who becomes a slave to sin also sells himself for nought. We hear a great deal of talk these days about the causes of sin. Psychiatrists and sociologists like to blame everything from inhibitions and complexes to heredity and environment for human sin. While these things should not be discounted, the truth is, each man sells himself into bondage to sin. No sin is forced upon any man, in the final analysis each man is to blame for his own wrongdoing. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brethren, but we sell ourselves into slavery to sin and we gain nothing thereby except a debased nature and a guilty conscience, a lost reputation, heartaches and regrets.

Poor indeed would we be if we had to buy our own freedom from our slavery, for having gained nothing by the transaction through which we became bondmen, we have no means wherewith to purchase freedom; but those who have sold themselves, the prophet tells us, **“Shall be redeemed without money.”**

We are freed from the slavery of sin, not by works of righteousness which we can do, but by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who made Himself a ransom for many. God’s invitation is, “He that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat” (Isaiah 55:1).

God’s Word declares, **“If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”** (John 8:36). It is our own poverty as slaves to sin which makes us candidates for the redemption for which Christ suffered, for we are **“not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold . . . but by the precious blood of Christ . . .”** (I Peter 1:18, 19).

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love, and power:
He is able,
He is willing: doubt no more.

Now, ye needy, come and welcome;
God’s free bounty glorify;
True belief and true repentance,
Every grace that brings you nigh,
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him:
This He gives you;
'Tis the Spirit's glimmering beam.

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Bruised and mangled by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all;
Not the righteous,
Sinners Jesus came to call.

— Joseph Hart

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SIN TRIPLETS

The life of Saul, the first king of Israel, is a sad and tragic spectacle. In answer to Israel's clamor for a king, Saul was chosen by God. A fine figure of a man was he, taller by a head than the average, handsome and noble of countenance. He ascended the throne to the shouts of the acclaim of the people over whom he was to rule. He was loved and respected.

No man ever began his reign more auspiciously; but note the circumstances of his death. His army routed and fleeing, the wounded king, fearing to fall into the hands of the Philistines, committed suicide. From the triumph of his ascension to the tragedy of his death, Saul had steadily descended.

- His life was wrecked by the triple sins of pride, jealousy and disobedience.
- He could not stand power.
- He became puffed up.
- He could not bear to have another man popular.
- He became jealous of David and much of his reign was spent in pursuit and attempted persecution of the man of whom he was jealous.

He disobeyed God in failing wholly to destroy all the Amalekites and their cattle when God gave him the victory over them, and in seeking to pry into the future by his visit to the Witch of Endor. As a result of these sins, his life, which might have been pleasant, became bitter; his reign, which began so gloriously, ended disastrously. His disobedience cost him God's blessing and his own life. These three sins, pride, jealousy and disobedience, all too often go together.

Like the three weird women whose evil charms lie at the root of the tragedy and ruin of Macbeth in Shakespeare's play, these three sins loom foreboding and evil in the tragedy of Saul.

They are the cause of the ruin of many lives. Saul came down to a tragic death because of these sins, but the sins did not die with him.

He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much:
And, Lord, contentment still I crave,
Because Thou savest such.

Fullness to such a burden is
That go on pilgrimage:
Here little, and hereafter bliss,
Is best from age to age.

— John Bunyan

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JUDGMENT COMING

God has a way of turning things around. Paul was brought before Felix for trial and questioning. In the natural order of events Paul should have stood in fear before the representative of Caesar, but instead we find Felix trembling in the presence of Paul. Paul had been brought into the presence of the procurator to be questioned, but that day Felix himself was on trial.

Instead of flattering his judge, who apparently had some languid interest in oriental religion and philosophy, Paul “**reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come . . .**” and Felix trembled as well he might, for all three points in Paul’s reasoning struck home.

Felix was a most unrighteous man. Formerly a slave, because of the emperor’s affection for him, he had been appointed to this high office, where he practiced injustice of every sort. He and Drusilla, the wife of another man, whom he had taken for himself, were living lives characterized by intemperance of all kinds. He who had judged others harshly and ruthlessly and felt himself immune from the consequences of his acts was suddenly brought face to face with the fact that judgment awaited him. No wonder he trembled!

The sad part of the story is not that he trembled, but that he failed to heed the warning of his conscience as it was stirred up by the preaching of Paul and to accept the Lord Jesus Christ who is God’s provision for unrighteous and in temperate men, and thus avoid the judgment to come. Felix was convicted, but not converted.

Conviction in itself is not enough. It must be followed by repentance and faith in Christ. Conviction is like the pain which warns of the presence of disease. The pain unheeded, the disease may be fatal. So, the pricking of the conscience as it is moved by the Holy Spirit should be heeded and not dismissed lightly. There is danger in putting off decision as did Felix who said:

“Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”

Day of wrath, O dreadful day!
When this world shall pass away,
And the heavens together roll,
Shriveling like a parched scroll,
Long foretold by saint and sage,
David’s harp, and sibyl’s page.

Day of terror, day of doom,
When the Judge at last shall come!
Through the deep and silent gloom,
Shrouding every human tomb,
Shall the archangel’s trumpet tone
Summon all before the throne.

O just judge, to whom belongs
Vengeance for all earthly wrongs,
Grant forgiveness, Lord, at last,
Ere the dread account be past:
Lo, my sighs, my guilt, my shame!
Spare me for Thine own great Name.

Thou, Who bad’st the sinner cease
From her tears and go in peace,
Thou, Who to the dying thief
Spakest pardon and relief,
Thou, O Lord, to me hast given,
E’en to me, the hope of heaven.

—Thomas of Celano
(Translated by Arthur P. Stanley)

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“THE WAY OF THE LORD”

These familiar phrases leap to our eye from the pages of the daily newspaper and the books of the philosophers and historians: “The sequence of events,” “The due course of circumstances,” “The natural order of things,” “The dealings of fate.”

Thus, men, leaving God out, attempt to account for the way in which things come to pass. The writer of the book of Proverbs describes it more accurately when he refers to **“The way of the Lord.”** He has been gripped by this truth, that God moves in a certain direction and all the courses of events are the result of His planning and the purpose of His will as He works it out in the affairs of men.

He declares that **“The way of the Lord is strength to the upright; but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity”** (Proverbs 10:29). In the Hebrew tongue the word **“strength”** has the connotation of *stronghold or fortress*; so the way of the Lord is a place of protection and defense for the righteous, but it frowns with hostile arms upon the workers of iniquity. As a fort offers defense to those within and danger to those who stand without, so the purposes of God are ordained for the blessing of those who align themselves with Him and for the destruction of those who set themselves against Him.

Each man may decide whether he wishes to ride in the chariot of God’s will or be crushed beneath His wheels. **“The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous . . .”** (Psalm 34:15), we are told. That is, He looks upon them with tenderness and love, but **“the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.”** The same divine countenance which smiles in benison upon His children, frowns in anger upon His enemies.

To each man, to a certain extent, is given the power of choice. He may go with the Lord in His way or he may set himself against it. In either case the purpose of God shall be realized, but in one instance with blessing and in the other with destruction. The Gospel offers eternal life to the one who accepts, but he who rejects the same Gospel condemns himself to destruction thereby, for the Gospel is the savour of life unto life and death unto death.

Great God! beneath whose piercing eye
The earth’s extended kingdoms lie;
Whose favoring smile upholds them all,
Whose anger smites them, and they fall.

We bow before Thy heavenly throne;
Thy power we see, Thy greatness own;
Yet, cherished by Thy milder voice,
Our bosoms tremble and rejoice.

Thy kindness to our fathers shown
Their children’s children long shall own;
To Thee, with grateful hearts, shall raise
The tribute of exulting praise.

Great God, our Guardian, Guide and Friend!
O still Thy sheltering arm extend;
Preserved by Thee for ages past,
For ages let Thy kindness last!

— William Roscoe

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DEMONS FLEE

Jesus Christ on one occasion cast a great number of demons out of a poor creature who dwelt in tombs, cutting himself with knives, and “**no man could bind him, no, not with chains**” (Mark 5:1-5). The demons, coming out of the man, with the permission of God’s Son entered a herd of swine which straightway plunged off a cliff and drowned themselves in the sea. We are told that when the people of the country found the man out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, “**they were taken with great fear**” (Luke 8:37), and asked Jesus to depart from their country.

Those Gadarenes were so much like people we know. They were afraid of the miraculous. They beheld evidence of divine power, and instead of rejoicing at the freedom of the poor man from the demons which had controlled him, they were full of fear.

There are people who are afraid of a revival. They do not want to see God at work in the salvation of souls, the healing of the spiritually diseased ones, because they are afraid of that which is unusual and which they themselves cannot understand and analyze.

What a pity that men’s fear of the miraculous must sometimes limit the work of God among them! Had Jesus stayed in the country of the Gadarenes, how many other poor demon-possessed men might have been freed, how many blind eyes might have been opened and how many lame men made to walk! But because they were afraid of the miraculous, they asked Him to leave; and, of course, when He left, the blessing and the power left with Him.

There was another cause for their request that He depart. They loved money more than they loved the souls of men.

He had cast out demons, the demons had entered the swine, and the swine had been drowned. The Gadarenes preferred to have their herd of pigs undisturbed rather than to see the demoniac clothed and in his right mind. They were more interested in pigs than they were in men.

Any man who traffics in that which debases souls, the man who sells liquor, runs a gambling den or any other place of debauchery and sin, is like those Gadarenes. Naturally, he does not want the Lord Jesus around, or the preaching of His Gospel to be heard, for that frees men from the bondage of their sin and hurts his business.

Jesus! the Name high over all,
In hell or earth or sky;
Angels and men before it fall,
And devils fear and fly.

Jesus! the Name to sinners dear,
The Name to sinners given;
It scatters all their guilty fear;
It turns their hell to heaven.

O that the world might taste and see
The riches of His grace!
The arms of love that compass me
Would all mankind embrace.

Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp His Name;
Preach Him to all, and cry in death,
“Behold, behold the Lamb!”

— Charles Wesley

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SMALL PEBBLES

When told that it was 92,000,000 miles from his house to the sun, a little child once asked his teacher, “Do you mean that far from the roof or the basement?” Poor little child! his house looked tall to him, but when you consider the millions of miles from the earth to the sun, the height of the house is insignificant. Indeed, the height of the highest mountain is insignificant in comparison to those miles of space. When we compare the brief span of our own lives with the great eternity of God, we find we are “pretty small pebbles on a pretty big beach!”

God’s Word reminds us that we are to be clothed “**with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble**” (I Peter 5:5). Quite plainly this means that the man who is proud finds God in opposition to him. God resisteth the proud man, but He gives grace to the humble. What is grace? It is spirituality. There is no such thing as a spiritual, proud man. A spiritual Christian is always an humble Christian. The great men of God have been humble in their personal lives, and with humble hearts they have walked before God as conscious of His blessings as of their own unworthiness.

One good way to secure humility is by looking deep down inside your heart and seeing all the ugliness there. Sometimes a scientific expedition goes out aboard a ship to gather specimens of unusual marine life. Nets are let down thousands of feet under the surface and when they are pulled up they contain strange creatures, awful looking things some of them, slimy and bloated creatures of the deep.

When the Holy Spirit turns the searchlight of God’s Word upon the human heart you find it full of ugliness for, “**The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked**” (Jeremiah 17:9). How can we be proud, knowing that in our flesh dwelleth no good thing?

Having looked at yourself, behold the purity of Christ and the holiness of God!

She sat and wept beside His feet; the weight
Of sin oppressed her heart; for all the blame,
And the poor malice of the worldly shame,
To her was past, extinct, and out of date:

Only the sin remained, the leprous state;
She would be melted by the heat of love,
By fires far fiercer than are blown to prove
And purge the silver ore adulterate.

She sat and wept, and with her untressed hair
Still wiped the feet she was so blessed to touch;
And He wiped off the soiling of despair
From her sweet soul, because she loved so much.

I am a sinner, full of doubts and fears:
Make me a humble thing of love and tears.

— Hartley Coleridge

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STRANGLING RICHES

Nothing can be more fatal to spiritual life than worldly care and the pursuit of wealth. In His parable on the sower our Lord speaks of the seed which fell among thorns which sprang up and choked them, and in interpreting the parable to His disciples, He said:

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful”
(Matthew 13:22).

No man or woman can avoid altogether the cares of this world. There are financial problems, a living to be made, business to attend to, children must be provided for and the house must be kept. In the complexities of our day there are a thousand nagging cares which face us. The pressure of details can so fill the mind that we cannot hear the voice of God. One can be so busy trying to look after business and discharging his responsibilities that he has no time for communion with the Lord and study of His Word. However, the more perplexed and care-ridden we are, the more necessary it is that we take time for spiritual things; the more harassed we are by problems, the more we need to turn to the Lord for help and strength and guidance. But by the care of the world, I think the Lord means not so much the perplexities and problems of life as a concern for worldly things far beyond their worth and importance or, in other words, an affection for temporal and worthless things.

The deceitfulness of riches can be even worse than the care of the world in its effect. The man who loves money is like one consumed with a fever. That which he thinks will quench his thirst leaves him more thirsty than ever. Riches are deceitful. They promise satisfaction, which they never bring, and the more the poor lover of wealth has of this world's goods the more he craves. It is no wonder he becomes unfruitful, for the deceitfulness of riches not only chokes out the Word of God from a man's life, but it also destroys and smothers all the finer impulses as well. The man who is avid in his greed for gold eventually finds all kindness and generosity and natural affection choked out by the thorns.

Are you all silver? Is there naught of gold
Upon you anywhere? You seem to go in silver
When you walk, your shoes upon the pavement, splashing rain
After a shower, or wading deep in moonlight
Sifted through the shadows on the grass—
A silver portrait in a frame;

And when you talk
One thinks of sun on icicles—something that's splendid, fine,
And shining; your serenity
Is like the placid waters of a sea,
Tipped with a silver brush;
Your laughter is the echo of a coin
Striking a stone;

Yet, I have seen sword blades flash silver in the light,
And they were beautiful in their own fashion
But I found they were of death;
I have heard bugle calls at dawn, sending their silver notes
Across the peaceful hills.
And I have thrilled to them until I knew of their deceit—
They drew men forth to die, And they were cruel;
And I have read how One was sold for silver—
How the tinkling of the money whispered in a traitor's ear
“Betrayal”—
I have learned all this, and I have learned how treacherous
Is silver, and how cold;

Are you all silver? Is there naught of gold
About you anywhere at all—
When you walk or talk?
In all you do?
What of your heart—
Is that of silver, too?

— Ruth M. Gibbs

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SCRIPTURE DISTORTED

It is true that anything can be proved by the Bible if one has no regard for truth and is willing to take a fragment of a verse here and another fragment of a verse there without regard for the context of either and put them together. Satan delights to misquote and misapply Scripture. It is one of his favorite methods of approach, and many of the fanatical demonstrations of our day find their inspiration in some such misuse of the Word of God.

One of the strange phenomena of my section of the country is snake handling. Newspapers occasionally carry stories of men and women who were killed by the bites of rattlesnakes which they were handling in religious meetings. I know nothing sadder than the way these poor people are deceived by Satan and misled by ignorant preachers. They base their strange practice of handling reptiles on the eighteenth verse of the sixteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, which declares: **“They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly things, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”** Just why they attempt to prove their piety by picking up snakes and not drinking poison is one of the things which nobody can understand or explain.

The message of the verse in Mark is plain in the light of its context. The Holy Spirit is saying that under certain circumstances when a man is doing God’s will and is in the plan and purpose of God, He will do the miraculous in order to preserve his life. There is no doubt that God does provide miraculous keeping and protecting power many times. The Book also promises elsewhere, **“He shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone”** (Matthew 4:6).

In connection with snake handling, it may be interesting to note this verse particularly. It is the Scripture which Satan quoted to Christ when he tempted Him to cast Himself down from the temple. It is a pity that the poor, deluded and misguided snake handlers do not read the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, where the accounts of our Lord’s temptation are given, for they will note that when Satan quoted this verse to the Saviour in tempting Him to do a spectacular but senseless thing, our Lord replied: **“It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God”** (Matthew 4:7). Snake handling is no proof of spirituality. It is an indication of a desire to show off. It is doubly to be regretted that such a thing is done in the name of piety and under the pretense of the worship of Almighty God. But how like Satan it is to use the serpent, which is the symbol of demonism in so many pagan religions of the world and the creature who was the instrument of man’s temptation and fall in the garden, as a means of discrediting faith in Almighty God!

Upon the Gospel’s sacred page
The gathered beams of ages shine;
And, as it hastens, every age
But makes its brightness more divine.

On mightier wing, in loftier flight,
From year to year does knowledge soar;
And, as it soars, the Gospel light
Becomes effulgent more and more.

More glorious still, as centuries roll,
New regions blest, new powers unfurled,
Expanding with the expanding soul,
Its radiance shall o'erflow the world,—

Flow to restore, but not destroy;
As when the cloudless lamp of day
Pours out its floods of light and joy,
And sweeps the lingering mists away.

— John Bowring

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THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

There are many pleas made these days for tolerance, but often tolerance is not the right word for that which is demanded. What is meant is compromise. Tolerance and compromise are not the same thing.

- This is tolerance: to grant to another the same rights which I claim for myself.
- This is compromise: to sacrifice heartfelt conviction in order that someone else may be pleased or in order to avoid a breach of peace.

Tolerance and compromise are not children of the same family. Tolerance springs from greatness of character, compromise from lack of it.

As is to be expected, the demand for compromise made in the name of tolerance comes from those who have no convictions of their own and therefore have nothing to sacrifice. To the man who believes the Bible, the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, His Virgin Birth, His Death and Resurrection are the very essentials of the Christian faith. These are the essential foundations upon which Christianity is founded. Without them, he believes, there can be no such thing as a Christian Church.

Into many of our denominations of late years, however, come men who do not hold to these fundamentals of the faith, and in many instances these so-called “modernists” or “liberals” have come very largely into control of the affairs of some of the denominations. They are the ones who in the name of tolerance demand that other men who possess convictions throw them overboard.

They, themselves, are the least tolerant of men. Having no conviction of their own, they have no regard for the conviction of others. They make their demands for the sake of “unity and peace.” Peace accepted at the price of compromise will never be a victorious peace, and peace which a church achieves by sacrifice of fundamental principles is defeat.

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself forever set up the standard when He said: “**He that is not with me is against me**” (Matthew 12:30). The man who is willing to sacrifice his convictions about the deity of the Lord Jesus on the altar of unity and peace is not tolerant. He is a compromiser.

Loud o'er my head though awful thunders roll,
And vivid lightnings flash from pole to pole
Yet 'tis Thy voice, my God, that bids them fly,
Thy arm directs those lightnings through the sky.
Then let the good Thy mighty Name revere,
And harden'd sinners Thy just vengeance fear.

— Sir Walter Scott

* * *

ENEMIES —FRIENDS

Pilate and Herod were enemies. That is, they were enemies until the question, of what to do with Jesus Christ came up. This was a problem which faced them both. Herod was the ruler of Galilee, and Jesus was a Galilean. Since Herod was in Jerusalem at the time, Pilate threw the problem into his lap. Herod gave it back to Pilate.

Both men realized that here was a delicate matter and one in which were possibly locked up forces of revolt and rebellion which neither of them wished to meet. On the basis of this mutual fear, and because both lacked the courage to assume responsibility and release an innocent man, they became friends. As Luke's Gospel puts it: “**The same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves**” (Luke 23:12).

Hatred also can bring together strange allies. When Christ hung on the Cross, the priests and leaders of Israel mocked Him, saying: “**If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross**” (Matthew 27:40). The cry was echoed by the thieves beside Him and by the lowest rabble from the underworld of Jerusalem gathered around the Cross. Strange fellowship between priests and thieves, and between the national leaders and the outcasts of the population. Yet allies they were, in the business of mocking a dying man.

Both classes hated Him, the rulers and religious leaders because He spoke as one having authority and challenged their abuse of place and power and religious influence; the other, because the purity and beauty of His life and the perfection of His character were a constant source of reproof to theirs. Human nature has not changed much since then. Men who have reason for differing among themselves, men who have strong dislikes the one for the other, still are willing to forget them to join together in attacking a mutual enemy.

The recent great war showed striking examples of nations with different political concepts and economic theories fighting side by side against a common enemy. In the realm of religion, liberal ministers who hate the old Gospel message of individual salvation by the grace of God have joined with the representatives of Communistic organizations and atheistic societies in attacking movements such as "Youth for Christ." Christ's words are still true: "**He that is not with me is against me**" (Matthew 12:30). When a man is not for Christ, is an enemy of the Gospel, he is quick to join hands with any other man who hates the same soul-stirring, heart-cleansing message and who is an enemy of the same Christ. When church members and drunkards, preachers and atheists, line up together, you can be pretty sure that Jesus Christ is on trial.

Thy foes might hate, despise, revile,
Thy friends unfaithful prove;
Unwearied in forgiveness still,
Thy heart could only love.

O give us hearts to love like Thee,
Like Thee, O Lord, to grieve
Far more for others' sins, than all
The wrongs that we receive.

One with Thyself, may every eye
In us, Thy brethren, see
That gentleness and grace that spring
From union, Lord, with Thee.

— Edward Denny

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RELIGION VERSUS CHRIST

Religion is often the greatest enemy of truth. Religion is based upon tradition, opinion, custom or superstition. These may all be wrong, founded upon falsehood, nurtured in prejudice and accepted in ignorance. We must not confuse Christianity with religion. That which a man lives by becomes his religion. A man's religion may be his avowed agnosticism. Christianity is the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Word of God and as personal Saviour and Lord.

Religion was often His worst enemy when He was here on earth. He was thrust out of the synagogue. The priests condemned Him and led the public demonstration before the house of Pilate which preceded His Crucifixion. It was the priests, the representatives of the religion of Israel, who mocked Him when He hung upon the Cross. He was the God of Israel, the incarnate Son of God; and yet these men who called themselves the priests and servants of the Most High were most bitter in their hatred of Him. Conditions have not changed greatly.

Today the worst enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ are sometimes those who stand in pulpits, nominally Christian. They bear denominational labels, and they may even occupy high official positions.

- They are denominationalists, and denominationalism is their religion.
- They are not interested in honoring Christ;
- They are interested in extending the influence of their own organization.
- In their preaching, they strip Him of His deity and rob Him of the honor which is His due.

His Name is rarely mentioned in their sermons, and when He is referred to, it is as to a man and not as to the ever-living Son of God, who was from the beginning with God and who is the God of the Ages.

The Almighty God demands that we have no other gods before Him. The Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, declared: **“He that is not with me is against me”** (Matthew 12:30). Of those who would follow Him, He demands the forsaking of father and mother and houses and lands and all human things for His sake. The love of the Lord Jesus Christ, the desire to do His will and to make Him known to others through the preaching of His Gospel, should be the first and deepest purpose of everyone who claims to be His follower. Denominational affiliation, organizations of any sort, are valuable only as they serve this purpose and contribute to this end.

O where are kings and empires now,
Of old that went and came?
But, Lord, Thy church is praying yet,
A thousand years the same.

We mark her goodly battlements,
And her foundations strong;
We hear within the solemn voice
Of her unending song.

Unshaken as eternal hills,
Immovable she stands,
A mountain that shall fill the earth,
A house not made with hands.

— A. Cleveland Coxe

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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