

THE WAY TO GOD

by

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CHAPTER THREE

THE TWO CLASSES

“Two men went up into the temple to pray” (Luke 17:10).

I NOW want to speak of two classes: First, those who do not feel their need of a Saviour, who have not been convinced of sin by the Spirit; and, second, those who are convinced of sin and cry, **“What must I do to be saved?”**

All inquirers can be ranged under two heads: they have either the spirit of the Pharisee, or the spirit of the publican.

If a man having the spirit of the Pharisee comes into an after-meeting, I know of no better portion of Scripture to meet his case than Romans 3:10: **“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.”** Paul is here speaking of the natural man. **“They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”** And in the Seventeenth verse and those which follow, we have, **“And the way of peace have they not known: there is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”**

Who Have Sinned?

Then observe the last clause of verse 22: **“For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”** Not part of the human family—but all—**“have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”**

Another verse which has been very much used to convict men of their sin is I John 1:8: **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”**

I remember that on one occasion we were holding meetings in an eastern city of forty thousand inhabitants; and a lady came and asked us to pray for her husband, whom she purposed bringing into the after-meeting.

I have traveled a good deal and met many pharisaical men; but this man was so clad in self-righteousness that you could not get the point of the needle of conviction in anywhere.

I said to his wife: "I am glad to see your faith; but we cannot get near him; he is the most self-righteous man I ever saw."

She said: "You must! My heart will break if these meetings end without his conversion."

She persisted in bringing him; and I got almost tired of the sight of him.

Asked Prayers for Himself

But towards the close of our meetings of thirty days, he came up to me and put his trembling hand on my shoulder. The place in which the meetings were held was rather cold, and there was an adjoining room in which only the gas had been lighted; and he said to me, "Can't you come in here for a few minutes?"

I thought that he was shaking from cold, and I did not particularly wish to go where it was colder.

But he said: "I am the worst man in the state of Vermont. I want you to pray for me."

I thought he had committed a murder, or some other awful crime; and I asked: "Is there any one sin that particularly troubles you?"

And he said: "My whole life has been a sin. I have been a conceited, self-righteous Pharisee. I want you to pray for me."

He was under deep conviction. Man could not have produced this result; but the Spirit had. About two o'clock in the morning light broke in upon his soul; and he went up and down the business street of the city and told what God had done for him; and has been a most active Christian ever since.

There are four other passages in dealing with inquirers, which were used by Christ Himself.

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

In Luke 13:3, we read: **"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."**

In Matthew 18, when the disciples came to Jesus to know who was to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, we are told that He took a little child and set him in the midst and said:

"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (18:1-3).

There is another important “**except**” in Matthew 5:20: “**Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.**”

A man must be made meet before he will want to go into the kingdom of God. I would rather go into the kingdom with the younger brother than stay outside with the elder. Heaven would be hell to such an one. An elder brother who could not rejoice at his younger brother’s return would not be “fit” for the kingdom of God. It is a solemn thing to contemplate; but the curtain drops and leaves him outside, and the younger brother within.

To him the language of the Saviour under other circumstances seems appropriate: “**Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you**” (Matthew 21:31).

Defending the Elder Brother

A lady once came to me and wanted a favor for her daughter. She said: “You must remember I do not sympathize with you in your doctrine.”

I asked: “What is your trouble?”

She said: “I think your abuse of the elder brother is horrible. I think he is a noble character.”

I said that I was willing to hear her defend him; but that it was a solemn thing to take up such a position; and that the elder brother needed to be converted as much as the younger. When people talk of being moral it is well to get them to take a good look at the old man pleading with his boy who would not go in.

But we will pass on now to the other class with which we have to deal. It is composed of those who are convinced of sin and from whom the cry comes as from the Philippian jailer, “**What must I do to be saved?**”

To those who utter this penitential cry there is no necessity to administer the law. It is well to bring them straight to the Scripture: “**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved**” (Acts 16:31).

Many will meet you with a scowl, and say: “I don’t know what it is to believe;” and though it is the law of heaven that they must believe, in order to be saved—yet they ask for something besides that. We are to tell them what, and where, and how, to believe.

In John 3:35 and 36 we read:

“**The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand. He that believeth on the Son HATH everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.**”

Now This Looks Reasonable

Man lost life by unbelief—by not believing God's word; and we got life back again by believing—by taking God at His word. In other words, we get up where Adam fell down.

He stumbled and fell over the stone of unbelief; and we are lifted up and stand upright by believing. When people say they cannot believe, show them chapter and verse, and hold them right to this one thing:

“Has God ever broken His promise for these six thousand years?”

The devil and men have been trying all the time and have not succeeded in showing that He has broken a single promise; and there would be a jubilee in hell today if one word that He has spoken could be broken. If a man says that he cannot believe, it is well to press him on that one thing.

I can believe God better today than I can my own heart. **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”** (Jeremiah 17:9).

I can believe God better than I can myself.

If you want to know the way of life, believe that Jesus Christ is a personal Saviour; cut away from all doctrines and creeds, and come right to the heart of the Son of God. If you have been feeding on dry doctrine, there is not much growth on that kind of food.

Doctrines are to the soul what the streets which lead to the house of a friend who has invited me to dinner are to the body. They will lead me there if I take the right one; but if I remain in the streets my hunger will never be satisfied.

Feeding on doctrines is like trying to live on dry husks; and lean indeed must the soul remain which partakes not of the Bread sent down from heaven.

Some ask: “How am I to get my heart warmed?”

It is by believing. You do not get power to love and serve God until you believe.

The apostle John says:

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (I John 5:9-12).

The Value of the Testimony of Men

Human affairs would come to a standstill if we did not take the testimony of men. How should we get on in the ordinary intercourse of life, and how would commerce get on, if we disregarded men's testimony? Things social and commercial would come to a dead-lock within forty-eight hours.

This is the drift of the apostle's argument here. **"If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater."**

God has borne witness to Jesus Christ. And if man can believe his fellow men who are frequently telling untruths and whom we are constantly finding unfaithful, why should we not take God at His word and believe His testimony?

Faith is a belief in testimony. It is not a leap in the dark, as some tell us. That would be no faith at all. God does not ask any man to believe without giving him something to believe. You might as well ask a man to see without eyes; to hear without ears; and to walk without feet—as to bid him believe without giving him something to believe.

When I started for California I procured a guide-book. This told me, that after leaving the state of Illinois, I should cross the Mississippi, and then the Missouri; get into Nebraska ; then go over the Rocky Mountains to the Mormon settlement at Salt Lake City, and proceed by the way of the Sierra Nevada into San Francisco. I found the guide book all right as I went along; and I should have been a miserable skeptic if, having proved it to be correct three-fourths of the way, I had said that I would not believe it for the remainder of the journey.

Suppose a man, in directing me to the post-office, gives me ten landmarks; and that, in my progress there, I find nine of them to be as he told me; I should have good reason to believe that I was coming to the post-office.

And if, by believing, I get a new life, and a hope, a peace, a joy, and a rest to my soul, that I never had before; if I get self-control, and find that I have a power to resist evil and to do good, I have pretty good proof that I am in the right road to the **"city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."**

And if things have taken place, and are now taking place, as recorded in God's Word, I have good reason to conclude that what yet remains will be fulfilled.

And yet people talk of doubting. There can be no true faith where there is fear. Faith is to take God at His word, unconditionally. There cannot be true peace where there is fear. **"Perfect love casteth out fear."**

How wretched a wife would be if she doubted her husband! and how miserable a mother would feel if after her boy had gone away from home she had reason, from his neglect, to question that son's devotion! True love never has a doubt.

Knowledge, Assent, Appropriation

There are three things indispensable to faith—knowledge, assent, and appropriation.

We must know God

“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom, Thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

Then we must not only give our assent to what we know, but we must lay hold of the truth. If a man simply give his assent to the plan of salvation, it will not save him: he must accept Christ as his Saviour. He must receive and appropriate Him.

Some say they cannot tell how a man’s life can be affected by his belief. But let some one cry out that some building in which we happen to be sitting, is on fire; and see how soon we should act on our belief and get out. We are all the time influenced by what we believe. We cannot help it. And let a man believe the record that God has given of Christ, and it will very quickly affect his whole life.

Take John 5:24. There is enough truth in that one verse for every soul to rest upon for salvation.

It does not admit the shadow of a doubt. **“Verily, verily”—which means truly, truly—“I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath—hath—everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”**

Now if a person really hears the word of Jesus and believes with the heart on God who sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, and lays hold of and appropriates this great salvation, there is no fear of judgment. He will not be looking forward with dread to the great white throne; for we read in I John 4:17: **“Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world.”**

If we believe, there is for us no condemnation, no judgment. That is behind us, and passed; and we shall have boldness in the day of judgment.

Had the Pardon in His Pocket

I remember reading of a man who was on trial for his life. He had friends with influence; and they procured a pardon for him from the king on condition that he was to go through the trial, and be condemned.

He went into court with the pardon in his pocket. The feeling ran very high against him, and the judge said that the court was shocked that he was so much unconcerned. But, when the sentence was pronounced, he pulled out the pardon, presented it, and walked out a free man.

He had been pardoned, and so have we.

Then let death come, we have nought to fear. All the grave-diggers in the world cannot dig a grave large enough and deep enough to hold eternal life. All the coffin-makers in the world cannot make a coffin large enough and tight enough to hold eternal life. Death has had his hand on Christ once, but never again.

Jesus said: **“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die”** (John 11:25, 26).

And in the Apocalypse we read that the risen Saviour said to John: **“I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore”** (Revelation 1:18).

Death cannot touch Him again.

We get life by believing. In fact we get more than Adam lost; for the redeemed child of God is heir to a richer and more glorious inheritance than Adam in Paradise could ever have conceived; yea, and that inheritance endures forever—it is inalienable.

I would much rather have my life hid with Christ in God than have lived in Paradise; for Adam might have sinned and fallen after being there ten thousand years. But the believer is safer, if these things become real to him.

Let us make them a fact, and not a fiction.

God has said it; and that is enough. Let us trust Him even where we cannot trace Him. Let the same confidence animate us that was in little Maggie, as related in the following simple but touching incident which I read in *The Bible Treasury*.

The Story of Maggie

“I had been absent from home for some days, and was wondering, as I again drew near the homestead, if my little Maggie, just able to sit alone, would remember me. To test her memory, I stationed myself where I could see her, but could not be seen by her, and called her name in the familiar tone, ‘Maggie!’

“She dropped her playthings, glanced around the room, and then looked down upon her toys.

“Again I repeated her name, ‘Maggie!’ when she once more surveyed the room; but, not seeing her father’s face, she looked very sad, and slowly resumed her employment.

“Once more I called, ‘Maggie!’ when, dropping her playthings, and bursting into tears, she stretched out her arms in the direction whence the sound proceeded, knowing that, though she could not see him, her father must be there, **FOR SHE KNEW HIS VOICE.**”

Now, we have power to see and to hear, and we have power to believe. It is all folly for the inquirers to take the ground that they cannot believe. They can, if they will.

But the trouble with most people is that they have connected FEELING with BELIEVING. NOW, feeling has nothing to do with believing. The Bible does not say— He that feeleth, or he that feeleth and believeth, hath everlasting life. Nothing of the kind. I cannot control my feelings. If I could, I should never feel ill, or have a headache or toothache. I should be well all the while. But I can believe God; and if we get our feet on that rock, let doubts and fears come and the waves surge around us, the anchor will hold.

The Right Kind of Faith

Some people are all the time looking at their faith. Faith is the hand that takes the blessing. I heard this illustration of a beggar.

Suppose you were to meet a man in the street whom you had known for years as being accustomed to beg; and you offered him some money, and he were to say to you: “I thank you, but I don’t want your money; I am not a beggar.”

“How is that?”

“Last night a man put a thousand dollars into my hands.”

“He did! How did you know it was good money?”

“I took it to the bank and deposited it and have got a bank book.”

“How did you get this gift?”

“I asked for alms; and after the gentleman talked with me he took out a thousand dollars in money and put it in my hand.”

“How do you know that he put it in the right hand?”

“What do I care about which hand, so that I have got the money?”

Many people are always thinking whether the faith by which they lay hold of Christ is the right kind—but what is far more essential is to see that we have the right kind of Christ.

Faith is the eye of the soul; and who would ever think of taking out an eye to see if it were the right kind so long as the sight was perfect? It is not my taste, but it is what I taste, that satisfies my appetite. So, dear friends, it is taking God at His word that is the means of our salvation. The truth cannot be made too simple.

There is a man living in the city of New York who has a home on the Hudson River. His daughter and her family went to spend the winter with him: and in the course of the season the scarlet fever broke out. One little girl was put in quarantine, to be kept separate from the rest.

Every morning the old grandfather used to go and bid his grandchild, “Good-by,” before going to his business. On one of these occasions the little thing took the old man by the hand, and, leading him to a corner of the room, without saying a word she pointed to the floor where she had arranged some small crackers so they would spell out, “Grandpa, I want a box of paints.”

He said nothing. On his return home he hung up his overcoat and went to the room as usual: when his little grandchild without looking to see if her wish had been complied with took him into the same corner, where he saw spelled out in the same way, “Grandpa, I thank you for the box of paints.”

The old man would not have missed gratifying the child for anything. That was faith.

Faith is taking God at His word; and those people who want some token are always getting into trouble. We want to come to this: GOD SAYS IT—LET US BELIEVE IT.

But some say, “**Faith is the gift of God.**”

So is the air; but you have to breathe it. So is bread; but you have to eat it. So is water; but you have to drink it. Some are wanting a miraculous kind of feeling. That is not faith. “**Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**” (Romans 10:17). That is whence faith comes. It is not for me to sit down and wait for faith to come stealing over me with a strange sensation; but it is for me to take God at His word. And you cannot believe, unless you have something to believe. So take the Word as it is written, and appropriate it, and lay hold of it.

In John 6:47, 48 we read: “**Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life. I am that Bread of life.**”

There is the bread right at hand. Partake of it. I might have thousands of loaves within my home, and as many hungry men in waiting. They might assent to the fact that the bread was there; but unless they each took a loaf and commenced eating, their hunger would not be satisfied. So Christ is the Bread of heaven; and as the body feeds on natural food, so the soul must feed on Christ.

Faith Illustrated

If a drowning man sees a rope thrown out to rescue him he must lay hold of it; and in order to do so he must let go everything else.

If a man is sick he must take the medicine—for simply looking at it will not cure him.

A knowledge of Christ will not help the inquirer, unless he believes in Him, and takes hold of Him, as his only hope. The bitten Israelites might have believed that the serpent was lifted up; but unless they had looked they would not have lived (Numbers 21: 6-9).

I believe that a certain line of steamers will convey me across the ocean, because I have tried it; but this will not help another man who may want to go, unless he acts upon my knowledge.

So a knowledge of Christ does not help us unless we act upon it.

That is what it is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to act on what we believe.

As a man steps on board a steamer to cross the Atlantic, so we must take Christ and make a commitment of our souls to Him; and He has promised to keep all who put their trust in Him.

To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, is simply to take Him at His word.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

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