

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SECOND-HAND.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 28TH, 1899,

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, February 12th, 1882.

"Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?"—John xviii. 34.

I EXPLAINED, this morning,* why our Saviour put that question to Pilate. The Roman governor had asked him, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" And Jesus as good as said to him, "Have you, of your own knowledge, seen anything in me that looks like setting up to be a king in opposition to Cæsar? You intend, by asking me that question, to enquire whether I have led a rebellion against your government, or the imperial authority which you represent. Now, has there been anything which you have observed which would have led you to make this enquiry, or do you only ask it because of what the Jews have been saying in their enmity against me?" You will see, dear friends, that our Lord asked this question in order that he might get from Pilate's own lips the acknowledgment that he had not seen any sign of sedition or rebellion in him, and that it might be proved that the charge had been brought to Pilate by those outside, and had not come from the Roman governor himself.

We will, now, forget Pilate for a while, for I want to use this question in two ways with reference to ourselves. First, I shall utilize it as *a warning against second-hand cavils at Christ and his gospel*. Some people have a large stock of them, and we might say to each one of these cavillers, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?" Then, in the second place, I shall use the text as *a warning against all second-hand religion*, pressing this question home upon each one who speaks up for Christ, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?"

I. We will begin with the opponents of the Lord Jesus, and consider our text, first, as a WARNING AGAINST SECOND-HAND CAVILS AT CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL.

There are a great many people in the world who really do not know

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,644, "Our Lord's first appearance before Pilate."

why they oppose religion; and if you ask them the reason, they repeat some old bit of scandal, some stale slander upon Jesus and his cross, and they give that as their answer. I firmly believe that there are thousands, who are ranked among the opposers of the gospel, who have not anything to say against Christ of their own knowledge; but others have told them something or other, and they go on repeating and reiterating the old exploded obsolete objections that have been demolished thousands of times, and I suppose they and others of their kind will keep on doing the same thing right to the end of time.

As soon as ever Jesus Christ's gospel was launched upon the world's sea, it had to encounter opposing winds, and storms, and tempests. Like a scarred veteran, the gospel has had battle after battle to fight. In our Lord's own day, it was opposed most vigorously. His apostles found that, wherever they went, their feet were dogged by those who railed at Jesus and his Word; and when the apostles had all fallen asleep, the early churches found that they had need of an order of men who became the apologists for the gospel, and who bravely stood up to defend it against the attacks of divers heathen philosophers, and sceptics, and heretics who arose wherever the truth was preached. Everywhere, there was opposition to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his servants girded up their loins to do battle for him and for his truth.

That great campaign has continued even down to this day, and there is this very remarkable fact about it, that, at the present moment, most of the objections that are brought against the gospel are those that were answered and silenced some hundreds of years ago; and, even when they appeared, all those centuries back, they were then only reproductions of some older objections which had been answered, and, as the defenders of the faith thought, had been trampled out, like sparks of fire trodden under foot. But, somehow, an ill wind has begun to blow again, and the fire, which some hoped was finally extinguished, has burned up once more. Originality in scepticism has almost ceased to be; we scarcely ever hear anything fresh in the way of heresy nowadays. We are troubled with the very errors which our forefathers answered a hundred years ago; yet the adversaries of the truth go on cleaning and sharpening again their blunted shafts, that they may once more shoot them at the great shield of faith, which is impervious to their puny assaults, for it can quench even the most fiery darts of the devil himself. The modern arrows of scepticism will be broken against that glorious shield, yet they will probably be gathered up by another generation that will follow the present one, and the heretics and objectors in the future will do just as their fathers did before them. I want, at this time, to put to any caviller whom I may be addressing, the question of our Lord to Pilate, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?"

And, first, I ask you to observe that there are many unreasonable prejudices. *Some persons have great prejudices against the Bible.* I will not repeat what they say; but I should like to ask every person who thinks ill of this blessed Book, "Have you read the Bible through, and read it thoroughly? Have you studied it? Are your

objections your own? Come, now; did you make them yourself?" It is almost always found that objections are like the axe the young prophet was using, they are borrowed; and often, they are objections against a Book which has not been read at all, and which has not been allowed to exercise its own influence upon the heart and the judgment of the person who is prejudiced against it to his own hurt. Other people have told men such-and-such things, so they shut the Book, and refuse to look into it for themselves.

There are other people who are *prejudiced against public worship*. You see, I am starting at the very beginning, those matters with regard to religion which are elementary. Of course, we are told that we shut ourselves up on a Sunday in these dreary buildings of ours, and here we sit, in a horrible state of misery, listening to the most awful twaddle that ever was taught, our singing being nothing better than droning, and the whole of our worship being something very terrible! If I were to read to you the descriptions of an English Sabbath which I have sometimes seen in newspapers, they might make you almost weep tears of blood to think that we poor souls should suffer so much as we do; only you know that we are altogether unconscious of any such suffering. We really have been under the notion that we very much enjoyed ourselves while worshipping the Lord in his house. Many of us have the idea that the Sabbath is the happiest day in all the week to us, and that, when we hear the gospel preached, it is sweeter than music to us, and makes our hearts leap within us for very joy. Of course, we are very much obliged to our friends for telling us how dull and how unhappy we are, and for wishing us to be in a better condition. We can only say that, not being enabled to perceive any of these sorrows, we would advise them to retain their pity, and exercise it upon themselves, for they certainly need it far more than we do. To any of you who make remarks of the kind I have indicated, I say,—Do your difficulties concerning public worship really arise out of your attending the house of God,—out of your hearing the gospel preached,—out of your joining in the songs and praises of God's people? Oh, no! it is those people who never come to our services who believe the Sabbath to be dull, the house of God to be dreary, and the preaching of the gospel to be a monotonous sound from which every sensible man would escape. I put the question of my text to every person who is prejudiced against the Bible, and prejudiced against our public worship in God's house, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?"

Sometimes, *the prejudice concerns the preacher*. I will not say that it is so about myself; though I have had in my time more than my fair share of it. "Hear him?" says one; "I would not go across the road to listen to such a fellow." Many have said that, and the preacher, whoever he may be, is condemned without a hearing. If the objector were asked to give a reason for his prejudice, he might answer by quoting the old lines,—

"I do not like you, Dr. Fell;
The reason why, I cannot tell;
But this I know, and know full well,—
I do not like you, Dr. Fell."

I should like to say to everybody who is prejudiced against any servant of Christ, "Sayest thou this of thyself?" Those absurd stories about the preacher,—did you really hear them yourself, or did somebody tell you them? Would you like to be judged by the mere idle tittle-tattle of the street or of the newspapers? And if you would not, then be an honest, reasonable man, and at least give the servant of God a hearing before you condemn him or his message; and, take my word for it, the most-abused preacher is very likely to be the very man whom God will bless the most. Not the one who is most praised, but the one who is most censured by the world, is probably the man who has been most faithful to his Master and to the gospel committed to his charge. At any rate, be honest enough to reply to the question which our Lord put to Pilate, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?"

There is a remark sometimes made, and I fear it is a very common one, "Oh, I would not be a Christian, I would not be religious, for *it makes men so dreadfully miserable!*" Now, friend, sayest thou this of thyself, or did somebody else tell it thee? Come, now, you say that religion is such a miserable thing; have you tried it for yourself? Have you experienced the misery that comes out of prayer,—out of faith,—out of repentance,—out of love to God,—out of being pardoned,—out of having a good hope of heaven? Have you ever proved what that dreadful misery is? I think, if you had ever really tested these things for yourself, your verdict would be the very reverse, and you would join with us in singing the lines that express what many of us most firmly believe about this matter,—

"'Tis religion that can give
Sweetest pleasures while we live;
'Tis religion must supply
Solid comfort when we die."

Yet you go on repeating that slander upon religion though you cannot prove it to be true, and might easily learn its falseness. Do let me appeal to you. Had you a godly mother? "Yes," you say, "and it was her life that prevents my being altogether an unbeliever." I thought so; but, if I remember her aright, she was a quiet good soul who, in her home, tried to make everybody happy; and though she had not much pleasure in her son, for he was wayward and wilful, yet there was no unkindness on her lip, the law of love always ruled the house. She was a weak and feeble creature, who derived but slender gratification from any of the outward enjoyments of life; but she had a deep, secret spring of peace and joy which kept her calm, and quiet, and happy; and now that she has gone to be with God, she has left a gleam of sunlight still behind in her sweet memory. You did not get from your mother, nor from other godly friends, your belief that religion makes men miserable; and I venture to say that, so far as you have had any actual personal observation of it, you have been inclined to come to quite the opposite verdict, and to confess that, though you do not know how it is, yet, somehow or other, godliness does give, to the people who possess it, peace of mind, and happiness of heart, and usefulness of life.

There is another slander that is spread abroad very widely, and that is, *that the doctrine of the grace of God*—the doctrine which we try to preach from this pulpit,—has no sanctifying effect,—that, on the contrary, it is *likely to lead people into sin*,—that if we preach, “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life,” and do not preach up good works as the way of salvation, it is clear that such teaching will lead people into sin. Clear, is it? It is not so to me; but, my friend, will you answer this question, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?” Is it not a matter of history that there never have been stricter-living men than the Puritans? What is the great quarrel against John Calvin himself but that, when he ruled in Geneva, he was too stern and too exacting in his requirements? It is an odd thing,—is it not?—that these doctrines of grace should, on the one hand, make men too strict as a matter of fact, and yet that the wiseacres who object to them should say that these doctrines are likely to lead into sin those who accept them? It is not found to be so by those who believe them. Let me again appeal to any candid objector. My dear sir, did you ever prove what it is to believe in the great love of God to you,—that, for the sake of his dear Son, out of pure, unmerited grace, he has chosen you, and saved you, and appointed you to eternal life? Did you ever believe that, and then feel, as a natural consequence, that you would go and live in sin? I know that you never did, but that it was quite the reverse. “Here,” said some boys to a companion, “we are going to rob an orchard; come along with us, Jack.” “No,” said he, “my father would not approve of such a thing.” “But your father is very fond of you, and never beats you as our fathers do.” “Yes,” said the boy, “my father loves me very much, and I love him very much, and that is the reason why I am not going to rob the orchard, and so to grieve him.” Now, you believe in the beating of the boys by the rod of the law, do you not? And we, on the other hand, feel that, because God loves us, and will in his infinite mercy continue to love us, therefore we must keep out of sin as much as we possibly can. We cannot do that horrible thing which would grieve his blessed Spirit. So I ask you, as truthful men, not to repeat that old slander concerning the doctrines of grace leading to sin, until you have really had some reason to assert it because of what you yourselves have witnessed in the lives of Christian people. Do not say it again until you can truly say it from your own experience or observation; do not repeat it simply because others tell it to you.

Yes, and there are some who say that *there is no power in prayer*,—that we may pray, if we like, but that we cannot change the purposes of God,—that the laws of nature are fixed and immutable, and, therefore, to pray is a piece of absurdity. “Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?” I will speak personally to you. Did you ever try to pray? Did you ever put this matter to the test,—whether God will hear prayer or no? I do not think you can have put it to a fair test, and I would like you to see whether God will or will not hear even your prayer if you cry to him. If any say to me, “God does not hear prayer,” I have scarcely the patience to give them an answer. I live from day to day crying to God

for this or that favour which I receive as certainly and as constantly as ever my sons had their meals when they sat at my table. I knew how to give good gifts to my children, and I know that my Heavenly Father gives good gifts to me. My evidence, of course, is only that of one man, and it may not suffice to convince others, though many of you here could add your testimony to mine; but I should like all objectors just to give prayer a fair trial before they are quite so sure about the inefficacy of it. Let them-see whether real prayer, offered in the name of Jesus, will not be heard even in their case. Certain I am that there is not anywhere on the face of the globe a praying man who does not bear this testimony,—that God hears him. And if any say, “We do not pray, and do not believe that God hears prayer,” what evidence have you to bring? You are out of court altogether, for you know nothing about the matter; but the man who does pray, and then says, “God hears me,” is the man to be a witness, and the one who has a right to be heard. I have told you, more than once, what the Irishman said when there were five witnesses to prove that he had committed murder. He said to the judge, “You must not condemn me on their evidence; there are only five people here who saw me do it, but I can bring fifty people who did not see me do it;” but that was no evidence at all; and, in like manner, there are many who say, “You bring a certain number of people, who pray, to prove that God hears them; but we can bring ten times as many, who do not pray, and who do not get heard.” What has that to do with the matter? Where is the evidence? You say it not of yourself, but merely repeat, second-hand, what has been said by others, so often, and so foolishly, that it sickens one to hear it.

It is beginning to be questioned, in many quarters, nowadays, whether there is any real effect produced by prayer, except that of exciting certain pious emotions in the breasts of those who pray. This is a very pretty statement! We ought to be extremely obliged to those superior persons who allow that even so much may be done! I wonder they do not assert that prayer is ridiculous, or hypocritical, or immoral. Their moderation puts us under obligations. And yet I do not know: when I look again at their admission, I thank them for nothing, for they as good as call us fools. Do they think that we perform a useless exercise merely for the sake of exciting pious emotions? We must be grievous idiots if we can receive benefit from a senseless function. We are not willing to whistle to the wind for the sake of the exercise. We should not be content to go on praying to a God who could be proved to be both deaf and dumb. We have still some little common sense left, despite what our judicious friends consider to be our fanaticism. We are sure that we obtain answers to prayer. Of this fact I am certain, and I solemnly declare that I have received of the Lord that which I have asked at his hands. I am not alone in such testimony, for I am associated with multitudes of men and women who bear witness to the same fact, and declare that they sought the Lord, and he heard them. Take care, brethren and sisters, to record all instances of answered prayer, so as to leave this unbelieving generation without excuse. Accumulate the facts, and demonstrate the grand truth. Multiply

the testimonies, till even the philosophers are obliged to admit both the phenomena and the deduction rightly drawn from them.

There is one other gross slander to which I would reply, and that is, a saying that goes round among troubled consciences—*that Christ will not receive sinners*,—that the very guilty cannot be saved,—that Christ can forgive and deliver up to a certain point; but if you get beyond that, he is no longer willing to pardon. Dear hearer, has that foolish and wicked notion entered thy head? Then, I ask thee, “Sayest thou this thing of thyself?” Didst thou ever prove it to be true? Hast thou ever sought his face? Hast thou cried to him for mercy? “Yes,” you say, “I have.” And then, further, have you thrown yourself at his feet, trusting him to save you, and have you been refused? I know you have not; there was never a sinner yet, who fell down before him, and determined to lie there and perish if he did not speak a word of mercy, to whom the Lord has not, sooner or later, spoken the grace-word which has sent that poor sinner on his way rejoicing. I would at least like you to go and see whether Christ will receive you or not, before you say that he will not do so. Say not that the door of his mercy is shut, but go in while it is still open. If he casts you out, then he will have broken his word, for he has said, “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” Do not give him the lie, and say that he will cast you out till you have yourself proved that it is so; and that, I know, will never be the case. I am afraid that there is another being who has been whispering that vile insinuation into your ear, and he is your arch-enemy, who is seeking your destruction, and therefore he has come, and told you this falsehood against the infinitely-loving and gracious Saviour. Believe him not; but come even now, and put your trust in Jesus, and you shall find that he will give to you eternal life.

I have thus examined the question of my text with reference to the opponents of the gospel, and I shall now leave that part of the subject, praying the Holy Spirit to bless it to all whom it may concern.

II. Now, in the second place, I am going to speak briefly, but with much earnestness, to the many here present who are friends of the gospel, but who have only a SECOND-HAND RELIGION, if they have any at all. I want to have a word with you, dear friends, about this matter. You and I have been talking a great deal about Christ. Now, have we been simply quoting what others have said? Have we been making extracts from other people's experience; or is what we have said something that we can say of ourselves, and not what others have told us?

For, brethren, first, *a second-hand testimony for Christ is a powerless thing*. Take a man—as I am afraid is often done,—with no grace in his heart, and send him to Oxford or Cambridge, with the view of making him a parson; teach him the sciences, and languages, and mathematics, and give him a degree. His friends want to get a living for him, and the bishop's chaplain proceeds to examine him. The first question ought to be, Is this young man a Christian? Is he truly converted? Does he know the Lord? Does he understand in his own soul the things he is going to preach to others? For, if he does

not, what good can he do in the Christian ministry? Perhaps he is sent to a school of theology, to learn the various systems of doctrine. He must read the judicious Hooker, he must study Jeremy Taylor, he must take lessons in elocution and rhetoric. Then, possibly, his friends buy him some lithographed sermons that he may read, and they get him some books, that he may make extracts from them to put into the sermons he preaches. Suppose that man is all the while unconverted, suppose that he does not know anything about the working of the grace of God in his own soul, what is the good of him as a teacher of others? No good at all; at any rate, at the best, he may be only as good as one of those newly-invented phonographs which can repeat what is spoken into them. This man can read out what he has selected from other books; but that is all. We will suppose that he is a very decent sort of fellow,—an amiable gentleman, well-instructed, well-behaved, and so on; but all that he has to say is what other people have told him.

But now put into that man's pulpit, only for one Lord's-day, a preacher who has known what it is to feel the burden of sin, and to have it removed by faith in Jesus. Let him begin to speak to the people, in downright earnest, about the pangs and sorrows of true repentance; let him tell them about their need of the new birth, and about his experience of obtaining that great blessing; and how, by sovereign grace, he was brought out of the darkness into the light, and even from death to life. Let that man be moved to speak of the peace of pardon through the precious blood, and of the joys of heaven laid up for all believers, and then the people will wake up, I will warrant you. This is something very different from the preaching to which they have been accustomed, and they will soon feel the power of it.

Yet the Lord sometimes uses even a preacher who does not himself understand the truth he proclaims. I know a man, who went and heard a certain minister preach, or rather, read a sermon, and it was such a good one that the hearer's conscience was smitten by it. The discourse was about the new birth; and, the next morning, the man went off to the clergyman, and said, "Sir, I want you to explain this matter further to me, for I am dreadfully distressed by what you preached last night." What, think you, did this preacher say? He said, "Well, Jonathan, I am sure I never meant to cause anybody any uneasiness; what was it that gave you such trouble?" "Why," replied he, "it was that part of the sermon where you said that we must be born again." So the preacher said, "Well, here is the discourse. You see, by the dates upon it, that I have used it thirteen times before, so I could not have made it with any special view to your case. I am very sorry, indeed, that it caused you any discomfort, and I will never preach it again if it brings people into trouble in this style." That was all the help the poor man could get from the parson, so he went out, and found a true servant of God, who knew the truth himself, and was not a second-hand retailer of it, and, through conversation with him, and prayer, and the reading of the Scriptures, he was brought into peace and liberty. I need hardly tell you that he does not go to hear that second-hand preacher now;

he listens to a far humbler minister, who, nevertheless, preaches what he has tasted and handled of the good Word of life. Now, if any of you are going to be Sunday-school teachers, or street-preachers, do not begin to talk about what somebody else has told you. Go and say what you yourself know, of a heart first broken by the power of the Holy Spirit, and then bound up by the application of the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tell out your message, in a living way from the heart to the heart, or else your hearers will feel that there is no power about it, however nicely you put the truth, and however sweetly you describe it. There is all the difference between personal testimony to the truth and a parrot-like repetition of it, that there is between the living and the dead. Let us only bear witness to what we do really know, and then no one will need to ask us what our Lord asked Pilate, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?"

Now, further, the same thing is true *with regard to professors*. We have many friends who come, at different times, to join the church, and their stories greatly vary. Some who come to see me cannot say much, and they think that I shall be very dissatisfied with them because they make a great muddle of their narrative, and there is not much that comes out after all. But the people with whom I am least satisfied are those who reel off their yarn by the yard; they have it all ready to repeat, and everything is arranged as prettily as possible. Yes; and as I listen to it, I know that someone has told them what to say, and they have learned it all for me to hear. But I like far better the testimony that I have to pick out in little bits, but which I know comes fresh from the heart of the trembling convert. Sometimes, it costs the poor soul a tear or a real good cry, and I have to go round about in all manner of ways to get hold of the story at all; but that shows that it is true, and that the man never borrowed it. I like to hear the experience of a believer, when he comes straight out of the world and out of the ways of sin, to confess his faith in Christ. He does not know anything about the terms that Christian people use. He has not learned our phrases; and it is a great delight to hear it all fresh and new. Yet it is always the same story in all the essential parts of it. However strangely he may narrate it, it tallies with that of others in the main points. Take the experience of a Christian man who has been brought up in the sanctuary from his childhood, and extract the pith and marrow of it. Now take the experience of a man who has been a horse-racer, a drunkard, a swearer, but who has been truly converted, and extract the pith of that. Talk to a peer of the realm who has become an heir of the kingdom of heaven, and take the pith of his experience. Now get a chimney-sweep who has been brought to the Lord, and get the pith of his experience; put them all side by side, and you will not know one from the other. There are always the same essential marks,—death, birth, life, food,—Christ in the death, the life, the birth, the food,—repentance, faith, joy, the work of the Spirit of God. But it is very sweet to hear the story told in the many different ways in which the converts tell it. The true child of grace is ever the same in heart, although the outward appearance may continually vary.

But, dear friends, whenever you begin to make a profession of religion, take care that you never profess more than you really possess. Go just as far as you can go yourself, by the grace of God, and do not repeat what others tell you. To borrow another man's experience is dishonest. If it is not mine, how dare I say that it is? It is also very apt to be self-deceptive, for a man may repeat another person's experience until he really thinks he did pass through it himself, just as a man may repeat a lie until it almost ceases to be a lie because he himself gets to believe what at first he knew was not true. That borrowing of the experience of others is usually unavailing with those who have had much to do with men, for we who do know the Lord, and are familiar with his people, very readily trip up those who only repeat what they have learned. Freemasons recognize one another by various grips and signs. A man may, perhaps, find out one of the grips, but he does not learn them all, and at last he gets caught, and people say to him, "You are pretending to be what you really are not." Take, again, a man's handwriting; someone may imitate my writing for a long while, but, at last, he does not copy some peculiar dash, or stroke, or mark, which is characteristic of my style, and those who know say, "That is not Mr. Spurgeon's writing; it is a forgery." So there is a something—a sort of freemasonry—about Christianity. People may learn some of our grips, and signs, and passwords; but, by-and-by, they make a blunder, and we say, "Ah! you are an impostor." They may try to write after the fashion of a child of God, and they may make the pot-hooks, and hangers, and straight strokes; but, as they get on further, there is a something or other that comes out in the long run, which proves that they are only copyists after all. Therefore, I say to you, dear friends,—Do not attempt to repeat what others have told you about experimental godliness, but let your testimony only consist of what you can truly say out of your own heart and soul.

Let this be the case also *with regard to every man, whether he makes a profession of religion or not.* May God grant that all that we think we know, we may really know in our own souls, and not have because we have borrowed it from others! In religion, proxies and sponsors are altogether out of place. I pray you never to be guilty of that horrible blasphemy—for I think that it is nothing less than that,—of standing up before God, and promising that a child shall keep his commandments, and walk in the same all the days of its life. Remember that, in religion, there are certain things that must be personal. For instance, every man must be himself born; another person cannot be born for you. In like manner, "Ye must be born again,"—personally, for yourself. There is no possibility of another person experiencing that new birth for you. If a man lives, he must eat for himself. You cannot take my meals for me; it is I myself who must eat them. And we must eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ by faith, each one for himself or herself; nobody can do it for another. In daily life, each man must be clothed for himself. You may wear silk and satin, you may be dressed in the best broad-cloth; but you cannot be clothed on my behalf, I must be myself dressed, or else go naked. So must each man put on the robe of

Christ's righteousness, or be naked to his shame before God. Every man must repent of his own sin,—make confession of his own sin,—believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for himself,—love God for himself,—obey the Lord for himself; and there is no possibility of any other person, by any means, doing this for you. There must be personal godliness, or else there is no godliness at all. So, whenever you feel inclined to say for yourself, "I believe that I am a Christian; I believe this and I believe that;" let this question come home to you, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?"

And, lastly, brethren and sisters in Christ, let me utter a word specially for your ears. *Never get, in your prayers, or in your talk, an inch beyond your actual experience.* Our calling is a very high one; and one of the most serious difficulties in the way of ever attaining its greatest height is the impression that we have reached it when we have not. My own impression is, that some brethren might have been well-nigh perfect if they had not thought that they were so already, but they missed the blessing through that very thought. Many a man might have become wise, but he imagined that he had learned wisdom, so he never really was wise. You know that, if you see a man who thinks that he is wise, you say to yourself, "How very foolish he is!" And you speak truly, too. The doorstep of wisdom is a consciousness of ignorance, and the gateway of perfection is a deep sense of imperfection. Paul was never so nearly perfect as when he cried, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But if he had sat down, and said, "I have attained, and am already perfect," then would he have been in a fair way of missing the blessing of God. No, dear brothers or sisters, say no more than you can justify. There are many who do that in business; mind that you do not so act in spiritual matters. Look at that shop-window: what a wonderful display! Now go inside the shop; why, there is nothing there! No, for the man has all his goods in the window. You would at once say to yourself, if he wanted to deal with you, "I shall not trust him very deeply." Ah! and do we not know some who, spiritually, have all their goods in the window? It is a grand thing to have a great stock in reserve. Never mind if it is in the cellar, where you cannot yourself see it; it is none the worse for being out of sight.

The great thing for all Christians is to have a good background, something behind that is real; so that, if you pray, or if you speak to another, you will be prepared to back it up. I remember trying to be a blessing to a very shrewd boy in a Sunday-school class when first I knew the Lord. I told him the gospel: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Then he asked me a straight question, "Teacher, have you believed?" I replied, "Yes, I hope so." He said, "Don't you know, teacher? You ought to." "Yes," I answered, "yes, I do know; I have believed in Jesus." "Well, teacher," he enquired next, "have you been baptized?" I replied, "Yes, I have." "Then," said he, "teacher, you are saved." I said, "I hope so." "But," he insisted, "you *are*." Just so, and I found that I must say so, too, and that I must not use even Christ's words unless I meant to back them up by my own consistent

character; otherwise I was throwing suspicion on my Master's veracity. May the Lord bring us up to this point of Christian honesty,—that, when we cannot truthfully say a thing from our own experience, we will be honest enough to resolve, "I shall not say it till I *can* truly say it." When you think of a verse of a hymn, and it is a little in advance of your own position, wait till you come up to that point. There are numbers of hymns that I laid by, in that fashion, years ago. I wished that I could sing them, yet they seemed to stick in my throat, and I could not. But my throat has been cleared a good deal lately, and I have been obliged at last to feel that I must have those very hymns, for they have become true to my soul, and have made my experience a very happy one. Do not be in too much of a hurry in spiritual things any more than in temporal affairs. If you cannot eat meat, stick to your milk. Milk is for babes, so keep to milk till you outgrow it. You will choke with that tough bit of meat; you had better leave it for somebody else. Do not find fault with it; it is good for strong men, they do not want to be always drinking milk. Do not deny the strong man his meat, but let him have as much as he likes of it; as for yourself, if you are a babe in grace, keep to your milk diet. "As newborn babes, desire the unadulterated milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." But, in all your testimony, do not go beyond what is actually true to yourself, and often let my text lay its hand upon your shoulder, and repeat this searching enquiry, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee?"

May God grant a rich blessing to you all, dear friends, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

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