

A Catechism for the Proud

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that all gifts and advantages, whether physical, intellectual, or spiritual, are received from God and therefore pride in them is misplaced.

Scripture: James 1:17, Acts 17:25, Deuteronomy 8:18, Psalm 115:1, Nehemiah 9:17

Topics: "Humility", "Divine Grace", "Pride"

Description

In "A Catechism for the Proud," C.H. Spurgeon addresses the dangers of pride within the Christian community, especially among those gifted with talents and spiritual gifts. He emphasizes that all advantages—physical, intellectual, or spiritual—are gifts from God and should lead believers to humility and gratitude rather than boasting. Drawing from 1 Corinthians 4:7, Spurgeon calls Christians to recognize God's hand in all things and to foster unity and lowliness of spirit.

Transcript

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"For who makes you to differ from another? And what have you that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?" 1 Corinthians 4:7.

THE Corinthian Church was exceedingly gifted. Perhaps no other Church of the period had in it so many persons of education and talent. The Apostle says of them, "In everything you are enriched, in all utterance and in all knowledge, so that you come behind in no gift." Alas, its Divine Grace was not in proportion to its gifts and, consequently, a proud spirit was developed in the Church which manifested itself in divisions and contentions. Parties were formed. One said, "I am of Paul," and probably prided himself on the depth of his thought. "I am of Apollos," said another, and probably gloried in the brilliant eloquence of his language. "I am of Cephas," cried a third, and boasted in the plain, unvarnished practicality of Peter's teaching.

"You are all wrong," exclaimed a fourth, "and I will have nothing to do with you. I am of no sect and no system, for I am of Christ and exclude you all because I wish to promote love and unity." Party leaders are sure to be found where there is a party spirit—and party spirit is a fungus which grows upon the dunghill of conceit! The Apostle grieved greatly to see that the brethren had no discipline, could not keep rank and were not content to work under anybody or with one another. He lamented that each man wanted to be foremost and he was so ashamed of them that he thanked God that he had baptized none of them!

Probably the adherents of the various parties had only used their leaders' names to make a sect in order that they, themselves, might be made the more prominent. They gloried in men that other men might glory in them. From all this may we, as a Church, be preserved! May God grant that whatever gifts and talents we may have, we may always be filled by His good Spirit so abundantly that we may walk in all lowliness of spirit and abide in hearty, loving union with each other. Our Apostle displayed great wisdom in his rebuke of the Corinthians. He did not cry down their talents. He did not say that it was altogether a thing of no value to be able to argue, to be able to preach, to be able to discern spirits, or to be able to speak with tongues.

This is a mode of procedure which suggests itself very readily, but it is not a good one. You very seldom lower a man's opinion of himself by undervaluing his gifts. He knows that you are treating him unfairly and he, naturally, resents the injustice and becomes more proud than ever. He remembers the fable of the fox and the sour grapes and is fully persuaded that you only decry his abilities because you do not possess them yourself! Pride is not to be cured by injustice! One devil will not drive out another! Pride often finds fuel for itself in that which was intended to dampen its flame. The man who is undervalued feels that if his gifts are despised by others. He knows their value, if nobody else does, and so he has another reason for considering himself to be a person of superior abilities.

The Apostle follows a far more sensible course—he does not deny the talent, but asks where it comes from! He does not irritate, but cuts deep while he asks one or two questions which strike at the very root of self-esteem. In effect these questions were as follows, "If you are a superior person and a man fit to be a teacher of others, from where did you obtain this superiority? If you are different from the common people, who makes you to differ? If you are a person of remarkable gifts, how did you come to possess them? If all your distinguishing abilities are gifts from God, why do you boast? Why do you exalt yourself? What have you which you have not received? If you received everything as the gift of Divine charity, why do you glory as if you had not received it?"

These questions may well hide pride from man and I pray that such may be the result upon our minds while at this time we pursue the train of thought suggested by the text. To this end we shall need the assistance of the Holy Spirit, for nothing is more difficult than to overcome our self-conceit. Pride takes a thousand forms and hides itself under number-

less disguises. Many talk of lowliness, but humility still remains among the rarest of jewels! Many take pride in what they call having no pride about them—it is very easy to be proud of not being proud—and perhaps some Brothers and Sisters here are in that condition. Perhaps we, ourselves, have said, "No, we are not such fools as to boast." That is not boasting, I suppose?

"I could not be vainglorious," says one. "I know too much of my unworthiness to give myself airs and ride the high horse," says another. Quite so, my Friends, and yet at the bottom of such a speech there may lie a world of self-confidence! In fact, your humble confessions may be only another form of blowing your own trumpets. It is easy to be proud while sneering at pride and to glorify self while denouncing all self-exultation. There was great truth in Plato's observation when Diogenes trampled on his valuable carpets and said, "I trample upon the pride of Plato?" "Yes," said Plato, "and with greater pride."

There are some who are never more ostentatious than when they cry down all display and never more insolent than when opposing insolence. Pride is a subtle serpent-like vice—it will insinuate itself into the most secret chamber and hide in the most unlikely places! It will speak like an angel of light and cringe and

fawn and display a mock modesty which might almost deceive the very elect! It will blush and be diffident and hesitating, while all the while Lucifer himself is not more puffed up! To deal blows at this vice of vanity we shall meditate upon our text and pray God to bless it to us.

First, we shall note that the verse contains a great and comprehensive Truth of God. And secondly we shall observe, as God shall help us, the teaching which may be derived from it.

I. Our text contains within itself A GREAT AND COMPREHENSIVE TRUTH OF GOD—namely, that whatever advantages any of us possess over our fellow men we have received from God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of Lights." "The living God gives us richly all things to enjoy." "He gives to all life, breath and all things." Everything that we are which is not sinful and everything that we have which is worth having, we owe to the bounty of our God.

And this is true, first, as to all sorts of temporal advantages. Begin at the very lowest—we owe our physical strength and personal comeliness to the Lord. Some persons are born with a fine frame, well knit, healthy, vigorous, strong, fitly proportioned. And others exhibit a beauty of person and countenance which gives them great influence and wins much admiration. One of the most common vices in the world and one of the most silly, is the propensity to boast in mere animal force or physical beauty, whereas the man had no hand in making one single bone or muscle or sinew of his frame! Nor has the fairest daughter of Eve been the creator of her own loveliness! No credit is due to the strong man for his strength nor to the beautiful for their beauty. Strength and beauty are gifts, not virtues.

There are some who consider the strongest man to be the best and measure themselves by their capacity to lift weights, or to inflict blows—forgetting that horses and elephants can bear greater loads—and lions and tigers can be fiercer in battle. Mere force belongs to beasts and to steam engines even more than to men! And a man of gigantic strength is outdone at every step by the most common machinery. As for beauty, one of its most potent charms lies in its modest unconsciousness—it is greatly marred when accompanied by vanity. It may seem natural that a peacock should expand its tail in self-admiration, for the bird knows no better. But for a man or woman possessed of reason to gaze in the glass and admire their own bright eyes, glossy hair and delicate features is contemptible vanity!

Lovely is the modesty which does not even think of itself, but like the sweetly perfumed violet hides itself among the leaves to be sought out by those who have pleasure in lowly worth. O fine lady, why so haughty? Did you make yourself? Then be proud of yourself! O strong athletic man, why so arrogant? Are you your own creator? Did you, O man, or woman, give yourself strength or comeliness? Those legs of a man so swift for running—has the runner fashioned them himself? Those eyes of woman, so bright for fascination—did she kindle their wondrous light herself? No, these personal advantages are evidently gifts distributed at the Divine pleasure.

The Lord has made one athletic while another is born a cripple—one is uncomely and another fair as beauty's self. We meet with persons who are born blind, or deaf and dumb, or deformed in limb, or weak in spine and, therefore, we see that our vigor of physical frame is the gift of Providence. To each favored one we may say, "What have you that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?" Position, too, in this world is a thing very commonly boasted of. This man is born with a silver spoon in his mouth—another man comes into the

world with nothing silvery about him. The first man boasts because he is a gentleman and has come from a wealthy family—but what had he to do with it?

What determined the place of his birth? What but a Providential arrangement altogether apart from himself? And after all, in the matter of birth we are all pretty much upon a level if we trace our pedigrees to their common meeting-place in the father of all living. Among the numerous kinds of pride this is one of the most ridiculous—the boast of blood and vaunting of ancestry! What can there be of all inherited position and rank for which we can claim merit? However great the privilege, no credit is due to those who have it, for we may say to each one, "What have you which you have not received?"

Some men are vainglorious because they claim to have made their own position—we have even heard them say that they made themselves! I observe that persons who boast of being self-made usually worship their supposed maker with great fervency and endeavor to lead others to pay the same homage. But I would ask such, "Who gave you the opportunity to become what you have become? From where did you get that natural talent and force of character which have brought you to the front?" The "self-made man" can only be so called in a very restricted sense, or else the speech is false and blasphemous.

If a man has prospered, his prosperity has come of God's kind permission—"The Lord makes poor and makes rich." And if he has fought his way up from penury and obscurity to dignity and position among the sons of men, he owes it to the gentleness of God, who "raises up the poor out of the dust." Education, the gift of prudent parents, opportunity, the gift of Providence—these have all united to make the man prosperous—what has he that he has not received? Some glory in their talent and knowledge. But here again, if a man commits himself to the nobler pursuits of science and learning and renounces the more groveling ambitions of mere wealth and station. If he endeavors to search out the secrets of Nature so as to become useful to his fellow men—if he should succeed and rise to be numbered with great master minds—has he not received it all?

From the beginning, were there not natural predilections and propensities and talents and capacities bestowed upon him which have been denied to others who have been equally industrious, but could not, in the nature of things, become equally eminent? From where, also, has come the health which has enabled the student to persevere in laborious research? Many have been slain by their devotion to their books. The brain is very sensitive and many, in burning the midnight oil, have consumed the oil of life at the same time! To whom, then, does the successful student owe his continued mental vigor? The greatest philosopher may wisely thank God that he is not a lunatic! It may be many a time, in the pursuit of knowledge, he has, in the straining of his faculties, come very near to the overstraining of them. "Great wits to madness often are allied" and frequently only the merciful interposition of Heaven has spared the deep student from the madman's fate. What has he that he has not received?

As to wealth, where some are apt to indulge a vulgar vanity, what is there in it, after all? Certainly it is to a man's credit that he did not, in the commencement of his life, squander his money in wanton waste and self-indulgence. It is to a man's credit that he put his shoulder to the wheel and toiled on and did not consume his days in idleness, or fall into habits of drunkenness and dissipation which are the roots of nine-tenths of the poverty in the land. It is to his credit that he has been economical and so has kept the wolf from the door and risen to a competence. But still, what has he that he did not receive? These very habits and discretions may be traced to training, or to force of mind, or to happy example and they are, therefore, things received.

As for the man's success—it is not only due to his industry, for sickness or accident might have made him unable to earn his bread, or lack of employment might have hampered him. An ill turn in trade would have swept away his little capital, or, trusting in others, he might have found himself robbed of all. Are there not

many who are industrious and prudent and all that, and yet nothing seems to prosper with them, or if they do have a little season of prosperity it is soon over? They have not, perhaps, all the wit of some and, therefore, become the prey of hucksters—nor have they all the vigor of mind which is necessary in these days of competition. Alas, some have grown rich by wickedness and have heaped up curses for themselves—but as far as wealth is a blessing—no man possesses it apart from God's goodness.

What do the Scriptures say? "You shall remember the Lord your God; for it is He that gives you power to get wealth." If any man will sit down and trace his progress in life, he will say of each of his mercies, "This, also, comes to me from the goodness of the Lord. It is He who has prospered me. I might have exerted myself as I have done, but unless the

Lord had built the house, they who built it would have labored in vain. Unless the Lord had kept the city, the watchmen had wakened in vain. Even if I have labored as in the very fire and risen early and sat up late, yet all would have come to nothing unless His good hand had been with me."

Let us remember this and never indulge the pride which robs God of His praise. It would be a sad thing if we were to become as besotted as ungrateful Israel, of whom the Lord said, "She did not know that I gave her corn and wine and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold." Nor is it only for the power to get that we are indebted to the Lord, for the retaining of our substance is equally of His favor. Riches take to themselves wings and fly away—and the rich man may be, all of a sudden, stripped of all his treasure. Houses are soon plucked down unless the Lord keeps them. For the continued supplies of our needs let us thank the Lord who daily loads us with benefits! O man of learning, it is the Lord that gives you power to acquire knowledge—otherwise all your efforts would be fruitless and your mind would prove to be a barren waste!

All faculty, capacity, attainment and influence come from Him. It is He that gives you power, if you are a member of the Christian Church, to take a high position in it and to become a leader of others. If you have any experience by which you can comfort the afflicted. If you have any knowledge of His Word by which you can instruct the ignorant. If you have the Spirit of God resting upon your utterance to convince and awaken, to confirm and to edify—if in anything you are favored to bless the Church or the world—you owe this to the great Giver of all good. Bless Him, therefore, and boast not! If any man is prepared to deny our doctrine, we may leave him to his own ungrateful pride—but let him tremble lest, like Nebuchadnezzar, he should be stripped of all power and made, in his fall, to acknowledge the hand of the Lord.

You shall always find that men upon their knees, if they are sincere, bless God for all they have. And the better a man grows and, I will venture to add, the more common sense he gains, the more ready is he to trace all that he has and is to the good hand of his God! Certainly the more Grace he has and the more he becomes like his God, the more earnestly does he refuse any credit for himself! And the more sweetly does he sing the Psalm, "Non nobis domine"—"Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto Your name give glory." Like Paul, he cries, "By the Grace of God I am what I am."

We have thus set forth the great general Truth of God which holds good as to all temporal advantages. I believe it to be an equally sure Truth as to all gracious privileges. The Apostle says, "Who makes you to differ?" Now, my Brothers and Sisters, those of us who have been saved by Divine Grace do differ from others. We differ greatly from what we used to be! We differ sensibly from ourselves in our former state and we also differ greatly from others who are still unregenerate, for if the Grace of God did not make our character to be different from that of the ungodly, where would its value be? The Lord has taught us what others do not know! He has quickened us with a life which others do not feel! He has given us a sorrow

which the world has never felt and, blessed be His name, He has endowed us with a joy with which worldlings cannot intermeddle.

There is a very great difference between him that fears God and him that fears Him not. "Now, who makes you to differ?" is the question to be thought of, this morning, by every saved one. I believe that the Doctrines of Grace would never be doubted if men would follow this question to its legitimate conclusions. Why am I different from other men if I am so? It has been by the hearing of the Gospel as the means, but I must ascribe it to Divine Grace and not to chance, that I was born where the Gospel was preached and not left under the influence of Popery or heathenism. There is distinguishing Sovereignty in the birth of one man in London and the birth of another in Timbaktu. Neither individual had anything to do with that most important item in his life.

You might have been born in a kraal of the Hottentot instead of in the midst of a family of believers in Christ. The very privilege of hearing the Word of God, you must thankfully acknowledge to be a gift from the hand of God! Others even in your own country may not have been equally favored, for they may not have had such earnest parents, nor have heard so earnest a minister. You were placed where many have been converted—it may be in the country or in London you were early carried to listen to a man whose way of putting the Gospel was warm-hearted, affectionate and likely to be used of God. There, again, is the Sovereignty of God to be seen—that one should be found under a cold, dead ministry and another should hear a soul-saving preacher.

Yet further, there were some who heard the same sermons as you did and were not converted and you were. How come? Will you take the glory for it? Were you better disposed? Was there something in your nature superior to that of others? It is true you paid more earnest attention, but why? What led you to do so? Was there some natural betterness

about you? No, dear Friend, you will not dare to say so! At any rate, if you said so in the heat of controversy, you would not repeat it on your knees! No Christian will say, " Lord, I was better than other people and, therefore, I am saved and they are not." No, in prayer we are all Calvinists! In prayer we all agree to ascribe the whole of the praise to the Grace of God! "Who makes you to differ?" has but one answer from Christian people—it is the Grace of God that has done it.

The Apostle next acknowledges that we possess many blessings, but declares that we have received all of them from God. Is that true? Let us enlarge upon the question. I speak only to professed Believers in Christ. You had, at first, conviction of sin—did that arise spontaneously or did the Spirit convict you of sin? Repentance towards God—was that worked in you by the Holy Spirit, or was it the outgrowth of your own free will? You have faith—I venture to ask you if that faith is the gift of God? If it is not, I advise you to get rid of it, for it will never save you! The faith which saves the soul is always spoken of in Scripture as the gift of God! Since your conversion you have exhibited some measure of holiness, but was that worked in you by the Spirit or is it the fruit of your natural excellence? Who is to have the praise for it? You have grown in knowledge—have you been taught of God, or did you teach yourself? If you were your own teacher, I know what kind of scholar you are! They say that when a man is his own lawyer, he has a fool for his client and it is very much the same when a man is his own teacher in Divine things.

You have also gained experience. You have felt love to Christ. You have burned with zeal—were these good things the gifts of God to you—or do you claim credit for them as having sprung up in your heart as weeds grow in a garden without sowing or watering? Ah, dear Brothers and Sisters, I know there is no

exception to this rule among the children of God—they all confess that their Divine Graces have been received of the Lord. Whatever their doctrinal views and sentiments, let them but speak with God in prayer or praise and they will all say, "It was all Your work as far as it was good! And unto You be all the honor of it from the first to the last. You have worked all our works in us."

Friend, if your Grace did not come from God, it is worthless! But if it did come from the Lord, let Him have the glory for it and do not boast as though you had not received it! I need to call your attention to the way in which the text is worded. It is not said, "Who made you to differ?" but, "Who makes you to differ?" Who distinguishes you now? It was God who made you to differ at the first—that we all admit. Who makes you to differ now? Suppose you were left to yourself—could you continue in your state of Divine Grace? Suppose the Grace of God were gone—what would become of you? Is there one man among us who could keep his own soul alive as long as it takes for the eye to blink if God's upholding Spirit were withdrawn?

Is there any folly, is there any fault, is there any crime into which the best saint here would not soon plunge if it were not for the restraining Grace of God? Who dares trust himself? What is it that makes us continue to differ from the very worst but the Grace of God? And who shall make us to differ in days to come? To whom do you look for your future preservation? Are you your own keepers? Do you hope that you yourselves, unaided, shall persevere in the road to Heaven? You are not, I trust, so presumptuous! Between this spot and yonder golden gates there will be battles in which we shall surely be slain unless Jehovah shall cover our heads! There are wilderness places into which we shall be sure to wander and lose ourselves forever unless the Shepherd of Israel shall lead us like a flock.

We know that it is so from past experience and present consciousness. The longer I live—and I think it is so with most Christians—the more I feel that everything must be of Grace from first to the last if I am to be saved. Grace chose us and Grace redeemed us! Grace calls us! Grace renews us! Grace preserves us and Grace must perfect us, or else nothing will come of all our hopes and desires! Our religion will all be a flash in the pan, a disappointment at the last and a failure forever. Today I stand here to say that if I have served the Lord from my youth up, He led me into His ways. If I have preached His Gospel faithfully to the utmost of my knowledge, it has been because His grace has urged me to. If any souls have been won to Christ. If a Church has been built up. If young preachers have been encouraged. If the savor of the Gospel has been spread abroad—for these things and all else that has been done I disclaim even the shadow of credit!

I loathe the thought! Unto God, alone, be the honor! He has worked in me to will and to do of His own good pleasure. When I bear this personal testimony I feel quite sure that every Brother and Sister here, according to his position and condition, will agree with me in his own case. If there is any virtue. If there is any praise. If there is anything that is honest or of good repute—unto the Lord and unto the Lord, alone, be the praise! If we are without these things the fault is our own—if we have no Grace, if we have not obtained mercy, if we are still unbelievers and disobedient—on our own heads must rest the responsibility and the sin!

But this by no means contradicts the present Truth of God that if there is any goodness in us it is the workmanship of Him who began to save us and will not cease from His work till He has finished it. Thus I have spoken of the great general

Truth.

II. Now we come to ITS TEACHINGS. The first teaching of this great Truth of God is that which we have already enlarged upon. It is useful as a rebuke to pride. If any Brother is filled with vanity, let him answer the question, "Who makes you to differ?" True, you are no more a drunkard, but why should you boast of your sobriety? Is it not your duty? True, you are no more the companion of evildoers, but who was it that took you out of their company and gave you a new heart and a right spirit? What is it that keeps you out of the ways of the wicked at this moment?

It is true you know something of the things of God, whereas others are blinded and the world lies in the Wicked One. But who opened your eyes? What do you say? You were born blind as they were—who opened your eyes? Did you bring light to your own soul? Think of what you used to be. Let any of us look back to our first estate and we shall surely be compelled to lay our finger on our mouth and silence every boast forever! Think of what we would be if Divine Grace were to leave us—how a hasty temper would soon ruin some of us, how natural levity would carry others of us off our feet—how depression of spirit would lead some to despair and carelessness would draw others to presume. Think of how in many ways our besetting sin would overthrow us if it were not for the preserving Grace of God!

Brothers and Sisters, if we say, concerning anything in us that is good, "This is mine and I congratulate myself upon having produced it," we are robbers and liars! Acknowledge that what you have is received from God! Admit that it belongs to the great Giver and that you, yourself, belong to Christ, and you may take the comfort of every good gift you have—but once say, "This is no gift, it is my own"—and you are uttering a lie and you are acting a knavish part in defrauding the great King of His lawful revenue of praise! Yes, and you are also acting the part of an idolater, making yourself into an idol and lavishing incense to please your own foolish vanity. God grant that from a sense of being beggars and nothing but beggars, daily receiving alms at the gate of Mercy, we may be led to behave ourselves in His Presence and among our fellow men with all lowliness of spirit. "Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?"

Secondly, this great Truth becomes an excitement to gratitude. If all I possess I have received and if all I am is due to the distinguishing Grace of God, then let me bless the Lord in the depths of my soul! Silence is often the noblest form of worship. I delight to sit before the Lord and feel that unspeakable mercy can only be acknowledged by unspeakable thankfulness. O God, if You had left me where I was. If You had left me to go on in sin, what might I have been by now? What a servant of the devil! What a well-tutored tempter of others should I have grown to be! Into what shame and disgrace might I have fallen! By what frightful habits might I have been enthralled! Some of you, my dear Hearers, would have been dead long ago if it had not been for the Grace of God—for you were killing yourselves in sin!

Some of you would have been damned long ago if Divine Grace had not stopped you, for you were riding headlong into Hell and did not go at a common prudent pace, as many do, along the broad road. Oh, I say again, what might not some of us have been by now if the Lord had not stepped in with His preventing and converting mercy! Let us, therefore, while we bless Him quietly in the deeps of our own soul, yet oftentimes overflow with praise, such as men may hear. Let our hearts flow over, for surely they are full! It is a good thing to spill a bowl of gratitude on an ungrateful man's floor—to make him feel that if he does not bless God, others will do so and will not be ashamed to do it to his face!

This gratitude should take the shape of continual obedience. Nothing which Jesus bids us do should be too hard for us and nothing that He has bid should be forgotten. When we were in bondage under sin we thought if the Lord did but forgive us we should become the most warmhearted and loving servants in His

employ. When I had the irons on my wrists and when I sat in sackcloth and ashes in the thick darkness of despair, if anyone had said to me, "The Lord will have mercy upon you and make a minister of you," I would have replied, "Then I will preach with all my heart and soul." I should have hoped to preach a hundred times better than I have ever done!

If it had been put to any one of you, do you not think you would have said, "I will serve Him with my whole being. Redeemed by His blood, pressed to His bosom as a dear, returning child—clothed in the best robe, with a ring on my finger and shoes on my feet—I will live to my Father's praise, yes, live with such intensity that even Apostles and martyrs shall not excel me." You have not done so, my Friend, but the text calls you and me to do it and suggests to us a gratitude which shall manifest itself in effort and glow in every action of our daily life.

Again, my text has another lesson. It is a reminder of responsibilities. God has made a great difference between you and others in many respects. He has given you a great many blessings—remember that where much is given, much will be required. If you have 10 talents, have you brought in the proportionate interest? If you possess five talents, have you brought in a five-fold return? It is to be deeply regretted that some of those who have the most ability to do good are doing the least. There are men with large wealth who do not give half as much as many with meager means. I know persons of great attainments in spiritual knowledge who do not teach one half as much as newly converted lads and girls who occupy their posts in the school right earnestly and teach what little they know.

I regret to say that those who could fight best are often the last to go to battle—and those who could plow best most often leave the plow rust—while feeble hands are worn to the bone. Brother, I will not deny that you have much knowledge, nor question that you have much experience, nor debate with you your right to be our superior if you are so! But will you kindly be so good as to exceed us in consecration, in self-denial, in earnestness and in holiness? In estimating our personal character, let us not so much calculate what we could be, as what we are. Let us not so much consider what we might be if we could, but what we really are doing for the Lord, for that is the matter of most importance! You may be a well of water, but you will get no credit for it at the last—the reward comes for the cup of cold water that was given to a disciple in the name of a disciple!

You may be a great bale of cloth, but you will get no honorable mention for it at the Last Great Day—the commendation will be to those of whom the Lord shall say, "I was naked, and you clothed Me." You may have a fat larder and a fine buttery, but the honor shall only come to you at the last if it can be said, "I was hungry and you gave Me meat. I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, sick and in prison and you visited Me." God grant we may all think of our responsibilities so that you who could take long strides may not be satisfied to walk like little children—and that you who could do a giant's work may not be satisfied with attempting that which might be credit enough to a dwarf—but is not at all worthy of your greater powers.

Learn another lesson. The Truth of God before us is a suggestion of great tenderness in dealing with others! Allow me, for a minute, to press that consideration upon you. "Who makes you to differ?" Who but a gracious God has renewed your heart? Yet you met, the other day, with a man fast bound with bad habits and you said, "Nothing can be done with such a wreck of a man. I will not waste words upon him." Another day you heard of an effort made in the back slums, among the lowest of the low, and you said, "I do not think much can come of it." Now, my dear Friend, "Who makes you to differ? What have you that you did not receive?"

It would be better to drink into the spirit of holy John Bradford, whose window looked upon the road to the gallows at Tyburn. As from day to day he saw poor condemned prisoners carried in the cart to die, he was known to say, "There goes John Bradford but for the Grace of God." If you feel so, let me ask you why cannot the Grace of God cause others to fear God as well as yourself? Cannot the Grace of God make other sinners to believe in Jesus as you do? I have never despaired of the salvation of any man since the Lord saved me. I know no heart that God cannot win if He could conquer mine! If you believe in your heart the precious Doctrines of Grace, you cannot be hopeless of any, but you must be ready to hope for those in whom there is nothing to encourage expectation! We ought never to look for desert in others, since the Lord did not look for desert in us. If Jesus loved us when there was no reason in us for that love, we ought just as freely to love our fellow men!

The last lesson is not for the Christian. It is for any of you here who wish you were saved. The text is an encouragement for seekers. You have begun another year and you are yet unsaved? But still you desire, if it is possible, to become children of God. Now, do you know an eminent Christian? "Yes," you say, "I do." Perhaps it is your grandmother, or it may be some earnest Christian minister. You greatly admire those people, do you not? Now remember that there is nothing good in them but what they have received from God! The Lord can give the same Grace to you—and you can receive even as they have received. Do you believe that? It is true whether you believe it or not!

The Lord, in His abundant mercy can give to you what He has given to the best of His saints, whoever you may be. "Then what have I to do?" one asks. What you have to do is, according to the text, to be a receiver. That is all—and that is the easiest thing in the world! Anybody here can be a receiver! When you go past the offering box for the College, perhaps some of you cannot be givers, however much you may wish to be. But if I were to put a man at the door with a shilling or a guinea for each one—anybody could receive it if he chose! Reception is a faculty which belongs to us however

low we may sink. When a person is covered with rags, covered with filth, covered with disease, he can still become a receiver! And even if he cannot stretch out his hand, he can find ways and means for receiving.

Receiving implies neither strength, nor merit, nor wisdom. It requires no power, no faculty, no virtue, no anything! The power to be a receiver dwells with the weakest of the weak and the worst of the worst. The emptier you are, the more room there is for reception! The blacker you are, the more room to receive washing! The more foul you are, the more reason to receive cleansing! The more sick and near to death, the more room to receive healing! Will you have the blessing which God in Christ Jesus is ready to give? If you will be saved, listen to the voice of God and live! If you are willing to accept His Son Jesus Christ as your Savior and, from this time forth put your whole trust in Him, you shall be saved! May He by His Grace lead you, now, to become a receiver, for it is written—"As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on His name." Amen.

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