

Self-Delusion

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon warns believers to diligently examine their hearts and faith to avoid the widespread deception of false profession and self-delusion in the Christian life.

Scripture: Luke 13:24, Matthew 25:1-5, Matthew 25:31-46, Malachi 3:3, Acts 5:1-11, Acts 8:9-24, 2 Timothy 1:15, 1 Corinthians 13:2

Topics: "Self-Examination", "False Profession", "Faith and Repentance"

Description

In this compelling sermon, C.H. Spurgeon exhorts believers to engage in rigorous self-examination to avoid the widespread danger of false profession and self-deception. Drawing from Scripture and vivid parables, he reveals how many who appear to be Christians are not truly saved. Spurgeon challenges listeners to reject carnal security and pursue genuine faith and repentance, emphasizing the eternal consequences of being found wanting. This message serves as a solemn warning and a call to spiritual vigilance.

Transcript

"Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able." Luke 13:24.

EVERY wise merchant will occasionally hold a stock-taking, when he will cast up his accounts, examine what he has on hand, and ascertain decisively whether his trade is prosperous or declining. Every man who is wise in the kingdom of Heaven, will do the same by himself. He will cry, "Search me, O God and try me." And he will frequently set apart special seasons for self-examination, to discover whether things are right between God and his soul. The God whom we worship is a great heart-searcher. Of old His servants knew Him as, "the Lord which searches the heart and tries the reins of the children of men."

We who are called to be the mouth for God unto the people feel ourselves impelled to stir you up in His name to make diligent search, for we would not have you come short of the promised rest. We should be unfaithful to your souls if we did not warn you against deception, and excite you to solemn trial of your state. That which every wise man does, that which God Himself does with you, I may well exhort you to do with yourselves this morning.

may God help you to deal very faithfully with your own hearts. Let the oldest Saint here look well to the fundamentals of his piety, for gray heads may cover black hearts. And let not the young Believer, in the first flush of his joyous faith, despise the word of warning, for the greenness of youth may be joined to the

rottenness of hypocrisy.

I shall not, this morning, aim to introduce doubts and fears into your minds. No, verily, I rather hope that the rough winds of self-examination may help to drive them away. It is not security, but carnal security, which we would kill. Not confidence, but fleshly confidence, which we would overthrow. Not peace, but false peace which we would destroy. I am sure I am right in taking such a text as this, and in desiring to force it home upon your attention. For Christ, speaking to His own disciples, says, "I say unto YOU."

Notice with great care how He repeats the personal pronoun, you, you, yourselves, some twelve times in a few verses. As if this were a matter especially belonging to professors—a subject which ought to come under our immediate notice, not as having reference to aliens and foreigners from the commonwealth of Israel, but to us, the professed followers of Jesus.

Let us bow our strength to our solemn work at once. O great Master of assemblies, make our words as goads to the conscience, and fasten them as nails in the memory!

I. Our first remark is this—MANY PROFESSORS ABE DECEIVED. So the text teaches us. It does not say, "a few may be misled," but "many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." That many professors are deceived is clear enough from the language of Christ Himself, both here and in other places. For instance, "Then shall the kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise and five were foolish."

We hope that in our Churches we have not such a division as this! It were a fearful thing to contemplate only one half as sincere, and the other half graceless, having the lamp of profession, without the secret vessel of spiritual life! Yet, so alarming a proportion as five out of ten should make us search ourselves very carefully, lest we are found among the virgins, and among the virgins having lamps, yes, and among those whose lamps are burning—and yet should be cast away as having no oil in our vessels!

Remember how the Master in another parable puts the multitude of the lost clearly before us—"When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the Throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand but the goats on the left." Now, by these goats are meant those who are in the flock but are not sheep.

A separation is needed, for they once were mingled. Yes, so mingled that they had a sort of hope, and were able impudently to plead—"Lord, when did we see You hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto You?" Yet I do not discover in the parable that there were more sheep than goats. I find, at any rate, that the goats did make up a very considerable multitude. And though they expected to receive the benediction with the blessed, He said, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Remember, also, another parable of our Savior, where the sower went forth to sow his seed. Here there were three places where the seed fell in vain, and only one where it brought forth fruit. And, out of the three where it fell in vain, there were two that must be numbered with professors. In the one case it fell where the thorns sprang up and choked it—there was religion but worldliness killed it. In the next, it fell where there was not much depth of earth. And the Master tells us that there are some who hear the Word and with joy receive it. But when persecution comes by-and-by, they are offended, for there was never a deep work in their inner spirit.

Tremble, my Hearers, so many of you as have received the Word with joy and gladness, lest you should be found to have had no depth of earth and so, by-and-by, the good things which have blossomed and budded in you should perish before the burning sun of persecution.

Nor are these parables so few. I might occupy much of your time by recalling them. But let me remind you that Christ Himself is compared by Malachi to a refiner. "He shall purify the sons of Levi. He shall be like a refiner's fire and like a fuller's soap." Now, of the mass that is put into the refining furnace, how little comes out pure gold or silver? All those who have to deal with metals will tell you that the ore and the slag make up, by far, the greater part, and that if they get but a small percentage, they are well rewarded for all their toil and trouble.

The Master says He will bring a third part through the fire, and happy should it be for us, if we are not found among the two-thirds that shall be put away like dross. You will remember, too, that Christ compares Himself to a farmer winnowing his corn. "Whose fan is in His hand and He will thoroughly purge His floor and gather His wheat into the garner. But He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Ask the farmer whether the chaff does not make a very considerable part of the unwinnowed mass, and whether it is not most intimately connected with the wheat.

A large heap, it lies upon the floor—wait till the fan has been used and diligently applied and you shall see the heap diminished by handfuls, for the chaff has fled, and now only the good grain is left. All these metaphors, and many more, go to warn us that there are many professors who are deceived—many that are in Israel, who are not of Israel. Many that are mingled with us, who, like the mixed multitude which came up out of Egypt with Moses, shall never enter into the promised land, but shall leave their carcasses to perish in the wilderness.

But, dear Friends, we are not left to inferences, for Holy Scripture gives us facts. Let me recall them to your recollection. Among the Apostles themselves, chosen by Christ, having Christ for their teacher and exemplar, there was a Judas. "I have chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." Were it very reasonable to suppose that our modern Churches have a smaller proportion than this of devilish deceivers? If even among Apostles, one in twelve is a liar, deceiving, and being deceived, O Lord, how should

Your people search and try themselves, lest they be found wanting at the last!

Remember, too, that in the early Church, within a few days after the Spirit of God had been poured out, when that Church was in the overflowing joy of her espousals, there were found two at least who were false to their profession. Ananias and Sapphira "lied unto the Holy Spirit," and fell dead before the rebuke of Peter. If, with the Spirit just poured out, there were spots in their solemn feasts. If in the first glory of the Church's sky there were wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness and darkness forever, how much more in these days of the Church's weakness, when we have need enough to cry, "Descend, O sacred fire, descend again. For without You Your Church shall die"?

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles also informs us of an instance of a wonderful success in the city of Samaria. And yet even here, among the early converts of this revival, there was found an arch-impostor. Philip the Evangelist preaches in Samaria and it is written, "Then Simon Magus believed also." But you know how false he was. For Peter said, "Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the Holy Spirit can be purchased with money." "I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

Well, if in one of the earliest of revivals, when converts were numerous, when miracles abounded, when the whole city was full of joy—we still find a Simon Magus—what must we expect now? And, Brethren, I scarcely need to remind you, that with Paul as an overseer of the Church, the cases of deception and apostasy were not few. "All they which are in Asia are turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." "Demas has forsaken me." "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil."

Hymenaeus and Alexander having made shipwreck of faith, the Apostle says, "Whom I have delivered unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme." Philetus is mentioned, "Who has strayed according to the truth." I say, there were even in such Churches as the Galatians—men who were accursed because they preached another Gospel. And in the Church of Corinth there were found evil ones who had to be cast out of the assembly. Moreover, Brethren, you will remember that the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, gives no flattering character of the seven Churches in Asia, though they were like seven golden candlesticks.

Of the best of them He might say, "I have somewhat against you." Of Sardis it is said, "You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." And of Laodicea, you will remember it was, "neither cold nor hot, so that Christ did spew it out of His mouth." Put these things together, and you will see they make up a mass of hypocrisy and deception in the most favorable age of the Church's history. And we therefore think ourselves far from an uncharitable judgment when we expect to find in the Church of today many that are deceived. But, friends, I need not argue thus. For we know that there are such, and know it to our shame.

Every now and then a cedar falls in our midst. "Howl fir trees," when the cedars fall. We have seen—who has not, that has had any experience in the religious world?—we have seen our leaders turn their backs in the day of battle. And our teachers fail to sustain their own character. Ah, and we have the painful conviction that there are others who are not discovered yet, whose sins do not go beforehand unto judgment but follow after, who are nevertheless tainted at the core. There are the many covetous professors who are as grasping and as grinding as if they never professed to be Christians.

And you know that "covetousness is idolatry." There are the many time-serving Christians who hold with the world and with Christ, too. And you know that we cannot serve two masters. There are the many secret sinners among Christians who have their petty vices which come not under human observation, and who, because they are thought to be good, write themselves down among the godly. Now we know there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and woe to them when their secret sins shall be published on the housetops!

Then we have the legal professors who trust to their own works, and shall find that the curse of Sinai shall wither them. And what more shall I say? Have we not many who are not so inconsistent that we could put our finger upon any open sin sufficient to deserve excommunication, but who are guilty of enormous spiritual wickedness? They are dead, they bring forth no fruit. Their hearts are hard as a millstone with regard to the conversion of sinners.

They have not the faith of God's elect. They do not live by faith. They have not the spirit of Christ, and therefore they are none of His. God knows we have sought to use all care and diligence in this Church, both to keep out unworthy persons, and to cast out unhallowed livers. But, despite all that, we cannot but be conscious, and we tell it to you faithfully, that the enemy still continues to sow tares among the wheat. The gold is mixed with the dross, and the wine with wa-ter—for evil men thrust themselves into the heritage of the Lord.

When our muster-roll shall be revised at last, how many out of our more than two thousand members will be found to be base-born pretenders unto godliness! O my Brethren, I implore you by the precious blood of Christ, which was not shed to make you hypocrites, but shed that a sincere people might show forth His praise—I beseech you, search and look, lest at the last it be said of you—"Mene, Mene Tekel, you are weighed in the balances and found wanting."

II. We shall now turn to a second point. IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THERE ARE FALSE PROFESSORS.

There is an imitation of the externals of godliness which is not easy to detect. Art can carve a statue so that it almost breathes. And some of us, in looking at very skillful paintings, have mistaken them for realities. In a notable picture in the Exhibition, you will have noticed an imitation of sunlight shining under a door so well painted that many go up to it to ascertain if it is not really a gleam from the sun. We know that men can counterfeit coins and notes so well that only the most experienced can detect them.

And in all commercial transactions men are so well aware of the subtlety of their fellows, that they look well lest they are deceived. The vital mysteries of godliness are mysterious—the inner life cannot be perceived by the carnal eye, and the outer life of the godly seems to most men to be but morality carried out with care. And therefore it becomes but a very simple task for a man to make himself look just like a Christian, so as to deceive the very elect. To learn by heart that which others say from the heart—to get the outline of a Believer's experience and then to adapt it skillfully to one's self as our experience—this is a thing so simple that instead of wondering that there are hypocrites, I often marvel that there are not ten times more!

And then, again, the Graces—the real Graces within—even they are very easy to counterfeit. There is a repentance that needs to be repented of—and yet it approaches as near as possible to true repentance. Does repentance make men hate sin? They who have a false repentance may detest some crimes. Does repentance make men resolve that they will not sin? So will this false repentance. For Balaam said, "If Barak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I will not go beyond the word of the Lord."

Does true repentance make men humble themselves? So does false repentance. For Ahab humbled himself before God, and yet he perished. There is a line of distinction so fine that an eagle's eye has not seen it, and only God Himself, and the soul which is enlightened with His Spirit, can tell whether this repentance is genuine or not. And as for faith, how easy it is to counterfeit this! Even in Christ's day there was a faith which worked miracles, but did not save the soul. And Paul tells us that if we had a faith which could remove mountains, yet if we had not charity, it would profit us nothing.

I know it, that a man may say that he is saved by faith without works. And his faith may give him comfort, his faith help him in trials, it may make him forsake some sins, and yet it may not be the faith which looks alone to Christ and so saves the soul. To imitate these things, to so cunning and well-practiced a counterfeiter as Satan, is no great difficulty.

Dear Friends, let us remember, too, that there are so many things which help a man to deceive himself. He himself is naturally disposed to be very partial. "Let well enough alone," is a proverb which most men have learned. Very few men care to look at the worst of their own state. They would rather say, "Peace, peace," than think too harshly of themselves. What man ever gave himself a bad character? Or if he did, what man could not abundantly excuse himself for having such a character?

Then there is the devil who never wants us to be too careful, for heedlessness is one of the nets in which he takes his prey. He will whisper in the ear, "It is all well," and so beguile the simple soul to its sure ruin. Beside that, there are the inconsistencies of true Christians. Self and Satan will always use these. "Why, you are as good as old So-and-So." Or, "David sinned, therefore you may be a saint and sin. Lot fell, therefore you may fall and be a saint." And so, what with the flesh, what with the sins of true Christians, and what with the devil, it is easy for a man to fall asleep in carnal security, dreaming about Heaven, and never having his dream broken till he lifts up his eyes in Hell.

Beloved, I must add to this point, that I marvel not that so many are deceived, when I see the careless way in which you deal with religion. When men have to do with their estates, they are very careful—they retain a lawyer to go back over the title-deeds perhaps for two or three hundred years. In trade they will hurry here and there to attend to their commercial engagements. They would not launch into speculations, nor would they run great risks.

But the soul, the poor soul—how men play with it as a toy and despise it as if it were worthless earth! Two or three minutes in the morning, when they first roll out of bed. Two or three odd minutes in the evening, when they are nearly asleep—the ends of the day given to their souls—and all the best part given to the body! And then, the Sunday! How carelessly spent by most people! With what indifference do you lend your ears too often to the preaching of the Word! It is an old song. You have heard it so many times. Heaven has become a trifle to you. Hell is almost a jest. Eternity a notion, and death but a bugbear.

Alas, alas! It is a marvel that there are not more deceived. The wonder is that any find the gate—that any discover eternal life—when we are so, so mad, so foolish, so insane, as to trifle where we ought to be awfully in earnest, and to play and toy where the whole heart is all too little to be given to a work of such dread, such everlasting importance! God help us, since it is so easy to be deceived, to search and watch, and look and test, that we are not found castaways at the last!

III. But now for a third point and that is a very solemn one, namely, that THIS DELUSION MAY CONTINUE

THROUGHOUT LIFE, even to the very last moment. And probably the first minutes of our life in the next world may be tintured with the same delusion.

Strange to think so, and yet some Scriptures seem to hint as much. Let me tell you one or two parables which Christ has used, which prove that this delusion may last long. There are the Tares and the Wheat—"Let both grow together until the harvest." It appears that the time of division does not arrive until the reapers, who are the angels, gather together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn. So, you see, you may stand in a professing state through your whole threescore years and ten, and you may be carried to your grave, followed by a train of devout men, who make great lamentation over you.

And yet, though laid in the grave like a sheep, the worm may devour you, and you may wake in the morning to shame and everlasting contempt. The separation may never occur, so far as the Church on earth is concerned. It may go on till the angelic revisers shall correct the list and cut you off who are not of God.

Another parable—the Draw Net repeats the same warning, "The kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net that is cast into the sea and gathers of every kind." When does the division come? Not till they have drawn the net to land. Then they put the good into vessels, and throw the bad away. So not till the land comes—that

is, till eternity has begun, shall be the great division. And some of you may remain in the net of the Church till it is pulled ashore at the Day of Judgment, and we may some of us be expecting to find you in the vessels—and yet you will be thrown away. Or we may expect ourselves to be there and yet ourselves may be thrown away.

I refer you again to another parable, where the same Truth of God is taught but, perhaps, even more forcibly. A great king made a supper, and it is said, "When the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he said unto him, Friend, how came you in here?" Here was a man who remained in the kingdom, that is in the visible Church—till the king came in to see the guests—that is until Christ comes to judge the quick and dead. Then was he cast out, but not till then.

Many postpone all trial of themselves as to their possession of the righteousness of Christ to the last moment. No, some manage to defer it, with all the miserable discoveries which it brings, until the grave is past, and the great assize is held, but further the lie cannot be played—further the examination cannot be deferred. When Jesus comes, it will be impossible for any to remain ignorant of their true state, for that day will pour a flood of light into the dark corners of the dark hearts and reveal the most secret of all secret things.

Solemn reflection! Solemn reflection for every man and woman here who has made a profession of godliness! You may be sitting at the table, and you may continue to sit there without any of your fellow guests taking any exception to you. But when the King comes in, whose eyes can read the secrets of all hearts, He will say, "How came you in here, not having on a wedding garment?" Then will your nakedness and defilement startle you from your fancied security!

Speechless confusion shall cover you. Your heart shall find no excuse, the sentence shall bear justice on its forefront. "Bind him hand and foot." Let resistance and escape be made impossible. "Cast him into outer darkness," for he shunned the light. "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"—fit doom for one who would not weep nor search his soul.

Sundry other parables utter same warning notes, but I shall quote only one more and that is, the Unprofitable Servant. He was a servant, and remained so. And he had the impudence to present himself among the other servants to receive the reward. Yes, and when he had no reward, he had the impertinence to argue with his Master and to claim that he had done his best with his Lord's money. You may have a talent—and, oh, how many of you have—which you are burying in the earth.

And you may never be upbraided by your fellow servants. But when He comes, you may, with brazen face, go up to ask for your reward but He shall say, "Take the unprofitable servant!" And you know what the doom of such must be. Therefore, from Christ's own language, we have the most satisfactory and solemn cause to believe that the delusion of many may continue even to the last. The blindness of the self-deceiver may continue until he finds himself in the tenfold night of eternal perdition.

But we need not go to Scripture for a proof of this, for we know that it is so ourselves. We have not an exact way of testing men's states—it were foolish to pretend to infallibility—but there are times when one can form a very accurate guess, the door of man's heart now and then stands on the jar. Deathbeds tell tales. It is not every man who has the hardihood to dance with death, and wear a mask upon the brink of the grave. Ah, how many there are who go through the first and the second gate, but they cannot open the iron gate that leads into the City.

I have seen some that could brave it out when in life, who have made a sorry figure in the article of death. It is a gloomy thing to hear a high professor, after all his boastings, compelled to condemn himself out of his own mouth—"I have been a hypocrite, I have sat at the Lord's Table, and I have drunk the cup of devils, too. I was respected, when I was not respectable. I was accepted among Saints, when I was a foul villain the whole while."

Some men have had to hang in chains before their execution. Some wretches lift up their eyes before they are actually in torment. But there have been others, more stolid still, who have gone right through the iron gate, with perfect quietness and calmness. And when we have heard their friends say, "Oh, he died such an easy death!" we have remembered that passage concerning the wicked, "There are no bands in their death—but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men."

This is the mark of the wicked, not of the righteous. O that sullen quietude, that dead calm, in which some men float into another world! How wretched that awful peace which heralds the overwhelming tempest and hurricane! Have I not watched the spirits of unregenerate professors, and seen the ghastly horror of the dread suspense which they labored to conceal. Not that their lives were inconsistent, but they had no spiritual life—no care for souls, no love for Christ, no private prayer, no secret fellowship with Him. And now, at last, they have no triumph, and no comfort of the Spirit.

When their time has come to die, they have talked as glibly as any, and they have closed their eyes as peacefully as any, but, like Dives, "In Hell they have lifted up their eyes, being in torment," and found their delusion dissipated, when, alas, it was too late. I warn you, dear Hearers, that delusion may continue for even fifty, sixty, or seventy years. You may say, "It is all well with my soul," and have neither doubt nor fear the whole time—and yet you may turn out rotten at the last.

The glorious Dreamer has sketched the end of the false professor. I quote his words, that you may see the scene before your eyes. "Now while I was gazing upon all these things, I turned my head to look back and saw Ignorance come up to the riverside. But he soon got over, and that without that difficulty which the other two men met with. For it happened that there was then in that place, one Vainhope, a ferryman, that with his boat helped him over. So he, as the others I saw, did ascend the hill, to come up to the gate, only he came alone. Neither did any men meet him with the least encouragement.

"When he was come up to the gate, he looked up to the writing that was above, and then began to knock, supposing that entrance should have been quickly administered to him. But he was asked by the men that looked over the top of the gate, Where did you come from? And what do you want? He answered. I have eaten and drank in the presence of the King, and He has taught in our streets. Then they asked him for his certificate, that they might go in and show it to the King. So he fumbled in his bosom for one and found none.

"Then said they, Have you none? But the man answered never a word. So they told the King, but He would not come down to see him but commanded the two Shining Ones that conducted Christian and Hopeful to the city, to go out and take Ignorance and bind him hand and foot and take him away. Then they took him up and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the hill and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction."

IV. The next point is this—that this delusion, even to the last, MAY SEEM TO HAVE THE MOST EXCELLENT ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT IT. I shall prove this from Scripture. A man may be a deceiver, and he may accomplish his task all the more readily because he can say, "I have made, and I have maintained a very respectable profession in the Church. I do not know that I have ever tarnished my character. I believe I am looked upon by most people as a pattern and example."

Yes, this may be all correct, and yet you may be shut out at the last. Remember that the five foolish virgins were virgins. They had not forfeited the chastity of their character, but were of such good repute as to have virtuous companions, and to have allowance to meet the honored bridegroom. They had lamps. Mark that. I do not find that they threw them away. Those lamps were burning, too, for a long time. And they had some oil, mark, or else the lamps could not have burned so long.

But they had not the oil in the vessel, though they had the oil in the lamp. Here was the fatal blunder. So the man may say, "Well, I am all right. The lamp burns. Does it not burn as well as yours? You, you say have other oil in your vessel. That does not matter. I have as much oil in my lamp as you. Mine shines as brightly. I am careful with it. And if I sleep, you sleep too—so that I have as decent a profession as you have." And yet, for all this, God may at the last rend you in pieces, and there shall be none to deliver you. How often is the candle of the wicked put out, and his beauty utterly consumed.

Again, some may bring a very careful outward observance of religion as an excellent argument, and think the conclusion to be drawn is very satisfactory. "Lord, we have eaten and drank in Your presence and You have preached in our streets." You have been baptized. You are always at the Lord's Table. Your pew always sees you in it whenever the doors are opened. All this is very proper and right. But it may all help to make you more easily deceived. You may conclude that you must be right because of this. And yet, the Master may say, "I never knew you."

If means of Divine Grace could raise men to Heaven, Capernaum would not have been cast down to Hell. If attendance at the temple could save the soul, then Caiaphas would be in Glory. If hearing the Word would be enough, then Herod would be in Heaven. O Brethren, more than this you must have, or you will miss everlasting life! Further, you may even go the length of manifesting much religious activity, and you may conclude from this that it must be all right with you—as those did who said, "In Your name we have done many wonderful works."

We may have been preachers and have converted our hundreds and attracted our thousands. We may have been Sunday school teachers and led our little ones to Christ. We may have been missionaries, whose names have been applauded at the public meeting. But, for all that, we may be found castaways at the last. For it is not the doing of mighty works, but vital union with Christ by real faith, which shall be the point that shall decide the question.

O Friends, your preaching, praying, almsgiving, tract distributing—unless Divine Grace is in you—only help you in your delusion, and make it the more difficult to arouse you from it. The more diligent in service the self-deceiver becomes, the more strong is the net in which his foot is taken. Every duty performed may be but another fetter to bind our souls if we are graceless professors. O that I could awaken you, you desperately bewitched and stupefied deceivers!

Dear Friends, even the righteousness of God may furnish us with a plea if we choose our own delusions, and from every holy thing we may fetch apologies. We may say, "Religion is very hard. God is very strict and severe. Nobody can carry it out as he should. Therefore it will be well with me." Just as he said, "Lord,

I knew that you were an austere man, gathering where you had not scattered seed, and reaping where you had not sown." And so, knowing that we are not what we should be, we may keep up our delusion by the excuse that there are very few who are, and that God is a hard master.

And so we may go on, keeping our eyes fast shut, till the flames of Hell shall wake us up to sleep and dream no more. I know some who will even make it an excuse that they did not know what religion required of them, and they will plead ignorance. "It is true," they will say, "I have not done as I should, but I did not know about it." Just as they did on the left hand. "When saw we You hungry and fed You not, or thirsty, and gave You no drink?" "I did not know," says the man, "that Christ was on earth. I knew there was a parcel of poor people about that many despised and called fanatics. I did not suppose that feeding them would have been feeding Christ. I did not know Christ."

"No," says Christ, "and I do not know you. Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity, for I never knew you." Ah, Beloved, if you will be deceived, it is the easiest task in the world to accomplish your purpose. Any fool can delude himself. It needs no wise, and persevering, and patient man to invent a method by which to drag his soul into a damnable delusion. This can be done by sitting still. If you would be saved, you must "strive to enter in at the narrow gate." But if you would be damned, there is no striving wanted. It is only a little matter of neglect, and the whole is done. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?"

V. And now to the last point—this delusion may last through life and be sustained by many specious arguments but IT MUST ALL BE DISPELLED. Ah, if this pretty dreaming could last forever—if the man could have hope forever— then I need not be earnest with you this morning. But since it must be dispelled, hear me! Hear me, Men and Brethren, while briefly I utter a few solemn warnings!

Remember, Professor, you will then be all alone. There will be no minister to comfort you—no deacons and Church members to say you have maintained a good profession. You will have then to look at your own acts, your own faith, and your own life, in the solemn privacy of eternity. And then you will give the right verdict, if you do not now. Then, too, your conscience will be awake. You would give a thousand worlds if you could make it sleep then, for conscience is "the worm" of Hell and it "dies not."

It is the fire that can never be quenched.

Then you will not be able to satisfy conscience with pretences, nor with promises. It will gnaw and bite and devour and vex you. The fury of its fire will consume once and for all your proud conceits, and comfortable fancies. Then, too, your mind shall be more sensitive than it is now. Now you think little of Hell or Heaven, time or eternity. But then those words will stick like daggers in you. You will feel, then, that the soul was of importance—no, that it was all-important.

You will then be made to feel those themes which now only enter your ears and are forgotten. There will be no cups in which to drown your thoughts, no theatres in which to dissipate your melancholy, no gay company in which to laugh or talk away the impressions of the Sunday. There will be no chance, then, of laughing at the minister, or pacifying your conscience about these things. But your sensitive soul, wounded in every point, shall be made to cry aloud, and never shall its cries cease, for then you shall be lost, lost, lost forever!

Then your knowledge shall increase, and you shall know what you know not now, and all you know shall only make your folly appear the more folly, because when there was hope you despised it, and when Christ was preached to you, you were content with the counterfeit, and despised the reality. But hear

me—hear me once again, Man! Then God shall deal with you. Now it is only my poor voice. It is only my feeble utterance that goes to your heart today, and you will forget it all. Or perhaps you do not feel it now. But when God deals with you, it will be another thing.

Oh, if I were a Baxter, I would preach my sermon out in tears and weep over you proud and high Professors that will not search and examine yourselves whether you are in the faith! But if I cannot get at you, God will. Those eyes of fire shall shed a light into the dark corners of your soul. That finger shall find out the leprous spots which now you have so well concealed. His hand shall rip open your breast, to look at your heart, and expose it to the assembled universe. As sure as God shall deal with you, so would I have you surely deal with God. Make sure work for eternity. Pull it down, pull it down, if it is built on the sand! Consume it, consume it, if it is "wood, hay, stubble," and cry to God this day that you may build upon the Rock and use nothing but "gold, silver and precious stones," that your building may abide the fire.

Sinners! A word to you. If the Professor, "if the righteous scarcely are saved," where will you appear? Drunkard, surely you shall drink the cup of wrath! Swearer! Surely you shall have your "damns" and your "anathemas" replayed into your soul abundantly! Thief! You shall find that you have stolen your own soul! Harlot! Whoremonger! You shall find at the last that God abhors you, and He will cast you from His Presence. I say, if even the best living of men need thus to search and try, and if many of them shall be shut out, careless Sinners, what must then, become of you?

And you timid ones—you timid Christians! I have not preached this to alarm you. Let me bid you, however—fly to Jesus again this morning. If there is all this ado, when we come to sift and try, would it not be better for you and me to cling to the Cross again, with, "Just as I am, I trust You, Jesus—I trust You alone." For oh, remember, none can perish that are clinging to the Cross!

But, proud Professors! The last word must still be for you. You may soar, yes, like Icarus, with wings of wax, but the higher you fly, the more terrible will be your fall. And what will become of you? Think of what has become of others like you, now in Hell! What would they give for your Sabbaths over again? What would they give to be here, that they might hear one faithful sermon—that they might repent and escape from the wrath of God? Think, while you are here, how they are cursing themselves to think that they threw away the golden hour and lost the opportunity! How they gnaw their tongues, while they say, "I came from the table of God to the place of fiends. I came from the pulpit into Hell. I descended from Mount Zion to the very depths of Hades. I was brought from Jerusalem to Tophet."

And this is to be your lot, proud Professor! Unless you repent. What do you say, Man? Are you willing to make your bed in Hell, after having talked of leaning your head on Jesus' bosom? What? Will you dwell with everlasting burnings, after having sung of everlasting love? What? Must you be driven from His Presence, when you have boasted of being justified by His righteousness, and washed in His blood? It must be so, Professor. It must be so, unless God helps you to make true work, and real work, and sure work of it by the Holy Spirit.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. For he that believes and is baptized shall be saved. He that believes not shall be damned."

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