

The Deceived Heart

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon warns that many are deceived in their religion, feeding on empty hopes and falsehoods, and urges a sincere self-examination to find true peace only through Christ.

Scripture: Isaiah 44:20

Topics: "False Religion"

Description

In 'The Deceived Heart,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the tragic condition of those who are misled by false religions or empty professions of faith. He challenges listeners to honestly examine their spiritual condition and recognize the futility of trusting anything but the true gospel of Jesus Christ. With pastoral urgency, Spurgeon calls for repentance and faith in Christ as the only path to genuine peace and salvation.

Transcript

"He feeds on ashes: a deceived heart has turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Isaiah 44:20.

THE Prophet, no doubt, is here primarily referring to the heathen. He accounts for the fact of their gross stupidity in bowing down to worship blocks of wood and stone by asserting that their deceived hearts had turned them aside so that they never sought to know the Truth of God, nor asked the question whether their idol was not a delusion and a snare. The idolater practically never said, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" With the immediate connection of my text, however, I shall have, at this time, very little to do. I shall only attempt to draw from it a few lessons which, I trust, may be useful to some persons, if God, the blessed Spirit, shall be pleased to apply the Truth to their hearts.

There is but one true religion and there is only one way of receiving that religion. There are many false religions and there are many wrong ways of professing the true religion. There are a thousand paths that lead to Hell, but only one that leads to Heaven. In the many broad roads that lead to destruction, there is room for innumerable winding alleys, but the way that leads to Heaven is a strait and narrow one—there is no room for any divergence there. We must have the same religion and have it in the same way, or else we shall not arrive at that hoped-for end, towards which, by our profession, we pretend to be pressing.

Now, Beloved, there are many persons who are deceived in their religion. They are professing a wrong religion, or else they are holding the right religion in a wrong way. This shall be our first point, that there are many persons who are entirely deceived in their religion. We shall, secondly, notice that their religion

is unsatisfactory to them. We may rest quite certain that any religion that is unsound and untrue is not satisfactory to the conscience—"He feeds on ashes." But then we shall have to notice, in the next place, that although that is so, yet there are many who seem perfectly content with their false religion, although, to us, it is clear that they are not satisfied, but are feeding upon ashes, yet they say that they are satisfied with their own condition, the reason being that, as our text puts it, "a deceived heart has turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Having briefly run over those particulars, I shall then address myself to the representatives of the different classes of deceived persons, those who profess religion, but do not possess it, and shall endeavor with all the might that God, the Holy Spirit, shall give me, to arouse and awaken them, lest they perish in their strong delusion!

I. In the first place, then, THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO ARE ENTIRELY DECEIVED IN THEIR RELIGION.

I need scarcely refer to the idolater who bows himself down before the idol that his own hands have fashioned. However sincere he may be, however devout in his worship, however punctual in the observance of his ceremonies, we are perfectly sure that he is a deceived man. And when we discover the stupidity of such a form of worship, we marvel that any man should be found so deficient in sense and wisdom as to continue to be deceived by such a travesty of religion.

And I need only, in passing, mention the Roman Catholic. He, too, has a false religion. To us it is perfectly clear that he is deceived while he strives, by his good works and by his sacraments, to reach a Heaven to which he cannot attain if he seeks it by the works of the Law and not by the righteousness of faith. We know that there is no admittance to Heaven

save by the blood and the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, relied upon by a Divinely-imparted faith. Let the Roman Catholic be as earnest and as devout as he may—let him strive with all his might and let him carry out his own convictions to the fullest, yet of this we are sure, beyond a doubt—he is a deceived man and his religion is a thing that is utterly worthless!

On the other hand, we have another class of persons living in our midst who pretend to have no religion at all, but who, in fact, have a superstition of their own—I mean the men who generally class themselves amongst Freethinkers, the people who will not believe the Bible and who cannot walk in the narrow way in which their grandmothers walked because it would imply a sort of slavery if they were to walk in the way of the Truth of God. They think they are bold and brave men, who glory in dashing away the fetters of right and doing wrong because of the freedom of it. They think it is a high prize and a great attainment, when they are able to despise everything which their fellows regard as being venerable and true. And, in fact, one of their greatest ambitions is to strive to reach such a height of impudence that they can laugh at everything that has the stamp of antiquity and truth upon it—and may just let their own wild thoughts fly as they will, without bit or bridle, guide or rein! Now these men, however true they may be to their convictions, we know, are deceived in their religion—for, after all, it is a religion—a religion of credulity and no one is so credulous as the man who professes not to believe anything! No man is so ready to suck in any delusion as the one who professes to abhor superstition. You will never find anyone so ready to be led astray as the man who says that he cannot be led astray. He who despises the miracles of our Lord and all that is recorded in the Word of God is the most gullible creature alive—and we know that however high his opinion of himself may be—he is a deceived man and feeds upon ashes!

But, alas, to come nearer home, we have another class of men who are also deceived in their religion—false professors, who, in a sense, have the true religion, but have not got it in the right way. We have some men whose doctrines are orthodox, whose theological views are sound—if they were tried before the Westminster Assembly they would come off with flying colors! They hold the Truth of God taught in our Catechisms and Creeds, nor do they swerve a hair's-breadth from the technicalities of our doctrine, but, alas, they hold it in a wrong way! They hold the Truth of God in licentiousness, or they hold it in hypocrisy. We have some who make a fair profession, but who, after all, have no heart in the matter and neither part nor lot in the things of God. We have some who have been baptized in the pool who have never been baptized with the Holy Spirit—some who sit at the Lord's Table and eat the bread and drink the wine, but never have had any real fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. We dare not deny the fact that in the purest Churches there are men who have, by great craft and subtlety, deceived the fallible judgment of minister, deacons and brethren. It is not possible for us to keep the church thoroughly pure! Let us stand at its gate both night and day, let us watch without sleep, for enemies will smuggle themselves in! We may be ever so careful, yet the enemy will creep in and sow tares among the wheat.

We doubt not that there is, in many churches, a far larger proportion of deceived persons than we would like to think. We are afraid that there are many more who will share the doom of Judas than it would be charitable for us to declare. Alas, hypocrisy must be rife in a church that is so cold or lukewarm. There must be far too many in our midst who are not true to God when the world can point to members of the Church, and say, "If these are the children of God, if these are Christians, then it is far better not to make a profession at all than to live as they do." There have been men who have been looked up to as great and mighty in the Church, but who have turned out as black as Hell itself! And so we are obliged to think that there are still hypocrites here and there, whom the Great Day shall reveal, but who are at present unknown to us. Perhaps hundreds, or even thousands are to be found in the various Churches throughout the length and breadth of our land who have no solid ground of hope. Although they may be trusting in themselves that they are righteous, they are deceiving themselves, and others, too—and fearful shall be their discovery when the Lord shall strip them of their masks and disguises—and make them naked to their eternal shame.

II. My second remark is that **ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY PERSONS THUS DECEIVED IN RELIGION,**

WE ARE NOT TO SUPPOSE THAT ANY OF THEM ARE REALLY, IN HEART, CONTENTED WITH THEIR RELIGION. They may seem to be satisfied with themselves, but we know that in their innermost spirit, they are not.

Our text says of the idolater that "he feeds on ashes." You see a man on his knees before his idol god. He has brought an offering to the priest. He kneels down and repeats his form of prayer. He rises and you say, "What a clear conscience that man has! That worship is enough for him—he can go to his bed and rest in peace, tonight, for he has said his prayers

to his god, he has chanted a solemn litany that may be accepted and, certainly, with all the forms and ceremonies of his religion, he will have a quiet conscience." But we are very apt to look upon the surface of things when, in reality, it is very different down below! And I believe that there is not an idolater beneath the heavens who does not find his religion unsatisfactory. I am fully aware that human nature is fallen. I know that reason has become darkened and blinded, but I do not believe that the idolater's reason is so dark that a ray of the Light of God cannot get into it and, therefore, I believe that, sometimes, the poor man

realizes that there must be a God higher and better than the block of wood or stone which he worships. I cannot conceive, as my own heart could not rest without a Savior, that another man's could! I think the mind of the heathen has enough light left in it to prevent him from being thoroughly satisfied and contented with his religion. No, it is true, as our text says—"he feeds on ashes." He must know that his religion is but as refuse on an ash heap—something that degrades, but can never content him.

It is just the same with the Roman Catholic. He will tell you, when he converses with you, that he is quite content with his religion, but I cannot believe it. There may be times when he is so imposed upon as to believe that, in his church, there is infallible salvation and that, by attention to ceremonies as absurd and wicked as those of idolaters, he shall obtain the favor of the Lord his God. But there are hours when Romanists, especially in this country, must tremble for the stability of their religion! There are times when they must be a little shaken. Surely there is enough of moral dignity and conscience in most men to teach them that a rotten rag cannot have any saving virtue about it! Surely the man who has kissed the toe of the Pope must feel everything within him that is noble recoil from the act! There ought to be enough humanity in man to rise above that groveling system which has sought to bring human nature lower than the dregs of the brute creation! I cannot suppose that a man who has a soul—a soul whose high aspirations are among the best proofs of its immortality—can be content with that poor piece of outside show which we call Popery! No, in that case, also, man "feeds on ashes." He is not satisfied with his religion, although he may pretend to be.

Now, in the next case, I speak with still greater confidence. It is just so with the infidel—"he feeds on ashes." He says he is very well content to be a Freethinker. He looks you boldly in the face and he laughs at your fears. As to death and all that is to come after it, what does he care about such things? He is not a child to be frightened with a nursery tale! He would as soon think of believing the story of Jack the giant-killer as of Christ on the Cross. He is not going to believe what priests tell him. He is quite content to be where he is and what he is. Yet see him on board ship in a storm—how is it that he cries to God there! How is it that Volney, the atheist, who took on board a large number of his infidel books to distribute—when a storm arose fell on his knees and asked God to give him mercy through Jesus Christ—and then, when he got on shore, cursed the God whose mercy he had implored?

A storm soon drives the infidelity out of a man. There is too much manhood left in him to let him continue so base a thing as an infidel! A man may be wicked enough to say that he has arrived at such a pitch of unbelief as to doubt the existence of God, but I do not think anyone has ever really thought so in his heart unless he were entirely demented and bereft of his senses. Infidelity will do very well for you when you can have a heated dance and merry revelry, but sickness and death are tests which it cannot endure! Many have found, then, that the ashes upon which they were feeding were but the preparation for feeding upon the burning coals of the eternal wrath of God!

I must also say that it is the same with the fourth class, that is, the people who make a profession of religion, but who have no religion in their hearts. We know that you are not at ease. We know that you are feeding upon ashes. You come to the Baptismal Pool and the Communion Table. You accost the deacon and the pastor with all confidence. You talk of experience even as they talk and you look as if religion made you happy—but we know better! Nothing can ever make the conscience really quiet, nor give the soul a solid peace except true religion rightly received in the heart. If there were any other cure for the heartache except the blood of Christ applied to the conscience, surely so costly a remedy need not have been provided. This I know—many of us tried everything else except true religion to give us peace, but we never could find it. We tried obedience to the Law of God, we tried what we could do by a bare profession

without religion in the heart, but we could never find rest for the sole of our feet till we came to Christ! And we do not believe that you have anymore rest than we had. We believe that your deceived heart has turned you aside, for you are feeding upon ashes even now!

III. But, in the third place, IT IS A STRANGE THING THAT ALL THESE PEOPLE SEEM VERY WELL CONTENTED WITH THEIR FALSE RELIGIONS.

The idolater, the Romanist, the infidel, the mere professor—all these people seem very satisfied with themselves and their delusions, and sometimes we marvel how this can be. How can it be that an idolater can think that a piece of wood, part of which has just boiled his kettle, and another part of which has been fashioned into a seat for him to sit upon—how can he think that the remnant of that wood can become a god? It seems strange to us that the very heathen should not laugh at one another for their folly, and we know that an old poet put this ironical utterance into the mouth of an idol that was set up in a vineyard, "Formerly I was the stump of a tree, a useless log. And the carpenter hesitated whether to make me into a table or a stool and, therefore he made me a god." We ask, how is it, how can it be, that the heathen can find any satisfaction in so silly a superstition? How is it that the Romanist can be content with such a mere sham as his religion is? How can the infidel live in such an uncomfortable atmosphere as that cold, credulous unbelief that now surrounds him? How can it be that the mere professor can get peace of mind as he now has, or even that appearance of peace of mind which he is able to keep up when he speaks to us? We answer, the true reason is this—it is not that these men are thoroughly satisfied with their religion. It is not that they themselves firmly believe in it—it is, as the text says, "a deceived heart has turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

If they were once to ask that question honestly, it would be fatal to their false religion! Let the infidel just sit down and ask this question, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" Let him solemnly, as before the tribunal of his own conscience, if he cannot say it before God, sit down and examine what he pretends to believe and fearlessly ask himself, "Is this not a lie?" Let the Romanist do the same, let the idolater do the same, let the false professor do the same! And then, as soon as it had been done, conscience would be at once enlightened and would give its answer—and each man would say, "Yes, the religion upon which I have been building my hope is a lie and I renounce it to seek a better."

But the deceived heart does not let that question ever come up, or if it is asked, the question is put away as quickly as possible. Up rises one devil in the heart and says, "Did not your grandmother worship that idol? Have not multitudes of other people done the same?" And if the question is asked again, another devil says, "Look at the tens of thousands who go to the shrine of Juggernaut. Are there not millions who bow before the shrine of Buddha? Common custom shall decide what is right." The Roman Catholic says, "Look at Christendom as a whole—is it not almost everywhere covered with the adherents of my religion?" "And," says the infidel, "I do not stand alone—some of the master spirits of the age have dared to think as I think." "And look," says the man who is making a false profession, "am I not as good as Mrs. So-and-So, and as pious as Mr. This or Mr. That? I am sure that there is no need of any examination of the position that I hold." And so, between them all, the poor heart is so deceived and baffled that the question never really comes before the conscience, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" For I repeat that if this question were truly to come before the conscience, there could not be any mistake about the answer that even poor fallen reason must give, "Your religion is a lie, therefore away with it!"

IV. Now, for the rest of the time at our disposal, I WANT TO SPEAK TO THOSE WHO ARE PROFESSORS OF RELIGION, BUT WHO DO NOT POSSESS IT.

I will introduce myself to you, Sir, at once. You have not, for a long time, asked yourself any questions about your religion. Will you honestly put to yourself the inquiry in my text, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" "Well," you reply, "I was baptized and I joined the church many years ago, and I concluded that I was converted and, at any rate, the church was satisfied with my testimony. I am not troubled with any doubts, or fears, or anxieties, and I am quite sure that if I am not all right, it will go very hard with a great many other people." Yes, Sir, I have no doubt it will go very hard with a great many people, but your conclusion does not prevent me from returning to the question, as far as it concerns you, personally. I want to put this question to you—Is there not a lie in your right hand? I do not say that you have a lie on your forehead—you would not like to put it there. But is there not a lie in your right hand? Now, come, open your palm. No, I mean your right hand, not your left one. Your right hand—that hand with which you act.

I do not mean that left hand which you have been keeping in reserve to lay upon your hypocritical heart. No, it is your right hand that I mean. It is your acts, your life, your conversation that I want to know about! Have not these been such as to prove that there is a lie in your right hand? We do not know all your conversation, do we? God knows all, but we do not. You have been able to keep many vices to yourself, or there are many things that you do in business that you know are wrong—so I will again put the question to you—Is there not a lie in your right hand? Are you quite sure that you are truly converted to God? Do you think, if you were, that you could live as you are living? Do you imagine that

the indulgence of such-and-such a vice and such-and-such a sin can be consistent with Divine Grace in your heart? Do you suppose that if you were really the possessor of the Grace of God, you could be what you now are? Does not your own conscience say, "No. I have a lie in my right hand"?

If you knew anyone who was a member of a Christian Church and who lived as you live, would you not be among the very first to say, "Such a man ought not to be in the Church"? Very well, then, measure your own corn by the same bushel which you use when you are measuring your neighbor's. Do you not, even now, know several people whom you regard as being mere formalists and hypocrites? Have you not, sometimes, said so? Now, what is the difference between yourself and them? Do you not think that if you could get into their bodies and look out of their eyes, you could see enough in yourself to condemn you, quite as justifiably as you now condemn them? Yes, I think that if conscience speaks now, it will be obliged to say, "Ah, it is so, Sir. Alas, it is so!" And then, when conscience hears this question asked again, "Does it not look as if you had a lie in your right hand?" how are you to escape from the solemn answer, "I fear I have. If my life is inconsistent with my profession. If my feelings and inward experience are not in conformity with the words that I speak with my lips, then most certainly I must have a lie in my right hand"?

Now, O professor, you who are a mere professor, I will address you, yet again, and may God bless the words I speak to the warning of some who have a name to live and yet are dead! Ah, Sir, you have not had a doubt about your state for a long time and a true child of God has said, "Oh, that I could get into the place where that man is, that I could be as easy in my mind as he is!" Little does the child of God know what a miserable fraud you are, nor how your deceived heart has beguiled you. Ah, if he did know, he would wish to be anything but what you are! Your peace is not the result of the assurance of faith—it is only presumption. Your confidence does not arise from trusting in Christ, but from sheer delusion. There was a time when you did tremble for yourself. When first you were united to the Church you did often ask yourself, "Am I Christ's, or am I not?" Now all those doubts and fears have vanished and it is very seldom you ask any question about yourself. You fold your hands and take it for granted that all is right with you. Are you not, you think, a member of the Church—then why should you be asking yourself any searching

questions? When the minister is preaching specially to you, you look up to the gallery and you see a drunk—and you say you hope the message will touch his heart.

When the minister is saying something strong about inconsistencies, you look across the Chapel and you notice somebody there—and you think surely that ought to reach his conscience. Ah, man, is it not God's message to you? Ought it not to reach your conscience, but from the fact that it does not, may we not draw the fearful inference that you are given up to a strong delusion to believe a lie—that your deceived heart has turned you aside so that you have a thousand artifices and schemes to evade an honest answer to that most important question—"Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

As God's ambassador, let me clear my conscience of your blood as I try to reach even your hardened conscience. Professor, I beseech you, as in the sight of God, let this question for once come home to your heart! Oh, you that have only a profession, let this question be answered by each one of you, now—"Is there a lie in my right hand? Am I a true Christian or a false professor? Am I making a profession to be what I am not, or am I, in the sight of God, what I am in the sight of man?" I shall not exempt myself from this solemn self-examination and I would ask you, my Brothers in the ministry, and those of you who are deacons, and all of you who are members of this or any other Christian Church, not to exempt yourselves. Let the question come home to each of us, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Oh, remember that to have made a profession of religion and yet to be deceived is one of the most frightful things to be imagined! And while it is so frightful, it is also sadly frequent—to have our face toward Zion by profession, and yet to be going towards Hell by our actions! To go with bold, brazen-faced impudence to the very gates of Heaven and cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us"—and to have those gates barred fast against us and to hear the Lord say—"Depart from Me, I never knew you! Depart, you cursed!" That is, I say again, frightful beyond all conception, but it is as frequent as it is frightful! My Brothers and Sisters, would you have that to be your lot? O my God, let it never be my portion! If I am to be damned, let it be as the worldling! Let me be as the sinner who openly lives and dies in his sin—but never suffer me to endure that double Hell that consists, first, in the torment of just punishment for my sin and then in the added torment of my disappointed hope. O my God, whatever You suffer me to be, permit me not to have a hope of Heaven and then, at the last, to have that hope turn out to be a delusion!

Do you, my Friend, put away the question of the text and say you know that you are all right? You are the very person who ought to let the question come home to you! Are you sure that all is well with you? Then perhaps you have no right to be sure. Do you never doubt? Have you never had any fear about the future? Then, remember what the poet Cowper so wisely said—

"He has no hope who never had a fear

And he that never doubted of his state,

He may perhaps—perhaps he may—too late."

Does your confidence stand so firm that nothing can shake it? Perhaps, then, it is not built upon a rock. There are things that stand very firm for a time that, after all, will not endure forever. The great mountains stand fast, but they shall be removed and be carried into the midst of the sea. And your hope may seem to have a firm foundation, yet you may find yourself swallowed up in a fearful whirlpool of horrible destruction. I appeal to some men who think that they need not heed my earnest words—men who are not members of Christian Churches, but who are reputed to be Christians. There are some among us who are

generally reputed to be children of God—their conversation is full of weighty religious matters—no one better understands the Truth of God than they do. Yet they have one master vice, one evil propensity that leads them astray everyday. In the name of God, I have warned them of the consequences of continuing in sin. As they must stand before Jehovah's bar and as I, who have warned them, must stand there with them, I do entreat them to let the voice of warning reach them!

O Man, it is little to have had a pious mother! It is little to have been enlightened concerning the things of the Kingdom of God! It is little to know the Truth and to love sweet and savory doctrine! It is little to be a friend of all good men and to be beloved of them! It is little to have had all this if you have not Divine Grace in your heart! Little, did I say? It is nothing at all to your advantage, but it is not little—it is a great and fearful thing to have had all these advantages and all this knowledge, and still to have suffered some base thing that was beneath your manhood to turn you aside and destroy all your hopes of Heaven!

There are some whom we know who live in this fair world of ours and who live near our hearts, too—men who might go to Heaven, we sometimes think, if it were not that they are too covetous to get there. Some we could not find any fault with except that they are given to strong drink—and that sin is their curse and ruin and will forever shut them outside the gates of Paradise. And some we know, whose love we prize and whose company we seek, who have some secret fault which now and then is discovered by those who watch them warily—and that fault is like a great cancer, eating up the man's vitals! His clothes are neat and trim. His friends call him "a perfect gentleman," yet he is carrying damnation in his heart by that secret lust and darling vice! Oh, you who are making a boast of your religion, or who keep it secretly and have some kind of a hope, I beseech you take warning! It is not my pleasure thus to address you, but if I did not speak thus, how should I render in my account at the Last Great Day? If I sat in those pews in which you sit, I would scorn the minister who did not speak faithfully to me and I would soon cease to be a hearer of such a man! I would not go to a Chapel if there were not a man in the pulpit who spoke the Truth of God in simple language and, as I judge you, you wish to hear the Truth of God plainly.

As I would wish it to be told to me, so have I told it to you, and if there should be any individual whose deceived heart has turned him aside, and who says, "The minister was very personal. He evidently meant me. His word was like a sword and it cut me to my very heart"—if that is the case with any of you, let the preacher at once admit that he did mean you! He does not deny that he has been personal! He meant you and he beseeches you to take his message to your heart. If you are angry with the preacher, he can well afford to bear it. Though he does not wish for it, if your soul can be saved in that way, he will rejoice in it! If there could be a possibility of making some man so angry that his conscience pricked him, I would fall on my knees and say, "My God, if that man should kill me, if it will be the means of saving his soul, let him do it! If an honest warning should so stir up his wrath, then even so let it be, only grant, my Father, that the end may be served in letting him know the folly and the evil which were leading him astray."

Brothers and Sisters, let every one of us retire to our closets and examine ourselves. Put your hopes in the crucible— see whether they will stand the test of the Word of the Lord which is like a fire. Judge yourself as you would judge another. If you are acquainted with another man who, you know, is living in the commission of a sin which makes his profession a falsehood—and you also are living in that sin—do not think any better of yourself than you think of him. If

you knew a man whose limb was rotting with mortification, would you not urge him to have it cut off? Well, then, have your own cut off! If you saw a man who was rushing swiftly to Hell, would you not start off boldly and warn him? Then, be as bold with yourself as you would be with others! Talk to yourself as you

would talk to other people. If you would observe this rule, I would not be afraid of what will happen to you—and some of you will thank God that you were ever led to examine yourselves, for now, as guilty sinners, you can flee to the Cross of Christ and, by faith, lay hold of Him who is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by Him!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: LUKE14:25-35.

Verse 25. And there went great multitudes with Him. During at least a part of His earthly ministry, Christ was very popular. The people crowded at His feet and they were willing to make Him a king. But you must have observed that He was always faithful in speaking to the populace—He did not flatter them. He also dealt in the same fashion with those who professed to be His followers. He winnowed the heap that was laid upon the floor and drove away the chaff from the midst of the wheat.

25, 26. And He turned and said unto them, If any man comes to Me, and hates not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. Do not misunderstand this passage. Our Lord does not use the word, "hate," in our common acceptance of the term, for no man would hate his own life. He means that the love of all these must be secondary to the love we bear to Him. Compared with our love to our Lord, all lower love must be more like hate. We must be willing to give up everything—to give up even ourselves—our entire selves—to Him, for Christ will have all or nothing. He will never divide the human heart with any rival. If we profess to serve Him, we must have Him for our only Master and not attempt to serve two masters. I fear that this Truth of God greatly needs to be enforced nowadays, for we have numbers of so-called Christians who are worldlings first, and Christians afterwards. We have a great many professors who might be accurately described by the words of a little girl concerning her father. When someone asked her, "Is your father a Christian?" she replied, "Yes, but he has not worked much at it lately." There are plenty of that sort. Christianity is their trade, their business, their profession—but they have not worked much at it lately—they carry it on very slightly, indeed. Let it not be so with us. If we would be followers of Christ, our whole hearts must be His.

27. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. If there is any cross-bearing involved in Christianity—such as the cross of holy living, or the cross of believing old-fashioned doctrines and not being "abreast of the times"—if there is any sort of cross which is involved in the conscientious discharge of our duty as followers of Christ, we must bear it, or else we cannot be His disciples. Our Lord's words are very clear and explicit—"And whoever does not bear his cross"—be he who he may, whatever pretensions or professions he may make—if he does not bear his cross, 'and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.'"

28-30. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and counts the cost, whether he has sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Do you not think that there are a great many towers of that kind about in our day? I mean, unfinished Christian characters, persons who profess to be followers of Christ, but are not! They just exhibit to you their own shortcomings. They are people with good intentions who did make some attempt to follow Jesus, but, since it involved too much self-denial, they were not able to go that length—so they turned back and walked no more with Him. They began to build a tower, but never finished it. May God, in His mercy, prevent you and me from becoming a laughing-stock to all eternity! I believe that in the Last Great Day and forever, those persons who knew enough about the Gospel to wish to be Christians, and who were somewhat actuated by right motives, but yet who never went so far as to give up their hearts to Christ, will stand forth as monuments

of their own folly and even the demons in Hell will point at them and say, "These men began to build, and were not able to finish."

Such persons will be unable to answer that contemptuous sneer. If you have conscience enough to begin to follow Christ, even reason, itself, requires you to go the whole length. If you know that it is right for you to do so, why do you not go through with it? If you are sufficiently convinced of its rightness to go as far as you do, why not go still farther?

God grant that you may! Better never begin to build than to commence without having counted the cost and then to find that you have not sufficient to finish.

31, 32. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sits not down first and consults whether he is able, with ten thousand, to meet him that comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off he sends an ambassador, and desires conditions of peace? If you cannot fight the world, the flesh, and the devil—if there is no power that can help you to do it, or if you are not willing to be helped by the only Power that can help you—if you will not surrender yourself to Christ that He may baffle all the hosts of the adversary, then it is of no use for you to begin the war.

33. So likewise, whoever he is of you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be My disciple. In Christ's days and afterwards, discipleship usually involved the absolute giving up of everything that His followers had, for those were times of persecution. And if such seasons should come to us, we must have such love to Christ that, for His sake, we could forsake all that we have. Otherwise we cannot be His disciples.

34. Salt is good: but if the salt has lost its savor, how shall it be seasoned? Christianity is good, but if the very life has gone out of it, what can you do with it? A dead professor is the most corrupt thing under Heaven. Some there are who think that God's salt can lose its savor and yet get it back again. I remember one who told me that he knew a person who had been born again four times. That doctrine of re-re-re-regeneration is one that I have never found in the Word of God. I believe that true regeneration never fails to take effect and that it never loses that effect. It begets within the soul a life that cannot die, but, if that life could die, it could never be brought back again. The Apostle Paul puts this matter beyond dispute in Hebrews 6:4-6—"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame."

35. It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out A dead profession of religion is utterly useless and if it could be possible that a man should be really quickened by the Spirit of God, and yet that the new life should depart from him, he would be in a hopeless case, indeed.

35. He that has ears to hear, let him hear. Let all of us give good heed to this injunction, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

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