

Self-Effort

by J.C. Ryle

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the necessity of personal effort and responsibility in seeking salvation through the narrow door of Christ.

Scripture: Proverbs 1:24-31, Matthew 11:12, Luke 13:24, John 10:9, John 14:6, Ephesians 3:12, Hebrews 9:8, James 5:20, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 John 3:4

Topics: "Salvation", "Personal Responsibility"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the critical importance of personal responsibility in seeking salvation through the 'narrow door' as taught by Jesus in Luke 13:24. He warns that many will attempt to enter but will ultimately be unable to, highlighting the urgency of making every effort to pursue a relationship with Christ. Ryle describes the narrow door as the only way to salvation, which requires diligence, sacrifice, and a sincere desire to turn away from sin. He encourages believers to actively share the message of salvation with others, reminding them of the fleeting nature of time and the certainty of Christ's return. The sermon serves as a call to action for all to enter through the narrow door without delay.

Transcript

"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to" (Luke 13:24).

There once was a man who asked our Lord Jesus Christ a very serious question. He said to Him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?"

Who this man was we do not know. What his motive was for asking this question we are not told. Perhaps he wished to gratify an idle curiosity: perhaps he wanted an excuse for not seeking salvation himself.

The Holy Spirit has kept back all this from us: the name and motive of the seeker are both hidden.

But one thing is very clear, and that is the vast importance of the saying of our Lord to which the question gave rise. Jesus seized the opportunity to direct the minds of all around Him to their own plain duty. He knew the train of thought which the man's inquiry had set moving in their hearts: He saw what was going on within them. "Make every effort," He cries, "to enter through the narrow door." Whether there be few saved or many, your course is clear--make every effort to enter in. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation. A day will come when many will seek to enter in and will not be able. "Make every effort to enter in now."

I desire to call the serious attention of all who read this paper to the solemn lessons which this saying of the Lord Jesus is meant to teach. It is one which deserves special remembrance in the present day. It teaches unmistakably that mighty truth, our own personal responsibility for the salvation of our souls. It shows the immense danger of putting off the great business of Christianity, as so many unhappily do. On both these points the witness of our Lord Jesus Christ in the text is clear. He, who is the eternal God, and who spoke the words of perfect wisdom, says to the sons of men, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to" (Luke 13:24).

I. Here is a "description" of the way of salvation. Jesus calls it "the narrow door."

II. Here is a clear "command." Jesus says, "Make every effort to enter through."

III. Here is an frightful "prophecy." Jesus says, "Many will try to enter and will not be able to."

May the Holy Spirit apply the subject to the hearts of all into whose hands this paper may fall! May all who read it know the way of salvation experimentally, obey the command of the Lord practically, and be found safe in the great day of His second coming!

I. Here is a "description" of the way of salvation--Jesus calls it "the narrow door."

There is a door which leads to forgiveness, peace with God, and heaven. Whosoever goes in through that door will be saved. Never, surely, was a door more needed.

Sin is a vast mountain between man and God. How will a man climb over it?

Sin is a high wall between man and God. How will man get through it?

Sin is a deep gulf between man and God. How will man cross over it?

God is in heaven, holy, pure, spiritual, undefiled, light without any darkness at all, a Being who cannot bear that which is evil, or look upon sin. Man is a poor fallen worm, crawling on earth for a few years--sinful, corrupt, erring, defective--a being whose imagination is only evil, and whose heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. How will man and God be brought together? How will man ever draw near to his Maker without fear and shame? Blessed be God, there is a way! There is a road. There is a path. There is a door. It is the door spoken of in the words of Christ--"the narrow door."

This door was "made for sinners by the Lord Jesus Christ." From all eternity He covenanted and promised that He would make it. In the fullness of time He came into the world and made it, by His own atoning death on the cross. By that death He made satisfaction for man's sin, paid man's debt to God, and bore man's punishment. He built a great door

at the cost of His own body and blood. He raised a ladder on earth whose top reached to heaven. He made a door by which the chief of sinners may enter into the holy presence of God, and not be afraid. He opened a road by which the vilest of men, believing in Him, may draw near to God and have peace. He cries to us, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:9). "I am the way: No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). "In Him," says Paul, "we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12). Thus was the door of salvation formed.

This door is called "the narrow door," and it is not called so without cause. It is always narrow, constricted, and difficult to pass through to some persons, and it will be so as long as the world stands. It is narrow to all who love sin, and are determine not to part with it. It is narrow to all who set their affection on this world, and seek first its pleasures and rewards. It is narrow to all who dislike trouble, and are unwilling to take pains and make sacrifices for their souls. It is narrow to all who like company, and want to keep in with the crowd. It is narrow to all who are self-righteous, and think they are good people, and deserve to be saved. To all, the great door, which Christ made, is narrow and constricted. In vain they seek to pass through. The door will not admit them. God is not unwilling to receive them; their sins are not too many to be forgiven: but they are not willing to be saved God's way. Thousands, in the last nineteen centuries, have tried to make the doorway wider: thousands have worked and toiled to get to heaven on their terms. But the door never alters. It is not elastic: it will not stretch to accommodate one man more than another. It is still the narrow door.

Narrow as this door is, it is "the only one by which men can get to heaven." There is no side door; there is no side road; there is no gap or low-place in the wall. All that are ever saved will be saved only by Christ, and only by simple faith in Him--Not one will be saved by simply repenting. Today's sorrow does not wipe off yesterday's score. Not one will be saved by his own works. The best works that any man can do are little better than impressive sins. Not one will be saved by his formal regularity in the use of the outward means of grace [going to church, reading his Bible, praying, taking the Lord's Supper, and honoring the Lord's day]. When we have done it all, we are nothing but poor "unprofitable servants." Oh, no! it is a mere waste of time to seek any other road to eternal life. Men may look to the right and to the left, and weary themselves with their own methods, but they will never find another door. Proud men may dislike the door if they want. Depraved men may scoff at it, and make a jest of those who use it. Lazy men may complain that the way is hard. But men will discover no other salvation than that of faith in the blood and righteousness of a crucified Redeemer. There stands between us and heaven one great door: it may be narrow; but it is the only one. We must either enter heaven by the narrow door, or not at all.

Narrow as this door is, it is "a door always ready to open." No sinners of any kind are forbidden to draw near: whosoever will may enter in and be saved. There is but one condition of admission: that condition is that you really feel your sins and desire to be saved by Christ in His own way. Are you really aware of your guilt and vileness? Have you a truly broken and contrite heart? Look at the door of salvation, and come in. He that made it declares, "Whoever comes to me I will never drive

away" (John 6:37). The question to be considered is not whether you are a great sinner or a little sinner--whether you are elect or not--whether you are converted or not. The question is simply this, "Do you feel your sins? Do you feel burdened and heavy-laden? Are you willing to put your life into Christ's hand?" Then if that be the case, the door will open to you at once. Come in this very day. Why are you standing out there? Narrow as this door is, it is "one through which thousands have gone in and been saved." No sinner was ever turned back, and told he was too bad to be admitted, if he came really sick of his sins. Thousands of all sorts have been received, cleansed, washed, forgiven, clothed, and made heirs of eternal life. Some of them seemed very unlikely to be admitted: you and I might have thought they were too bad to be saved. But He that built the door did not refuse them. As soon as they knocked, He gave orders that they should be let in.

Manasseh, King of Judah, went up to this door. None could have been worse than he up to that time. He had despised his good father Hezekiah's example and advice. He had bowed down to idols. He had filled Jerusalem with bloodshed and cruelty. He had slain his own children. But as soon as his eyes were opened to his sins, and he fled to the door for forgiveness, the door flew wide open and he was saved. Saul the Pharisee went up to this door. He had been a blasphemer of Christ, and a persecutor of Christ's people. He had labored hard to stop the progress of the Gospel. But as soon as his heart was touched, and he found out his own guilt and fled to the door for forgiveness, at once the door flew wide open, and he was saved.

Many of the Jews who crucified our Lord went up to this door. They had been grievous sinners indeed. They had refused and rejected their own

Messiah. They had delivered Him to Pilate, and pleaded that He might be slain. They had desired Barabbas to be let go, and the Son of God to be crucified. But in the day when they were convicted in their heart by Peter's preaching, they fled to the door for forgiveness, and at once the door flew open, and they were saved.

The jailer at Philippi went up to this door. He had been a cruel, hard, godless man. He had done all in his power to ill-treat Paul and his companion. He had thrust them into the inner prison, and locked their feet in the stocks. But when his conscience was aroused by the earthquake, and his mind enlightened by Paul's teaching of the Word of God, he fled to the door for forgiveness, and at once the door flew open, and he was saved.

But why would I need to stop short in Bible examples? Why should I not say that multitudes have gone to "the narrow door" since the days of the Apostles, and have entered in by it and been saved? Thousands of all ranks, classes, and ages--educated and uneducated, rich and poor, old and young--have tried the door and found it ready to open--have gone through it and found peace for their souls. Yes: thousands of persons yet living have proven the effectiveness of the door, and found it the way to real happiness. Noblemen and commoners, merchants and bankers, soldiers and sailors, farmers and tradesmen, laborers and workmen, are still upon earth, who have found the narrow door to be "a way of pleasantness and a path of peace." They have not brought up an evil report of what they found inside the door. They have found Christ's yoke to be easy, and His burden to be light. Their only regret has been that so few enter in, and that they themselves did not enter in before.

This is the door which I want every one to enter, into whose hand this

paper may fall. I don't want you merely to go to church, but to go with heart and soul to the door of life. I don't want you merely to believe there is such a door, and to think it a good thing, but to enter by faith and be saved.

Think "what a privilege" it is to have a door at all. The angels who did not remain faithful to God, fell, never to rise again. To them there was no door of escape opened. Millions of pagans have never heard of any way to eternal life. What would they have given, if they could only have heard one plain sermon about Christ? The Jews in Old Testament times saw only the door dimly and far away. "The way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing" (Hebrews 9:8). You have the door set plainly before you: you have Christ and full salvation offered to you, without money and without price. You never need to be at a loss which way to turn. Oh, consider what a mercy this is! Beware that you do not despise the door and perish in unbelief. Better a thousand times not to know of the door than to know of it and yet remain outside. How will you escape if you neglect so great a salvation?

Think what a thankful man you ought to be if you have really gone in at the narrow door. To be a pardoned, forgiven, justified soul--to be ready for sickness, death, judgment and eternity--to always be provided for in both worlds--surely this is a matter for daily praise. True Christians ought to be more full of thanksgivings than they are. I fear that few sufficiently remember what they were by nature, and what debtors they are to grace. A heathen remarked that singing hymns of praise was one special mark of the early Christians. It would be good for Christians in the present day, if they knew more of this frame of mind. It is no

evidence of a healthy state of soul when there is much complaining and little praise. It is an amazing mercy that there is any door of salvation at all; but it is a still greater mercy when we are taught to enter in by it and be saved.

II. In the second place, here is a plain "command." Jesus says to us, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door."

There is often much to be learned in a single word of Scripture. The words of our Lord Jesus in particular, are always full of matter for thought. Here is a word which is a striking example of what I mean. Let us see what the great Teacher would have us gather out of the words "Make every effort."

"Make every effort" teaches that a man must use means diligently, if he would have his soul saved. There are means which God has appointed to help man in his efforts to approach Him. There are ways in which a man must walk, if he desires to be found by Christ. Public Worship, reading the Bible, hearing the Gospel preached--these are the kind of things to which I refer. They lie, as it were, in the middle, between man and God. Doubtless no one can change his own heart, or wipe away one of his sins, or make himself in the least degree acceptable to God; but I do say that if man could do nothing but sit still, Christ would never have said "Make every effort."

"Make every effort" teaches that man is a free agent, and will be dealt with by God as a responsible being. The Lord Jesus does not tell us to wait, and wish, and feel, and hope, and desire. He says, "Make every effort." I call that worthless religion which teaches people to be content with saying, "We can do nothing ourselves," and makes them continue in sin. It is as bad as teaching people that it is not their

fault if they are not converted, and that God only is to blame if they are not saved. I find no such theology in the New Testament. I hear Jesus saying to sinners, "Come--repent--believe--labor--ask--knock." I see plainly that our salvation, from first to last, is entirely "of God;" but I see with no less clarity that our ruin, if lost, is wholly and entirely of ourselves. I maintain that sinners are always addressed as accountable and responsible; and I see no better proof of this than what is contained in the words "Make every effort."

"Make every effort" teaches that a man must expect many adversaries and a hard battle, if he would have his soul saved. And this, as a matter of experience, is strictly true. There are no "gains without pains" in spiritual things any more than in temporal. That roaring lion, the devil, will never let a soul escape from him without a struggle. The heart which is naturally sensual and earthly will never be turned to spiritual things without a daily fight. The world, with all its opposition and temptations, will never be overcome without a conflict. But why should all this surprise us? What great and good thing was ever done without trouble? Wheat does not grow without plowing and sowing; riches are not obtained without care and attention; success in life is not won without hardships and work; and heaven, above all, is not to be reached without the cross and the battle. The "kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matthew 11:12). A man must "Make every effort."

"Make every effort" teaches that it is worthwhile for a man to seek salvation. If there is anything that deserves a struggle in this world, it is the prosperity of the soul. The objects for which the great majority of men "make every effort" are comparatively poor and trifling

things. Riches, and greatness, and rank, and learning, are "a corruptible crown." The incorruptible things are all within the narrow door. The peace of God which passes all understanding--the bright hope of good things to come--the sense of the Spirit dwelling in us--the consciousness that we are forgiven, safe, ready, insured, provided for in time and eternity, whatever may happen--these are true gold, and lasting riches. It is right and good that the Lord Jesus call on us to "make every effort."

"Make every effort" teaches that laziness towards Christianity is a great sin. It is not merely a misfortune, as some fancy--a thing for which people are to be pitied, and a matter for regret. It is something far more than this. It is a breach of a clear commandment. What will be said of the man who violates God's law, and does something which God says, "You will not do?" There can be but one answer. He is a sinner.

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). And what will be said of the man who neglects his soul, and makes no effort to enter the narrow door? There can be only one reply. He is omitting an explicit duty. Christ says to him, "Make every effort," and behold, he sits still!

"Make every effort" teaches that all those outside the narrow door are in great danger. They are in danger of being lost and tormented forever. There is but a step between them and death. If death finds them in their present condition, they will perish without hope. The Lord Jesus saw that clearly. He knew the uncertainty of life and the shortness of time: He would rejoice to have sinners hurry and not to delay, lest they put off the business of their soul till it is too late. He speaks as one who saw the devil drawing near to them daily, and the days of their life

gradually ebbing away. He would have them be very careful that they would not wait too long: therefore He cries, "Make every effort."

Those words "Make every effort," raises solemn thoughts in my mind. It is full of condemnation for thousands of baptized persons. It condemns the ways and practices of multitudes who profess and call themselves Christians. There are many who neither swear, nor murder, nor commit adultery, nor steal, nor lie; but one thing unhappily cannot be said of them: they cannot be said to be "making every effort" to be saved. The "spirit of slumber" possesses their hearts in everything that concerns Christianity. They are very busy about the things of the world: they rise early, and go to bed late; they work; they labor; they are busy; they are careful: but the one thing they need to accomplish they never do--they never "make every effort," towards the things of God.

1. What will I say of those who are irregular about public worship on Sundays?

There are thousands who answer this description. Sometimes, if they feel disposed, they go to some church, and attend a religious service; at other times they stay at home and read the paper, or idle about, or look over their accounts, or seek some amusement. "Is this making every effort?" I speak to men of common sense. Let them judge what I say.

2. What will I say of those who come regularly to a place of worship, but come entirely as a matter of form?

There are many in every part of our country in this condition. Their fathers taught them to come; their custom has always been to come: it would not be respectable to stay away. But they care nothing for the worship of God when they do come. Whether they hear law or Gospel, truth or error, it is all the same to them. They remember nothing afterwards.

They take off their form of religion with their Sunday clothes, and return to the world. And "is this making every effort?" I speak to men of common sense. Let them judge what I say.

3. What will I say of those who seldom or never read the Bible?

There are thousands of persons, I fear, who answer this description.

They know the Book by name; they know it is commonly regarded as the only Book which teaches us how to live and how to die: but they can never find time for reading it, Newspapers, reviews, novels, romances, they can read, but not the Bible. And "is this making every effort?" to enter in? I speak to men of common sense. Let them judge what I say.

4. What will I say of those who never pray? There are multitudes, I firmly believe, in this condition. Without God they rise in the morning, and without God they lie down at night. They ask for nothing; they confess nothing; they return thanks for nothing, they seek nothing. They are all dying creatures, and yet they are not even on speaking terms with their Maker and their Judge! And "is this making every effort?" I speak to men of common sense. Let them judge what I say.

It is a solemn thing to be a minister of the Gospel. It is a painful thing to look on, and notice the ways of mankind in spiritual matters.

We hold in our hands that great law Book of God, which declares that without repentance, and conversion, and faith in Christ, and holiness, no man living can be saved. In discharge of our office we urge men to repent, believe, and be saved; but, to our grief, how frequently we have to lament that our labor seems all in vain. Men attend our churches, and listen, and approve, but do not "make every effort" to be saved. We show the sinfulness of sin; we unfold the loveliness of Christ; we expose the vanity of the world; we set forth the happiness of Christ's service;

we offer the living water to the wearied and heavy laden sons of toil:
but, to our dismay, how often we seem to speak to the winds. Our words
are patiently heard on Sundays; our arguments are not refuted: but we see
plainly in the week that men are not "making every effort" to be saved.
There comes the devil on Monday morning, and offers his countless snares;
there comes the world, and holds out its illusive prizes: our hearers
follow them greedily. They work hard for this world's goods; they toil
at Satan's bidding: but the one thing they need to do they won't--they
will not "make every effort" at all.

I am not writing from hear-say. I speak what I have seen. I write down
the result of thirty-seven years' experience in the ministry. I have
learned lessons about human nature during that period which I never knew
before. I have seen how true are our Lord's words about the narrow road.
I have discovered how few there are that "make every effort" to be saved.
Seriousness about fleeting matters is common enough. Striving to be rich
and prosperous in this world is not rare at all. Pains about money, and
business, and politics--pains about trade, and science, and fine arts,
and amusements--pains about rent, and wages, and labor, and land--pains
about such matters I see in abundance both in the city and the country.
But I see few who take pains about their souls. I see few anywhere who
"make every effort" to enter in through the narrow door.

I am not surprised at all this. I read in the Bible that it is only what
I am to expect. The parable of the great supper is an exact picture of
things that I have seen with my own eyes ever since I became a minister
(Luke 14:16). I find, as my Lord and Savior tells me, that "men make
excuse." One has his piece of land to see; another has his oxen to
prove; a third has his family hindrances. But all this does not prevent

my feeling deeply grieved for the souls of men. I grieve to think that they should have eternal life so close to them, and yet be lost because they will not "make every effort" to enter in and be saved.

I do not know in what state of soul many readers of this paper may be.

But I warn you to take heed that you do not perish forever because you did not "make every effort." Do not suppose that it needs some great scarlet sin to bring you to the pit of destruction. You have only to sit still and do nothing, and you will find yourself eventually in the pit of Hell. Yes! Satan does not ask you to walk in the steps of Cain, and Pharaoh, and Ahab, and Belshazzar, and Judas Iscariot. There is another road to Hell that is guaranteed to get you there--the road of spiritual sluggishness, spiritual laziness, and spiritual sloth. Satan has no objection to you being known as a respectable member of the Christian Church. He will let you give your offerings; he will allow you to sit comfortably in church every Sunday that you live. He knows full well, that so long as you do not "make every effort," you must come at last to the place where the destroying maggot never dies, and the fire that is never quenched. Be careful that you do not come to this end. I repeat it, "you have only to do nothing, and you will be lost."

If you have been taught to "make every effort" for your soul's well-being, I beg you never to suppose you can go too far. Never give way to the idea that you are too concerned about your spiritual condition, and that there is no need for so much carefulness. Settle it rather in your mind that "in all labor there is profit," and that no labor is so profitable as that bestowed on the soul. It is a maxim among good farmers that the more they do for the land the more the land does for them. I am sure it should be a maxim among Christians that the more they

do for their Christianity the more their Christianity will do for them. Watch out for the slightest inclination to be careless about such things as reading the Bible, going to church, praying, and the taking of the Lord's Supper. Beware of shortening your prayers, Bible reading, your private communion with God. Be careful that you do not give way to a thoughtless, lazy manner of using weekly services of the Church. Fight against any rising disposition to be sleepy, critical, and fault-finding, while you listen to the preaching of the Gospel. Whatever you do for God, do it with all your heart, mind and strength. In other things be moderate, and dread running into extremes. In matters of the soul fear moderation just as you would fear the plague. Don't care what men may think of you. Let it be enough for you that your Master says, "make every effort."

III. The last thing I wish to consider in this paper is the "dreadful prediction which the Lord Jesus delivers." He says, "Many will try to enter and will not be able to."

When will this be? At what period will the door of salvation be shut for ever? When will the "making of every effort" to enter in be of no use? These are serious questions. The door is now ready to open to the chief of sinners; but a day comes when it will open no more.

The time foretold by our Lord is the time of His own second coming to judge the world. The patience of God will at last have an end. The throne of grace will at last be taken down, and the throne of judgment will be set up in its place. The fountain of living waters will finally be closed. The narrow door will at last be barred and bolted. The day of grace will be passed and over. The day of reckoning with a sin-laden world will finally begin. And then will be brought to pass the solemn

prediction of the Lord Jesus "Many will try to enter in and will not be able to."

All prophecies of Scripture that have been fulfilled up to this time, have been fulfilled to the very letter. They have seemed to many unlikely, improbable, impossible, up to the very time of their accomplishment; but not one word of them has ever failed.

The promises of "good things" have come to pass, in spite of difficulties that seemed impossible:

1. Sarah had a son when she was well past the age for the bearing of children.
2. The children of Israel were brought out of Egypt and planted in the promised land.
3. The Jews were redeemed from the captivity of Babylon, after seventy years, and enabled once more to build the temple.
4. The Lord Jesus was born of a pure virgin, lived, ministered, was betrayed, and cut off, precisely as Scripture foretold.

The Word of God was promised in all these cases, that it should be. And so it was. The predictions of judgments on cities and nations have come to pass, though at the time they were first spoken they seemed incredible. Edom is a wilderness; Tyre is a rock for drying nets; Nineveh, that "greater than great city," is laid waste, and become a desolation; Babylon is a dry land and a wilderness--her extensive walls are utterly broken down. In all these cases the Word of God foretold that it should be so. And so it was.

The prediction of the Lord Jesus Christ which I press on your attention this day, will be fulfilled in like manner. Not one word of it will fail when the time of its accomplishment is due. "Many will try to enter in

and will not be able to."

There is a time coming when seeking God will be useless. Oh, that men would remember that! Too many seem to believe that the hour will never arrive when they will seek and not find: but they are sadly mistaken.

They will discover their mistake one day to their own confusion, except they repent. When Christ comes "many will try to enter in, and will 'not be able to.'"

There is a time coming when many will be shut out from heaven forever. It will not be the lot of a few, but of a great multitude; it will not happen to one or two in this area, and one or two in another: it will be the miserable end of a immense crowd. "'Many' will try to enter in, and will not be able to."

Knowledge will come to many too late. They will see at last the value of an immortal soul, and the happiness of having it saved. They will understand at last their own sinfulness and God's holiness, and the glorious fitness of the Gospel of Christ. They will comprehend at last why ministers seemed so anxious, and preached so long, and implored them so earnestly to be converted. But, to their grief, they will know all this "too late!"

Repentance will come to many too late. They will discover their own surpassing wickedness and be thoroughly ashamed of their past folly. They will be full of bitter regret and hopeless wailings, of keen convictions and of piercing sorrows. They will weep, and wail, and mourn, when they reflect on their sins. The remembrance of their lives will be grievous to them; the burden of their guilt will seem intolerable. But, to their grief, like Judas Iscariot, they will repent "too late!"

Faith will come to many too late. They will no longer be able to deny that there is a God, and a devil, a heaven, and a hell. False religion, and skepticism, and unfaithfulness will be laid aside forever; scoffing, and joking, and free-thinking will cease. They will see with their own eyes and feel in their own bodies, that the things of which ministers spoke were not cleverly devised fables, but great real truths. They will find out to their cost that evangelical religion was not lip service, extravagance, fanaticism, and enthusiasm: they will discover that it was the one thing they needed, and that the lack of it will cause them to be lost forever. Like the devil, they will finally believe and tremble, but "too late!"

A desire of salvation will come to many too late. They will long after forgiveness, and peace, and the favor of God, when they can no more be had. They will wish they might have one more Sunday over again, have one more offer of forgiveness, have one more call to prayer. But it will matter nothing what they think, or feel, or desire then: the day of grace will be over; the door of salvation will be bolted and barred. It will be "too late!"

I often think what a change there will be one day in the price and estimation at which things are valued. I look around this world in which my lot is cast; I note the current price of everything this world contains; I look forward to the coming of Christ, and the great day of God. I think of the new order of things, which that day will bring in; I read the words of the Lord Jesus, when He describes the master of the house rising up and shutting the door; and as I read, I say to myself, "There will be a great change soon."

What are the "dear things" now? Gold, silver, precious stones, bank

notes, mines, ships, lands, houses, horses, cars, furniture, food, drink, clothes, and the like. These are the things that are thought valuable; these are the things that command a ready market; these are the things which you can never get below a certain price. He that has a lot of these things is counted a wealthy man. Such is the world!

And what are the "cheap things" now? The knowledge of God, the free salvation of the Gospel, the favor of Christ, the grace of the Holy Spirit, the privilege of being God's son, the title to eternal life, the right to the tree of life, the promise of a room in the Father's House in heaven, the promises of an incorruptible inheritance, the offer of a crown of glory that does not fade away.

These are the things that no man hardly cares for. They are offered to the sons of men without money and without price: they may be had for nothing--freely and generously. Whosoever will may take his share. But, sadly, there is no demand for these things! They go begging. They are scarcely looked at. They are offered in vain. Such is the world!

But a day is coming upon us all when the value of everything will be altered. A day is coming when banknotes will be as useless as rags, and gold will be as worthless as the dust of the earth. A day is coming when thousands will care nothing for the things for which they once lived, and will desire nothing so much as the things which they once despised. The mansions and palaces will be forgotten in the desire of a "house not made with hands." The favor of the rich and great will be remembered no more, in the longing for the favor of the King of kings. The silks, and satins, and velvets, and laces, will be lost sight of in the anxious need of the robe of Christ's righteousness. All will be altered, all will be changed in the great day of the Lord's return. "Many will try to enter

in and will not be able to"

It was a weighty saying of some wise man, that "hell is truth known too late." I fear that thousands of those who profess to be Christians in this day will find this out by experience. They will discover the value of their souls when it is too late to obtain mercy, and see the beauty of the Gospel when they can derive no benefit from it. Oh, that men would be wise early in life! I often think there are few passages of Scripture more awful than that in the first chapter of Proverbs,

But since you rejected me when I called
and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,
since you ignored all my advice
and would not accept my rebuke,

I in turn will laugh at your disaster;
I will mock when calamity overtakes you--
when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,
when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

Then they will call to me but I will not answer;
they will look for me but will not find me.

Since they hated knowledge
and did not choose to fear the LORD,
since they would not accept my advice
and spurned my rebuke,
they will eat the fruit of their ways
and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.

(Proverbs 1:24-31)

Some reader of this paper may be one of those who neither like the faith

nor practice which the Gospel of Christ requires. You think that we are extreme when we implore you to repent and be converted. You think we ask too much when we urge you to come out from the world, and take up the cross, and follow Christ. But take notice that you will one day confess that we were right. Sooner or later, in this world or the next, you will acknowledge that you were wrong. Yes! It is a sad consideration for the faithful minister of the Gospel, that all who hear him will one day acknowledge that his counsel was good. Mocked, despised, scorned, neglected as his testimony may be on earth, a day is coming which will prove that truth was on his side. The rich man who hears us and yet makes a god of this world--the tradesman who hears us and yet makes his ledger his Bible--the farmer who hears us and yet remains cold as the clay on his land--the worker who hears us and feels no more for his soul than a stone--all, all will in time acknowledge before the world that they were wrong. All will in time earnestly desire that very mercy which we now set before them in vain. "They will try to enter in, and will not be able to."

Some reader of this paper may be one of those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Such an one may well take comfort when he looks forward. You often suffer persecution now for Christianity's sake. You have to bear hard words and unkind insinuations. Your motives are often misrepresented, and your conduct slandered. The reproach of the cross has not ceased. But you may take courage when you look forward and think of the Lord's second coming. That day will make amends for all. You will see those who now laugh at you because you read the Bible, and pray, and love Christ, in a very different state of mind. They will come to you as the foolish virgins came to the wise, saying, "Give us some of

your oil; our lamps are going out" (Matthew 25:8).

You will see those who now hate you and call you fools because, like Caleb and Joshua, you bring up a good report of Christ's service. Some day they will say, "Oh, that we had taken part with you! You have been the truly wise, and we the foolish." Then do not fear the reproach of men. Confess Christ boldly before the world. Show your colors, and do not be ashamed of your Master. Time is short: eternity rushes on. The cross is only for a short time: the crown is forever. "Many will try to enter in, and will not be able to."

And now let me offer to every one who reads this paper a few parting words, in order to apply the whole subject to his soul. You have heard the words of the Lord Jesus unfolded and expounded. You have seen the picture of the way of salvation: it is a narrow door--You have heard the command of the King: "Make every effort to enter in"--You have been told of His solemn warning: "Many will try to enter in, and will not be able to"--Bear with me a little longer while I try to impress the whole matter on your conscience. I still have something to say on God's behalf.

(1) For one thing, I will ask you a simple question. "Have you entered in through the narrow door or not? Old or young, rich or poor, religious or atheist, I repeat my question, "Have you entered in through the narrow door?"

I do not ask whether you have heard of it, and believe there is a door.

I do not ask whether you have looked at it, and admired it, and hope one day to go through. I ask whether you have gone up to it, knocked on it, been admitted, and "are now inside?"

If you are not inside, what good have you got from your religion? You are not pardoned and forgiven. You are not reconciled to God. You are

not born again, sanctified, and suitable for heaven. If you die as you are, you will live in the same place of torment as the devil will--forever, and your soul will be eternally miserable.

Oh, think, think what a state this is to live in! Think, think above all things, what a state this is to die in! Your life is but a vapor. A few more years at most and you are gone: your place in the world will soon be filled up; your house will be occupied by another. The sun will go on shining; the grass and daises will soon grow thick over your grave; your body will be food for worms, and your soul will be lost for all of eternity.

And all this time there stands open before you a door of salvation. God invites you. Jesus Christ offers to save you. All things are ready for your deliverance. Only one thing is lacking, and that is that you should be willing to be saved. Oh think of these things, and be wise!

(2) For another thing, I will give plain advice to all who are not yet inside the narrow door. That advice is simply this: "to enter in without a day's delay."

Tell me, if you can, of anyone who ever reached heaven except through "the narrow door." I know of none. From Abel, the first who died, down to the end of the list of Bible names, I see none saved by any way but faith in Christ.

Tell me, if you can, of any one who ever entered through the narrow door without "making every effort." I know of none except those who die in infancy. He that would win heaven must be content to fight for it.

Tell me, if you can, of any one who ever strove earnestly to enter, and failed to succeed. I know of none. I believe that however weak and ignorant men may be, they never seek life heartily and conscientiously,

at the right door, and are left without an answer of peace.

Tell me, if you can, of any one who ever entered through the narrow door, and was sorry afterwards. I know of none. I believe the footsteps on the threshold of the door are all one way. All have found it a good thing to serve Christ, and have never regretted taking up His cross.

If these things are true, seek Christ without delay, and enter through the door of life while you can! Make a beginning this very day. Go to that merciful and mighty Savior in prayer, and pour out your heart before Him. Confess to Him your guilt and wickedness and sin. Open your heart freely to Him: keep nothing back. Tell Him that you put yourself and all your soul's affairs wholly on His hands, and ask Him to save you according to His promise, and put His Holy Spirit within you.

There is everything "to encourage you to do this." Thousands as bad as you have applied to Christ in this way, and not one of them has been sent away and refused. They have found a peace of conscience they never knew before, and have gone on their way rejoicing. They have found strength for all the trials of life, and none of them have been allowed to perish in the wilderness. Why shouldn't you also seek Christ?

There is everything to encourage you to do what I tell you "at once." I know no reason why your repentance and conversion should not be as immediate as that of others before you. The Samaritan woman came to the well an ignorant sinner, and returned to her home a new creature. The Philippian jailer turned from darkness to light, and became a professed disciple of Christ in a single day. And why shouldn't others do the same? Why shouldn't you give up your sins, and trust in Christ this very day?

I know that the advice I have given you is good. The grand question is,

Will you take it?

(3) The last thing I have to say will be a request to all who have really entered through the narrow door. That request is, that you will tell others of the blessings which you have found.

I want all converted people to be missionaries. I do not want them all to go out to foreign lands, and preach to the heathen; but I do want all to be of a missionary spirit, and to make every effort to do good at home. I want them to testify to all around them that the narrow door is the way to happiness, and to persuade them to enter through it.

When Andrew was converted he found his brother Peter, and said to him, "'We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (John 1:41-42). When Philip was converted he found Nathaniel, and said to him, "'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathaniel asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip" (John 1:45-46). When the Samaritan woman was converted, "Leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?'" (John 4:28-29). When Saul the Pharisee was converted, "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20).

I long to see this kind of spirit among Christians in the present day. I long to see more zeal to commend the narrow door to all who are yet outside, and more desire to persuade them to enter through and be saved.

Happy indeed is that Church whose members not only desire to reach heaven themselves, but desire also to take others with them!

The great door of salvation is still ready to open, but the hour draws

near when it will be closed forever. Let us work while it is called today, for "night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4). Let us tell our relatives and friends, that we have accepted the way of life and found it pleasant, that we have tasted the bread of life and found it good.

I have heard it calculated that if every believer in the world were to bring one soul to Christ each year, the whole human race would be converted in less than twenty years. I make no comment on such a calculation. Whether such a thing might be or not, one thing is sure: that thing is, that many more "souls might probably be converted to God, if Christians were more zealous to do good."

This, at least, we may remember, that God does "not want anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He that endeavors to show his neighbor the narrow door is doing a work which God approves. He is doing a work which angels regard with interest, and with which the building of a pyramid will not compare in importance. What does the Scripture say? "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).

Let us all awaken to a deeper sense of our responsibility in this matter. Let us look around the circle of those among whom we live, and consider their state before God. Are there not many of them yet outside the door, unforgiven, unsanctified, and not prepared to die? Let us watch for opportunities of speaking to them. Let us tell them of the narrow door, and entreat them to "make every effort to enter in."

Who can tell what "a word spoken at the right time" may do? Who can tell what it may do when spoken in faith and prayer? It maybe the turning

point in some man's history. It may be the beginning of thought, prayer, and eternal life. Oh, for more love and boldness among believers! Think what a blessing to be allowed to speak one converting word!

I do not know what the feelings of my readers may be on this subject. My heart's desire and prayer is that you may daily remember Christ's solemn words, "Many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to."

Keep these words in mind.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/self-effort/>

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