

Letters of Master John Bradford, Written on Various Occasions

by John Bradford

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, sincerity, and trust in God's providence, and exhorts the listeners to repent and amend their lives according to the gospel.

Scripture: Matthew 5:10, Romans 8:18, 2 Timothy 1:12, James 1:12, 1 Peter 4:12

Topics: "Persecution", "Repentance"

Description

Master John Bradford, a faithful Minister, writes comforting letters to various cities and individuals, including his mother and friends, as he faces imprisonment and impending death for his unwavering faith in God's truth. He encourages repentance, turning away from sin, and steadfastness in the face of persecution, emphasizing the importance of living according to God's word and being willing to suffer for the sake of Christ. Bradford acknowledges his own shortcomings but remains resolute in his commitment to the gospel, urging others to hold fast to the true doctrine despite prevailing opposition and trials.

Transcript

Letters of Master John Bradford, written on Various Occasions *

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Master John Bradford, a faithful Minister and pillar of Christ's Church, by whose great labours and diligence in preaching and planting the sincerity of the gospel, by whose most godly and innocent life, and by whose long and painful imprisonments for the maintenance of the truth, the Kingdom of God was not a little advanced; who also at last most valiantly and cheerfully gave his blood for the same, on the first day of July, in the year of our Lord 1555.

[After the time that Bradford was condemned and sent to the Compter, it was purposed by his adversaries that he should be had to Manchester, where he was born, and there be burned. Whereupon he wrote to the City of London, thinking to take his last farewell of them in this letter. Fox.]

Letter 1. To the City of London

To all that profess the gospel and the true doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the city of London. John Bradford, a most unworthy servant of the Lord, now not only in prison, but also excommunicated and condemned to be burned, for the same true doctrine, wishes mercy, grace, and peace, with increase of all godly knowledge and piety, from God the father of mercy, through the merits of our alone and all-sufficient Redeemer Jesus Christ, by the operation of the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.

My dearly beloved brethren in our Saviour Christ. Although the time I have to live is very little, for I look hourly when I shall be conveyed into Lancashire, there to be burned, and, by the providence of God, to render my life where I first received it, by the same providence. And although the charge is great to keep me from all things whereby I might signify any thing to the world of my state; yet having, as now I have, pen and ink, through God's working, notwithstanding the power of Satan and his soldiers, I thought good to write a short confession of my faith, and thereto join a little exhortation unto you all, to live according to your profession.

First, my faith. I do confess, and pray all the whole congregation of Christ to bear witness with me of the same, that I believe constantly, through the gift and goodness of God, for faith is only God's gift, all the twelve articles of the symbol or creed, commonly attributed to the apostles. This my faith I would gladly particularly declare and expound, to confirm and comfort the simple. But, alas! by starts and stealth I write in the manner that I write, and therefore I shall desire you all to take this brevity in good part. And this faith I hold, not because of the creed itself, but because of the word of God, which teaches and confirms every article accordingly. This word of God, written by the prophets and apostles, and contained in the canonical books of the holy Bible, I do believe to contain plentifully all things necessary to salvation, so that nothing, as necessary to salvation, ought to be added thereto. And therefore neither the Church of Christ, nor any of his congregations, ought to be burdened with any other doctrine, that that which here-out has its

foundation and ground. In testimony of this faith, I render and give my life, being condemned, as well for not acknowledging the antichrist of Rome to be Christ's vice-general and supreme head of the catholic and universal church, here or elsewhere upon earth. As for denying the horrible and idolatrous doctrine of transubstantiation, and Christ's real, corporeal, and carnal presence in his supper, under the forms and accidents, (or appearance,) of bread and wine.

To believe that Christ our Saviour is the head of his Church, and that kings in their realms are the supreme powers, to whom every soul owes obedience. And to believe that in the supper of Christ is a true and very presence of whole Christ, God and man, to the faith of the receiver, but not to the stander by and looker upon, even as it is a true and very presence of bread and wine to the senses of men; to believe this, I say, will not serve. And therefore as a heretic I am condemned, and shall be burned. Whereof I ask God heartily for mercy that I do no more rejoice than I do, having so great cause, as to be an instrument wherein it may please my dear Lord God and Saviour to suffer.

For albeit my manifold sins, even since I came into prison, have deserved at the hands of God, not only temporal fire, but also eternal fire in hell, much more my former sinful life, which the Lord pardon for Christ's sake, as I know he of his mercy has done, and that he never will lay my iniquities to my charge, to condemnation. So great is his goodness, praised therefore be his holy name! Although, I say, my manifold and grievous late sins have deserved most justly all that man or devil can do unto me. And therefore I confess that the Lord is just, and that his judgements are true and deserved on my behalf. Yet, the bishops and prelates do not persecute them in me, but Christ himself, his word, his truth, and religion. And therefore I have great cause, yea, most great cause, to rejoice that ever I was born, and hitherto kept of the Lord. That by my death, which is deserved for my sins, it pleases the heavenly Father to glorify his name, to testify his truth, to confirm his verity, to oppugn his adversities. O good God and merciful Father! Forgive my great unthankfulness, especially herein.

And you, my dearly beloved, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, I humbly and heartily in his bowels and blood do now, for my last farewell in this present life, beseech you and every one of you, that you will consider this work of the Lord accordingly. First by me be admonished to beware of hypocrisy and carnal security. Profess not the gospel with tongue and lips only, but in heart and verity. Frame and fashion your lives accordingly. Beware that God's name be not evil spoken of, and the gospel still less regarded by your conversation. God forgive me, that I have not so heartily professed it as I should have done, but have sought myself much therein. The gospel is a new doctrine to the old man. It is new wine. And therefore it cannot be put in old bottles, without more hurt than good to the bottles. If we will talk with the Lord, we must put off our shoes and carnal affections. If we will hear the voice of the Lord, we must wash our garments and be holy. If we will be Christ's disciples, we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ. We cannot serve two masters. If we will seek Christ's kingdom, we must seek for the righteousness thereof. To the petition, Let thy kingdom come, we must join, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. If we will not be doers of the word, but hearers of it only, we sorely deceive ourselves. If we hear the gospel, and love it not, we declare ourselves to be but fools, and builders upon the sand. The Lord's spirit hates feigning. Deceitfulness the Lord abhors. If we come to him we must beware that we come not with a double heart. For them may chance that God will answer us according to the block which is in our heart, and so we shall deceive ourselves and others.

See that we couple a good conscience to faith, lest we make a shipwreck. To the Lord we must come with fear and reverence. If we will be gospellers, we must be Christ's. If we be Christ's, we must crucify our flesh with the lusts and concupiscences thereof. If we will be under grace, sin must not bear rule in us. We

may not come to the Lord, and draw night unto him with our lips, and leave our hearts elsewhere, lest the Lord's wrath wax hot, and he take from us the good yet remaining. In no case can the kingdom of Christ approach unto them that repent not. Therefore, my dearly beloved, let us repent and be heartily sorry that we have so carnally, so hypocritically, so covetously, so vain-gloriously professed the gospel. For all these I confess of myself, to the glory of God, that he may cover my offences in the day of judgement. Let the anger and plagues of God most justly fallen upon us, be applied to every one of our deserts, that from the bottom of our hearts every one of us may say, It is I, Lord, that have sinned against thee; it is my hypocrisy, my vain-glory, my covetousness, uncleanness, carnality, security, idleness, unthankfulness, self-love, and such like, which have deserved the taking away of our good king (King Edward VI, editor), of thy word, and true religion, of thy good ministers by exile, imprisonment, and death. It is my wickedness that causes success, and increase of authority, and peace to thy enemies. Oh, be merciful, be merciful unto us. Turn to us again, O Lord of hosts, and turn us unto thee. Correct us, but not in thy fury, lest we be consumed in thine anger. Chastise us not in thy wrathful displeasure. Reprove us not, but in the midst of thine anger remember thy mercy. For if thou mark what is done amiss, who shall be able to abide it? But with thee is mercifulness, that thou might be worshipped. Oh then be merciful unto us, that we may truly worship thee. Help us, for the glory of thy name. Be merciful unto our sins, for they are great. Oh, heal us, and help us for thine honour. Let not the wicked people say, Where is their God, etc.

On this sort, my right dearly beloved, let us heartily bewail our sins, repent us of our former evil live, heartily and earnestly purpose to amend our lives in all things, continually watching in prayer; diligently and reverently attend, hear, and read the holy Scriptures, and labour after our vocation to amend our brethren. Let us reprove the works of darkness. Let us flee from all idolatry. Let us abhor the antichristian and Romish rotten service, detest the popish mass, renounce their Romish god, prepare ourselves to the cross, be obedient to all that are in authority, in all things that are not against God, and his word; answering with the apostles, It is more meet to obey God than men. Howbeit, never for any thing resist, or rise against the magistrates. Avenge not yourselves, but commit your cause to the Lord, to whom vengeance belongs, and he in his time will reward is. If you feel in yourselves a hope, and trust in God that he never will tempt you above that which he will make you able to bear, be assured the Lord will be true to you. And you shall be able to bear all brunts. But if you want this hope, flee and get you hence, rather than, by your tarrying, God's name should be dishonoured.

In sum, cast your care upon the Lord, knowing for most certain, that he is careful for you. With him are all the hairs of your head numbered, so that not one of them shall perish without his good pleasure and will. Much more, then, nothing shall happen to your bodies, which shall not be profitable, however for a time it seems otherwise to your senses. Hang on the providence of God, not only when you have means to help you, but also when you have no means, yea, when all means are against you. Give him this honour, which, of all other things, he most chiefly requires at your hands; namely, believe that you are his children through Christ, that he is your Father and God through him, that he loves you, pardons you all your offences. He is with you in trouble, and will be with you for ever. When you fall, he will put his hand under. You shall not lie still. Before you call upon him he hears you. He will finally bring you out of evil, and deliver you to his eternal joy. Doubt not, my beloved, herein, doubt not, I say. God your Father will do this for you, not for respect of yourselves, but for respect of Christ your captain, your pastor, your keeper; out of whose hands none shall be able to catch you. In him be quiet, and often consider your dignity; namely, how that you are God's children, the saints of God, citizens of heaven, temples of the Holy Ghost, the thrones of God, members of Christ, and lords over all.

Therefore be ashamed to think, speak, or do anything that should be unseemly for God's children, God's saints, Christ's members, etc. Marvel not though the devil and the world hate you, though you are persecuted here, for the servant is not above his master. Covet not earthly riches. Fear not the power of man. Love not this world, nor the things that are in this world. But long for the coming of the Lord Jesus, at which time your bodies shall be made like unto his glorious body. When he appears you shall be like unto him. When your life shall thus be revealed, then shall you appear with him in glory.

In the mean season live in hope thereof. Let the life you lead be in the faith of the Son of God. For the just does live by faith, which faith flees from evil, and follows the word of God as a lantern to her feet and a light to her steps. Her eyes are above, where Christ is. She beholds not the things present, but rather things to come. She glories in affliction. She knows that the affliction of this life are not to be compared to the glory that God will reveal to us and in us. Of this glory God grants us here a lively taste. Then shall we run after the scent it sends forth. It will make us valiant men to take to us the kingdom of God, whither the Lord of mercy bring us in his good time, through Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

My dearly beloved, I would gladly have given here my body to be burned, for the confirmation of the true doctrine I have taught here unto you; but that my country must have it. Therefore I pray you, take in good part this signification of my goodwill towards every of you. Impute the want herein to time and trouble. Pardon me my offensive and negligent behaviour when I was among you. With me repent and labour to amend. Continue in the truth which I have truly taught unto you by preaching in all places where I have come. God's name therefore be praised. Confess Christ when you are called, whatsoever comes thereof. And the God of peace be with us all. Amen. This 11th of February, anno 1555.

Your brother in bonds for the Lord's sake,

John Bradford.

Letter 2. To the University and Town of Cambridge

To all that love the Lord Jesus and his true doctrine in the university and town of Cambridge, John Bradford, a most unworthy servant of the Lord, now not only imprisoned, but also condemned for the same true doctrine, wishes grace, peace, and mercy, with increase of all godliness from God, the Father of all mercy, through the bloody passion of our only Saviour Jesus Christ, by the lively working of the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.

Although I look hourly when I should be had to the stake (my dearly beloved in the Lord), and although the charge over me is great and strait; yet having, by the providence of God, secretly pen and ink, I could not but signify unto you something of my solicitude which I have for you and for every one of you in the Lord, though not as I would, yet as I may. You have so often and openly heard the truth disputed and preached, especially in this matter wherein I am condemned, that it is needless to do any more than to put you in remembrance of the same. But hitherto you have not heard it confirmed, and as it were sealed up, as now you do and shall hear by me, that is, by my death and burning. For albeit I have deserved eternal death and hell fire through my uncleanness, hypocrisy, avarice, vainglory, idleness, unthankfulness, and carnality, whereof I accuse myself, to my confusion before the world, that before God, through Christ, I might find mercy, as my assured hope is that I shall. Albeit, I have deserved much more than this affliction and fire prepared for me. Yet, my dearly beloved, it is not for these, or any of these things, wherefore the prelates persecute me, but for God's verity and truth. Yea, even Christ himself is the only cause and thing

whereof I am now condemned, and shall be burned as a heretic, because I will not grant the antichrist of Rome to be Christ's vice-general and supreme head of the church here, and everywhere upon the earth, by God's ordinance; and because I will not grant such corporeal, real, and carnal presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament as does transubstantiate the substance of bread and wine, and is received by the wicked, yea, even by dogs and mice. Also I am excommunicated, and counted as a dead member of Christ's Church, as a rotten branch, and therefore shall be cast into the fire.

Therefore you ought heartily to rejoice with me, and to give thanks for me that God, the eternal Father, has vouchsafed our mother (the University of Cambridge, editor) to bring up any child in whom it would please him to magnify his holy name as he does, and I hope, for his mercy and truth's sake, will do in my and by me. Oh! what such benefit upon earth can there be as that I, which deserved death by reason of my sins, should be delivered for a demonstration, a testimony, and confirmation of God's verity and truth! You, my mother, the University, have not only had the truth of God's word plainly manifested unto you, by reading, disputing, and preaching publicly and privately, but now to make thee altogether excuseless, and, as it were, almost to sin against the Holy Ghost, if you put to your helping hand with the Romish rout to suppress the verity and set out the contrary, you have my life and blood as a seal to confirm you, if you will be confirmed, or else to confound you, and bear witness against you, if you will take part with the prelates and clergy, which now fill up the measures of their fathers which slew the prophets and apostles, that all the righteous blood, from Abel to Bradford, shed upon earth, may be required at their hands.

Of this therefore I thought good before my death, as time and liberty would suffer me, for the love and duty I bear unto you, to admonish you, good mother, and my sister the town, that you would call to mind from whence you are fallen, and study to do the first works. You know, if you will, these matters of the Romish supremacy, and the antichristian transubstantiation, whereby Christ's supper is overthrown, his priesthood annulled, his sacrifice frustrated, the ministry of his word unplaced, repentance repelled, faith fainted, godliness extinguished, the mass maintained, idolatry supported, and all impiety cherished. You know, I say, if you will, that these opinions are not only besides God's word, but even directly against it. And therefore to take part with them is to take part against God, against whom you cannot prevail.

Therefore, for the tender mercy of Christ, in his bowels and blood I beseech you to take Christ's eye-salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see what you do and have done in admitting, as I hear you have admitted, yea alas! authorised, and by consent confirmed, the Romish rotten rags, which once you utterly expelled. Oh! be not a dog returned to his vomit. Be not the washed sow returned to her wallowing in the mire. Beware, lest Satan enter in with seven other spirits, and then your last state shall be worse than the first. It had been better you had never known the truth, than after knowledge to run from it. Ah! woe to this world and the things therein, which has now so wrought with you. Oh! that ever this dirt of the devil should daub up the eyes of the realm. If you be light and shine, all the body shall fare the better. But if your light be darkness, alas! how great will the darkness be! What is man, whose breath is in his nostrils, that you should thus be afraid of him!

Oh! what is honour and life here! Bubbles. What is glory in this world but shame? Why are you afraid to carry Christ's cross? Will you come into his kingdom, and not drink of his cup? Do you not know Rome to be Babylon? Do you not know, that as the old Babylon had the children of Judah in captivity, so has this Rome the true Judah, that is, the confessors of Christ? Do you not know, that as destruction happened unto it, so shall it do unto this? And suppose you that God will not deliver his people, now when the time is come, as he did then? Has not God commanded his people to come out from her, and will you give example to the whole realm to run unto her? Have you forgotten the woe that Christ threatens to

offence-givers? Will you not remember that it were better that a millstone were hanged about your neck, and you thrown into the sea, than that you should offend the little ones?

And alas! how have you offended! Yea, and how do you still offend! Will you consider things according to the outward show? Was not the synagogue more seemly and like to the true church than the simple flock of Christ's disciples? Has not the harlot of Babylon more costly array, and rich apparel, externally to set forth herself, than the homely housewife of Christ? Where is the beauty of the King's daughter, the church of Christ? Without or within? Does not David say within? Oh! remember, that as they are happy which are not offended at Christ, so are they happy which are not offended at his poor church. Can the pope and his prelates mean honestly, which make so much of the wife and so little of the husband? The church they magnify, but Christ they contemn. If this church were a honest woman, (that is, Christ's wife,) except they would make much of her husband, Christ and his word, she would not be made much of by them.

When Christ and his apostles were upon earth, who seemed more likely to be the true church, they or the prelates, bishops, and synagogue? If a man should have followed custom, unity, antiquity, or the more part, would not Christ and his company have been cast out of the doors? Therefore Christ bade them to search the scriptures. And, good mother, shall the servant be above his master? Shall we look for other entertainment at the hands of the world than Christ and his dear disciples found? Who was taken in Noah's time for the church, poor Noah and his family, or others? Who was taken for God's church in Sodom, Lot, or others? And does not Christ say, As it was then, so shall it be now towards the coming of the Son of Man? What means Christ when he says, Iniquity shall have the upper hand? Does not he say that charity shall wax cold? And who sees not a wonderful great lack of charity in those which would now be taken for Christ's church? All that truly fear God in this realm can tell more of this than I can write.

Therefore, dear mother, receive some admonition of one of your poor children, now going to be burned for the testimony of Jesus. Come again to God's truth. Come out of Babylon. Confess Christ and his true doctrine. Repent that which is past. Make amends by declaring your repentance by the fruits. Remember the readings and the preachings of God's prophet, and true preacher, Martin Bucer. Call to mind the threatenings of God, now something seen by the children Leaver and others. Let the exile of Leaver, Pilkington, Grindall, Haddon, Horne, Scory, Ponet, etc. something awake you. Let the imprisonment of your dear sons, Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, move you. Consider the martyrdom of Rogers, Saunders, Taylor. And now cast not away the poor admonition of me, going to be burned also, and to receive the like crown of glory with my fellows. Take to heart God's calling by us. Be not as Pharaoh was, for then will it happen unto you as it did unto him. What is that? Hardness of heart? And what then? Destruction eternally, both of body and soul. Ah! therefore, good mother, awake, awake, repent, repent, bustle yourself, and make haste to turn to the Lord, for else it shall be more easy for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgement than for you. Oh! harden not your hearts; oh! stop not your ears today in hearing God's voice, though it be by me a most unworthy messenger. Oh! fear the Lord, for his anger is begun to kindle. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the tree.

You know I prophesied truly to you before the sweating sickness came on you, what would come if you repented not your carnal gospelling. And now I tell you, before I depart hence, that the ears of men will tingle to hear the vengeance of God that will fall upon you all, both town and university, if you repent not, if you leave not your idolatry, if you turn not speedily to the Lord, if you still are ashamed of Christ's truth which you know.

Oh! Perne, repent; oh! Thomson, repent; oh! you doctors, bachelors, and masters, repent! Oh! mayor, aldermen, and town-dwellers, repent, repent, repent, that you may escape the near vengeance of the Lord. Rend your hearts and come apace, calling on the Lord. Let us all say, We have all sinned, we have done wickedly, we have not hearkened to thy voice, o Lord. Deal not with us after our deserts, but be merciful to our iniquities, for they are great. Oh! pardon our offences. In thine anger remember thy mercy. Turn us unto thee, o Lord God of Hosts, for the glory of thy name's sake. Spare us, and be merciful unto us. Let not wicked people say, Where is now their God? Oh! for thine own sake, for thy name's sake, deal mercifully with us. Turn thyself unto us, and us unto thee, and we shall praise thy name for ever.

If in this manner, my dearly beloved, in heart and mouth we come unto our Father, and prostrate ourselves before the throne of his grace, then surely, surely we shall find mercy. Then shall the Lord look graciously upon us, for his mercy's sake in Christ. Then shall we hear him speak peace unto his people. For he is gracious and merciful, of great pity and compassion. He cannot be chiding for ever. His anger cannot last long to be penitent. Though we weep in the morning, yet at night we shall have our sorrow cease. For he is easy to be entreated, and has no pleasure in the death of a sinner. He rather would have our conversion and turning.

Oh! turn now and convert, yet once again I humbly beseech you, and then the kingdom of heaven shall draw nigh. The eye has not seen, the ear has not heard, nor is the heart of man able to conceive the joys prepared for us, if we repent, amend our lives, and heartily turn to the Lord. But if you repent not, but be as you were, and go on forwards with the wicked, following the fashion of the world, the Lord will lead you on with wicked doers. You shall perish in your wickedness. Your blood will be upon your own heads. Your part shall be with hypocrites, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. You shall be cast from the face of the Lord for ever and ever. Eternal shame, sorrow, woe, and misery, shall be both in body and soul to you, world without end. Oh! therefore, right dear to me in the Lord, turn you, turn you, repent you, repent you, amend, amend your lives, depart from evil, do good, follow peace, and pursue it. Come out from Babylon, cast off the works of darkness, put on Christ, confess his truth, be not ashamed of his gospel, prepare yourselves for the cross, drink of God's cup before it come to the dregs, and then shall I with you, and for you, rejoice in the day of judgement, which is at hand. And therefore prepare yourselves thereto I heartily beseech you. And thus I take my farewell of you in this present life, my own dear hearts in the Lord. The Lord of mercy be with us all, and give us a joyful and sure meeting in his kingdom. Amen. Amen. Out of prison the 11th of February, anno 1555.

Your own in the Lord for ever,

John Bradford.

Letter 3. To Lancashire and Cheshire

To all that profess the name and true religion of our Saviour Jesus Christ, in Lancashire and Cheshire, and especially those abiding in Manchester and thereabout, John Bradford, a most unworthy servant of the Lord, now not only in bonds, but also condemned for the same true religion, wishes mercy and grace, peace and increase of all godliness, from God, the Father of all pity, through the deserts of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the working of the most mighty and lively Spirit, the Comforter, for ever. Amen.

I hear it reported credibly, my dearly beloved in the Lord, that my heavenly Father has thought it good to provide, that, as I have preached his true doctrine and gospel among you by word, so I shall testify and confirm the same by deed, that is, I shall with you leave my life, which, by his providence, I first received

there; for in Manchester was I born; for a seal to the doctrine I have taught with you and among you. So that if from henceforth you waver in the same, you have no excuse at all. I know the enemies of Christ which exercise cruelty upon me, (I speak in respect of my offence, which is nothing towards them, I think,) by killing of me among you, to affright you and others, lest they should attempt to teach Christ truly, or believe his doctrine hereafter. But I doubt not that my heavenly Father will, by my death, more confirm you in his truth than ever. And therefore I greatly rejoice to see Satan and his soldiers supplanted in their own wisdom, which is plain foolishness among the truly wise; that is, among such as have heard God's word, and do follow it; for they only are counted wise of the wisdom of God our Saviour. Indeed, if I should simply consider my life, with that which it ought to have been, and as God in his law requires, then could I not but cry as I do, Righteous art thou, o Lord, and all thy judgements are true. For I have much grieved thee, and transgressed thy holy precepts, not only before my professing the gospel, but since also. Yea, since my coming into prison I do not excuse, but accuse myself before God and all his church, that I have grievously offended my Lord God. I have not lived his gospel as I should have done. I have sought myself, and not simply and only his glory and my brethren's commodity. I have been too unthankful, secure, carnal, hypocritical, vainglorious, etc. All which my evils, the Lord of mercy pardon me for his Christ's sake, as I hope and certainly believe he has done for his great mercy in Christ our Redeemer. But when I consider the cause of my condemnation, I cannot but lament that I do no more rejoice than I do, for it is God's verity and truth. So that the condemnation is not a condemnation of Bradford simply, but rather a condemnation of Christ and of his truth. Bradford is nothing else but an instrument, in whom Christ and his doctrine is condemned. And therefore, my dearly beloved, rejoice, rejoice, and give thanks with me and for me, that God ever did vouchsafe so great a benefit to our country as to choose the most unworthy, I mean myself, to be one in whom it would please him to suffer any kind of affliction. Much more this violent kind of death, which I perceive is prepared for me among you for his sake. All glory and praise be given unto God our Father, for his great and exceeding mercy towards me, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

But perchance you will say unto me: "What is the cause for which you are condemned? We hear say, that you deny all presence of Christ in his holy supper, and so make it a bare sign and common bread, and nothing else." My dearly beloved, what is said of me, and what will be said, I cannot tell. It is told me that Pendleton is gone down to preach with you, not as he once recanted, for you all know he has preached contrary to that he was wont to preach before I came among you, but to recant that which he has recanted. How he will speak of me, and report before I come and when I am come, and when I am burned, I care not much. For he that is so uncertain and will speak so often against himself, I cannot think will speak well of me, except it make for his purpose and profit. But of this enough.

Indeed the chief thing which I am condemned for as a heretic, is because I deny that in the sacrament of the altar (which is not Christ's supper, but a plain perverting of it, when used as the Papists now use it,) there is a real, natural, and corporeal presence of Christ's body and blood, under the forms and accidents of bread and wine. That is, because I deny transubstantiation, which is the darling of the devil, and daughter and heir to Antichrist's religion, whereby the mass is maintained, Christ's supper is perverted, his sacrifice and cross imperfect, his priesthood destroyed, the ministry taken away, repentance repelled, and all true godliness abandoned. In the supper of our Lord, or sacrament of Christ's body and blood, I confess and believe, that there is a true and real presence of the whole Christ, God and man, to the faith of the receiver, (but not of the stander by and looker on,) as there is a very true presence of bread and wine to the senses of him that is partaker thereof. This faith, this true doctrine, which consents with the word of God and with the true testimony of Christ's church, which the popish church persecutes, I will not forsake, and therefore am I condemned as a heretic, and shall be burned. But, my dearly beloved, this

truth which I have taught, and you have received, I believed and do believe, and therein give my life. And I hope in God it shall never be burned, bound, nor overcome, but shall triumph, have victory and be at liberty, in spite of the head of all God's adversaries. For there is no counsel against the Lord, nor can any device of man be able to defeat the verity, in any other than such as are children of unbelief, which have no love to the truth, and therefore are given up to believe lies. From which plague may the Lord of mercy deliver you and all the realm, my dear hearts in the Lord, I humbly beseech his mercy. Amen.

And to the end you might be delivered from this plague, right dear to me in the Lord, I shall, for my farewell with you for ever in this present life, heartily desire you all, in the bowels and blood of our most merciful Saviour Jesus Christ, to attend unto these things which I now shall shortly write unto you, out of the holy Scriptures of the Lord.

You know that a heavy plague, or rather plagues, of God is fallen upon us, in taking away our good king and true religion, God's true prophets and ministers, etc., and setting over us such as seek not the Lord according to knowledge, those who endeavour God prospers wonderfully for the trial of many, that his people may both better know themselves, and be known. Now the cause hereof is our iniquities and grievous sins. We did not know the time of our visitation. We are unthankful unto God. We condemned the gospel, and carnally abused it to serve our hypocrisy, our vainglory, our viciousness, avarice, idleness, security, etc. Long did the Lord linger and tarry to have showed mercy upon us, but we were ever, the longer the worse. Therefore most justly has God dealt with us, and deals with us, yea, yet we may see that his justice is tempered with much mercy, whereto let us attribute that we are not utterly consumed. For if the Lord should deal with us after our deserts, alas! how could we abide it? In his anger, therefore, seeing he remembers his mercy undeserved, yea, undesired on our behalf, let us take occasion the more speedily to go out to meet him, not with force of arms, for we are not able so to withstand him, much less to prevail against him, but to beseech him to be merciful unto us, and to deal with us according to his wonted mercy.

Let us arise with David, and say, Enter not into judgement with thy servant, o Lord! For in thy sight no flesh living shall be justified. Let us send ambassadors, with the centurion, and say, Lord, we are not worthy to come ourselves unto thee; speak the word, and we shall have peace. Let us penitently, with the publican, look down on the earth, knock our hard hearts to burst them, and cry out, o God! be merciful unto us wretched sinners. Let us, with the lost son, return and say, o Father! we have sinned against heaven and earth, and before thee. We are unworthy to be called thy children. Let us, I say, do thus, that is, heartily repent us of our former evil life, and our past unthankful gospelling. Let us convert and turn to God with our whole hearts, hoping in his great mercy through Christ, and heartily calling upon his holy name. And then undoubtedly we shall find and feel otherwise, than as yet we feel both inwardly and outwardly. Inwardly we shall feel peace of conscience between God and us, which peace passes all understanding. And outwardly we shall feel much mitigation of these miseries, if not an outward taking of them away.

Therefore, my dearly beloved in the Lord, I your poorest brother, now departing to the Lord, as my farewell for this present life, pray you, beseech you, and even from the very bottom of my heart, for all the mercies of God in Christ showed unto you, I most earnestly beg and crave of you out of prison, as often out of your pulpits I have done, that you will repent you, leave your wicked and evil life, be sorry for your offences, and turn to the Lord, whose arms are wide open to receive and embrace you. Whose hand, stretched out to strike to death, stays, that he may show mercy upon you. For he is the Lord of mercy, and God of all comfort. He wills not the death of the sinner, but rather that you should return, convert, and amend. He has no pleasure in the destruction of man. His longsuffering draws to repentance before the time of

vengeance and the day of wrath, which is at hand, does come.

Now is the axe laid to the root of the tree, utterly to destroy the impenitent. Now is the fire gone out before the face of the Lord. And who is able to quench it? Oh, therefore, repent you, repent you. It is enough to have lived as we have done. It is enough to have played the wanton gospellers, the proud protestants, hypocritical and false Christians, as, alas! we have done. Now the Lord speaks to us in mercy and grace. Oh! turn before he speak in wrath. Yet is there mercy with the Lord, and plenteous redemption. Yet he has not forgotten to show mercy to them that call upon him. Oh! then call upon him while he may be found, for he is rich in mercy, and plentiful, to all them that call upon him. So that he that calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. If your sins be as red as scarlet, the Lord says, he will make them as white as snow. He has sworn, and never will repent him thereof, that he will never remember our iniquities. But as he is God, faithful and true, so will he be our God, and we shall be his people. His law will he write in our hearts, and engraft in our minds, and never will he have in mind our unrighteousness. Therefore, my dear hearts in the Lord, turn you, turn you to the Lord your Father, to the Lord your Saviour, to the Lord your Comforter. Oh! why do you stop your ears and harden your hearts today, when you hear his voice by me your poorest brother? Oh! forget not how that the Lord has showed himself true, and me his true preacher, by bringing to pass these plagues, which, at my mouth, you often heard of before they came to pass. Especially when I treated of Noah's flood, and when I preached from the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, on St. Stephen's day, the last time that I was with you. And now by me the Lord sends you word, dear countrymen, that if you will go on forward in your impenitence, carnality, hypocrisy, idolatry, covetousness, swearing, gluttony, drunkenness, whoredom, etc., wherewith, alas, alas! our country flows; if, I say, you will not turn and leave off, seeing me now burned among you, to assure you on all sides how God seeks you, and is sorry to do you hurt, to plague you, to destroy you, to take vengeance upon you; oh! your blood will be upon your own heads. You have been warned and warned again by me in preaching, - by me in burning.

As I said therefore, I say again, my dear hearts, and darlings in the Lord, turn you, turn you, repent, repent you. Cease from doing evil. Study to do well. Away with idolatry. Fly the Romish god and service. Leave off from swearing. Cut off carnality. Abandon avarice. Drive away drunkenness. Fly from fornication and flattery, murder and malice. Destroy deceitfulness, and cast away all the works of darkness. Put on piety and godliness. Serve God after his word, and not after custom. Use your tongues to glorify God by prayer, thanksgiving, and confession of his truth, etc. Be spiritual, and by the Spirit mortify carnal affections. Be sober, holy, true, loving, gentle, merciful. And then shall the Lord's wrath cease, not for this our doings' sake, but for his mercy's sake. Go to, therefore. Good countrymen, take this counsel of the Lord by me, and now sent unto you, as the Lord's counsel and not as mine. That in the day of judgement I may rejoice with you and for you, which I heartily desire; and not to be a witness against you. My blood will cry for vengeance against the papists, God's enemies (whom I beseech God, if it be his will, heartily to forgive, yea, even them which put me to death, and are the causers thereof, for they know not what they do). So also will my blood cry for vengeance against you, my dearly beloved in the Lord, if you repent not, amend not, and turn not unto the Lord.

Turn unto the Lord, yet once more, I heartily beseech you, you Manchester, you Aston-under-Line, you Bolton, Bury, Wigan, Liverpool, Mottrin, Stepport, Winsley, Eccles, Prestwich, Middleton, Radcliff, and you city of West-Chester, where I have truly taught and preached the word of God. Turn, I say unto you all, and to all the inhabitants thereabouts, turn unto the Lord our God, and he will turn unto you. He will say unto his angel, "It is enough, put up the sword." And that he do this I humbly beseech his goodness, for

the precious blood sake of his dear Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Ah! good brethren, take in good part these my last words unto every one of you. Pardon me my offences and negligences in behaviour among you. The Lord of mercy pardon us all our offences, for our Saviour Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. Out of prison, ready to come to you, the eleventh of February, anno 1555.

Letter 4. To the Town of Walden

To the faithful, and such as profess the true doctrine of our Saviour Jesus Christ, dwelling at Walden, and thereabouts. John Bradford, a most unworthy servant of the Lord, now in bands, and condemned for the same true doctrine, wishes grace, mercy, and peace, with the increase of all godliness, in knowledge and living, from God the Father of all comfort, through the deserts of our alone and full Redeemer Jesus Christ, by the mighty working of the most holy Spirit, the Comforter, for ever. Amen.

When I remember how that, by the providence and grace of God, I have been a man, by whom it has pleased him, through my ministry, to call you to repentance and amendment of life, something effectually, as it seemed, and to sow among you his true doctrine and religion; - lest that by my affliction and the storms now arisen, to try the faithful, and to conform them like to the image of the Son of God, into whose company we are called, you might be faint-hearted - I could not, but out of prison, secretly, for my keepers may not know that I have pen and ink, write unto you a signification of the desire I have, that you should not only be more confirmed in the doctrine I have taught among you, which I take on my death, as I shall answer at the day of doom, I am persuaded to be God's assured, infallible, and plain true. But also that you should, after your vocation, aver the same by confession, profession, and living. I have not taught you, my dearly beloved in the Lord,, fables, tales, or untruths. No, I have taught you the verity, as now by my blood gladly, praised be God, therefore, I seal the same.

Indeed, to confess the truth unto you, and to all the church of Christ, I think of myself, that I have most justly deserved not only this kind, but also all kinds of death, and that eternally, for my hypocrisy, vain-glory, uncleanness, self-love, covetousness, idleness, unthankfulness, and carnal professing of God's holy gospel, living therein not so purely, lovingly, and painfully as I should have done. May the Lord of mercy, for the blood sake of Christ, pardon me, as I hope, yea, certainly believe, he has done for his holy name sake. But, my dearly beloved, you and all the world may see and easily perceive, that the prelates persecute in me another thing than my iniquities, even Christ himself, Christ's verity and truth, because I cannot, dare not, will not, confess transubstantiation, and how that wicked men, yea, that even mice and dogs, eating the sacrament (which they call the sacrament of the altar, thereby overthrowing Christ's holy supper utterly,) do eat Christ's natural and real body born of the virgin Mary.

It is not enough now to believe and confess as God's word teaches, the primitive church believed, and all the catholic and good holy fathers taught, five hundred years at the least after Christ, that, in the supper of the Lord, which the mass overthrows, as it does Christ's priesthood, sacrifice, death, and passion, the ministry of the word, true faith, repentance, and all godliness; - there is whole Christ, God and man, present by grace to the faith of the receivers, but not of the standers-by and lookers-on, as bread and wine is to their senses. Therefore I am condemned, and shall be burned out of hand as a heretic. Wherefore I heartily thank my Lord God, that will and does vouch me worthy to be an instrument, in whom he himself does suffer. For you see my affliction and death is not simply because I have deserved no less, but much more at his hands and justice, but rather because I confess his verity and truth, and am not afraid through his gifts so to do that you also might be confirmed in his truth. Therefore, my dearly beloved I heartily pray you, and so many as unfeignedly love me in God, to give, with me and for me, most hearty thanks to our

heavenly Father, through our sweet Saviour Jesus Christ, for this his exceeding great mercy towards me, and you also, that your faith waver not from the doctrine I have taught, and you have received. For what can you desire more to assure your consciences of the verity taught by your preachers than their own lives?

Go to therefore, my dear hearts in the Lord. Waver not in Christ's religion, truly taught you and set forth in king Edward's days. Never shall the enemies be able to burn it, to prison it, and keep it in bonds. Us they may prison, they may bind and burn, as they do, and will do so long as shall please the Lord. But our cause, religion, and doctrine, which we confess, they shall never be able to vanquish and put away. Their idolatry and popish religion shall never be built in the consciences of men that love the truth. As for those that love not God's truth, that have no pleasure to walk in the ways of the Lord, in those, I say, the devil shall prevail, for God will give them strong illusion to believe lies. Therefore, dear brethren and sisters in the Lord, I humbly beseech you and pray you, in the bowels and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, now I am going to the death for the testimony of Jesus, as oftentimes I have done before, out of your pulpit, that you would love the Lord's truth. Love, I say, to live it, and frame your lives thereafter. Alas! you know the cause of all these plagues which are fallen upon us, and of the success which God's adversaries have daily, that it is for our not living according to God's word.

You know that we were but gossellers in lips, and not in life. We were carnal, full of concupiscence, idle, unthankful, unclean, covetous, arrogant, dissemblers, crafty, subtle, malicious, false, backbiters, etc., and even glutted with God's word. Yea, we loathed it, as the Israelites did the manna in the wilderness. And therefore, as to them the Lord's wrath waxed hot, so it does unto us. So that there is no remedy, but that, for it is better late to turn than never to turn. We confess our faults, even from the bottom of our hearts. And with hearty repentance, which may God work in us all for his mercy's sake, we run unto the Lord our God, who is ready to be entreated, merciful, and sorry for the evil poured out upon us. And we cry unto him with Daniel, saying, We have sinned, we have sinned grievously, o Lord God, against thy majesty. We have heaped iniquity upon iniquity. The measure of our transgressions flows over. So that thy vengeance and wrath are justly fallen upon us, for we are very miserable. We have contemned thy long suffering, we have not hearkened to thy voice; when thou hast called us by thy preachers, we hardened our hearts, and therefore now deserve that thou send thy curse thereupon, to harden our hearts also, that we should henceforth have eyes and see not, ears and hear not, hearts and understand not, lest we should be converted and be saved. Oh! be merciful unto us, spare us, good Lord, and all thy people whom thou hast dearly bought. Let not thine enemies triumph altogether and always against thee, for then will they be puffed up. Look down, and behold the pitiful complaints of the poor. Let the sorrowful sighing of the simple come in thy sight, and be not angry with us for ever. Turn us, o Lord God of hosts, unto thee, turn thou unto us, that thou may be justified in thy sweet sentences, and overcome when thou art judged, as now thou art by our adversaries. For they say, Where is their God? Can God deliver them now? Can their gospel serve them? O Lord! how long, for the glory of thy name, and for thy honour's sake, in the bowels and blood of Jesus Christ, we humbly beseech thee, come and help us, for we are very miserable.

In this manner I say, dearly beloved, let us publicly and privately bewail our sins, but so that hereto we join ceasing from wilfulness and sin of purpose. For else the Lord hears not our prayers, as David says. And in St. John it is written, the impenitent sinners God hears not. How impenitent are they, which purpose not to amend their lives! As for example, not only such as still follow their pleasures in covetousness, uncleanness, and carnality, but those also which for fear of favour of men against their conscience consent to the Romish rags, and resort to the rotten religion, communicating in service and ceremonies

with the papist; thereby declaring themselves to love the world more than God, to fear man more than Christ, to dread the loss of temporal things more than of eternal. In whom it is evident the love of God abides not. For he that loves the world has not God's love abiding in him, says St. John. Therefore, my dear hearts, and dear again in the Lord, remember what you have professed, - Christ's religion and name, and the renouncing of the devil, sin, and the world.

Remember, before you learned ABC, your lesson was Christ's cross (note: he refers to the figure of a cross formerly put at the top of the book from which children used to learn their letters). Forget not that Christ will have no disciples, but such as will promise to deny themselves, and take up their cross. Mark, they must take it up, and follow him, and not the multitude, custom, and use. Consider, for God's sake, that if we gather not with Christ, we scatter abroad. What should it profit a man to win the whole world, and lose his own soul? We must not forget that this life is a wilderness, and not a paradise. Here is not our home. We are now in warfare. We must needs fight, or else be taken prisoners. Of all things we have in this life, we shall carry nothing with us. If Christ be our captain, we must follow Him as good soldiers. If we keep company with Him in affliction, we shall be sure of his society in glory. If we forsake not Him, He will never forsake us. If we confess Him, He will confess us. But if we deny Him, He will deny us. If we are ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of us. Wherefore, as He forsook His Father, and heaven, and all things, to come to us, so let us forsake all things to come to Him, being sure and most certain that we shall not lose thereby. Your children shall find and feel and double, yea, treble whatsoever you lose for the Lord's sake. You shall find and feel peace of conscience, and friendship with God, which is worth more than all the goods of the world.

My dearly beloved, therefore, for the Lord's sake, consider these things which I now write unto you of love, for my last farewell for ever in this present life. Turn to the Lord. Repent you of your evil and unthankful life. Declare repentance by the fruits. Take time while you have it. Come to the Lord while He calls you. Run into His lap while His arms are open to embrace you. Seek Him while He may be found. Call upon Him while time is convenient. Forsake and fly from all evil, both in religion, and in the rest of your life and conversation. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and praise God in the day of his visitation. Oh! come again, come again, you strange children, and I will receive you, says the Lord. Convert and turn to me, and I will turn to you. Why will you needs perish? As sure as I live (swears the Lord) I desire not your death. Turn therefore unto Me. Can a woman forget the child of her womb? If she should, yet I will not forget you, says the Lord your God. I am He, I am He, which puts away your sins for My Own sake.

Oh then, dear friends, turn, I say, unto your dearest Father. Cast not these sweet and loving words to the ground and behind you, for the Lord watches over His word to perform it, which He does in two ways. To them that lay it up in their hearts, and believe it, will He pay all, and eternal joy and comfort. But to them that cast it at their backs, and wilfully forget it, to them, I say, will He pour out indignation and eternal shame. Wherefore I heartily yet once more beseech you, and pray you, and every one of you, not to contemn this poor and simple exhortation, which now out of prison I make unto you, or rather the Lord by me. Loath would I to be a witness against you in the last day, as of truth I must, if you repent not, if you love not God's gospel, yea, if you live it not.

Therefore to conclude, repent, love God's gospel, live in it, make it all your conversation. So shall God's name be praised, His plagues mitigates, His people comforted, and His enemies ashamed. Grant all things, Thou gracious Lord God, to every one of us, for Thy dear Son's sake, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. To Whom, Thee and the Holy Ghost, be eternal glory, for ever and ever. Amen. The twelfth of February, anno

1555.

By the bondman of the Lord, etc.

Your afflicted poor brother,

John Bradford.

Letter 5. A comfortable letter of Master Bradford to his mother, a godly matron, dwelling in Manchester, and to his brethren and sisters, and others of his friends there

Our dear and sweet Saviour Jesus Christ, whose prisoner at this present (praised be His name therefore) I am, preserve and keep you, my good mother, with my brothers and sisters, my father John Traves, Thomas Sorrocold, Lawrence and James Bradshaw, with their wives and families, etc., now and for ever, amen!

I am at this present in prison, sure enough for starting to confirm that I have preached unto you. As I am ready, I thank God, with my life and blood to seal the same, if God consider me worthy of that honour. For, good mother and brethren, it is a most special benefit of God to suffer for His name sake and gospel, as now I do. I heartily thank Him for it, and I am sure that with Him I shall be partaker of His glory. As Paul says, If we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him. Therefore be not faint-hearted, but rather rejoice, at least for my sake, which now am in the right and high way to heaven. For by many afflictions we must enter the kingdom of heaven. Now God will make known His children. When the wind does not blow, than a man cannot know the wheat from the chaff. But when the blast comes, then the chaff flies away. But the wheat remains, and is so far from being hurt, that by the wind it is cleansed from the chaff, and known to be wheat. Gold, when it is cast into the fire, is the more precious. So are God's children by the cross of affliction. God always begins His judgement at His house. Christ and the apostles were in most misery in the land of Jewry, but yet the whole land smarted for it afterwards. So now God's children are chastised in this world, that they should not be damned with the world. For surely great plagues of God hang over this realm.

You all know that there was never more knowledge of God, and less godly living and true serving of God. It was counted a foolish thing to serve God truly, and earnest prayer was not passed upon. Preaching was but a pastime. The communion was counted too common. Fasting to subdue the flesh was far out of use. Alms were almost nothing. Malice, covetousness, and uncleanness, were common everywhere, with swearing, drunkenness, and idleness. God therefore now is come, as you have heard me preach. And because He will not condemn us with the world, He begins to punish us - as me for my carnal living. For as for my preaching, I am most certain it is and was God's truth, and I trust to give my life for it by God's grace. But because I loved not the gospel truly, but outwardly, therefore He thus punishes me; nay, rather in punishing blesses me. And indeed I thank Him more for this prison than for any parlour, yea, than for any pleasure that ever I had. For in it I find God, my most sweet good God always. The flesh is punished, first to admonish us now to live heartily as we profess. Secondly, to certify the wicked of their just damnation, if they repent not.

Perchance you are weakened as to that which I have preached, because God does not defend it, as you think, but suffers the popish doctrine to come again and prevail. But you must know, good mother, that God by this proves and tries His children

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