

Preparations Before Conversion: Part Iii

by Samuel Rutherford

The gospel promises are not offered to all sinners immediately, and preparation is not a means to make us less unworthy or less sinners, but rather a response to Christ's love.

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1

Topics: "True Conversion", "Christian Repentance"

Description

Samuel Rutherford preaches about the twofold sense in which the promises of the gospel are offered to sinners, emphasizing the need for sinners to believe and apply Christ immediately while acknowledging their sinful condition. He highlights that while all within the visible church are offered Christ without price, true belief requires self-despair of salvation and a recognition of one's sinfulness. Rutherford also discusses the importance of being prepared for Christ's grace, cautioning against false beliefs and premature faith. He concludes by emphasizing that the love of Christ is undivided and consistent, moving Him to draw fallen saints out of the pit with the same love that began the work in them.

Transcript

Assertion. That the promises of the gospel are holden forth to sinners as sinners, hath a twofold sense. 1. As that they be sinners and all in a sinful condition to whom the promises are holden forth. This is most true and sound. The kingdom of grace is an hospital and guest house of sick ones, fit for the art and mercy of the Physician Christ. 2. So as they are all immediately to believe and apply Christ and the promises, who are sinners, and there be nothing required of sinners but that they may all immediately challenge interest in Christ, after their own way and order, without humiliation or any law-work. In this sense it is most false that the promises are holden forth to sinners as sinners, because then Christ should be holden forth to all sinners, Americans, Indians, and sinners who never by the least rumor heard one word of Christ. Peter desires not Simon Magus to believe that God had loved him in Christ Jesus with an everlasting love, nor doth the gospel promise offer immediately soul rest to the hardened and proud sinner wallowing in his lusts, as he is a hardened sinner. Nor is the acceptable year of the Lord proclaimed, nor beauty and the oil of joy offered immediately, to any but to those who are weary and laden, and who mourn in Sion, and wallow in ashes, Matt. 11:28-30, Isa. 61:1-3. It's true, to all within the visible church Christ is offered without price or money, but to be received after Christ's fashion and order, not after our order; that is, after the soul is under self-despair of salvation, and in the sinner's month, when he hath been with child of hell.

I grant, in regard of time, sinners cannot come too soon to Christ, nor too early to Wisdom; but in regard of order, many come too soon, and unprepared. Simon Magus too soon believed. Saltmarsh saith, He misbelieved too soon, for he falsely believed; none can believe too soon. Answer. To believe too soon, is to misbelieve, and Saltmarsh and the Antinomians teach us the method of false believing when they teach us too soon to believe, that is, to believe that God hath loved you (be ye what ye will, Simon Magus, Judas, or others) with an everlasting love; for this is the Antinomian faith. Simon Magus is without any foregoing humiliation, or sense of sin or self-despair; to believe he was no less written in the Lamb's book of life from eternity than Peter, and this he cannot believe soon enough, I say neither soon or late ought a reprobate to believe any such thing. A covetous man, who had great possessions, had not yet bidden farewell to his old god Mammon, when he came to Christ; therefore he departed sad from Christ. Another came before he had buried his father; and some come, Luke 14:28-29, before they advise with their strength, and what Christ will cost them.

I desire I be not mistaken. None can be thoroughly fitted for Christ before he come to Christ; but it is as true, some would buy the pearl before they sell all they have, which is not the wise merchant's part. And they err foully who argue thus, If I were not a sinner, or if my sins were less heinous, and so I were less unworthy, I would come to Christ and believe; but ah, I am so grievous an offender, and so unworthy, that I cannot go. Their antecedent is true, but the consequence is naught and wicked. It is true, I am sick, and it's good that I both say and feel that I am sick. But, ergo, I cannot, I will not, go to the Physician, that is wicked logic, and the contrary consequence is good, whereas the other consequence is a seeking of righteousness in ourselves. Another false ground is here laid by Libertines, That we place worth and righteousness in preparations, or that preparations make us less unworthy, and less sinners. But preparations are not in any sort to us money nor hire. We value them as dung, and sin; yet such sin, as sickness is in relation to physic. Preparations remove not one dram, or twentieth part of an ounce, of guiltiness or sin. Christ, in practice of free grace, not by law, yea not by promise, gives grace to the thus prepared, and often he denies it also.

Yea, and there is a good hour appointed by God, when Christ comes. Other physicians take diseases so early as they can, lest the malice of the disease overcome art; but Christ lets sin of purpose ripen, to the eleventh hour, often to the twelfth hour. He knows his art can overtake and outrun seven devils, most easily. The omnipotency of grace knows no such thing as more or less pardonable in sin; yea of purpose to heighten grace, that sinfulness may contend with grace and be overcome, the Gentiles must be like corn ripe, white and yellow, ere the sickle cut them down and they be converted, John 4:35. The boil must be ripe ere it break, the sea full ere it turn; therefore the Lord appoints a time and sets a day for conversion, Titus 3:3. We ourselves were sometimes mad, but the Lord hath a gracious when: When the kindness and man-love of God appeared, he saved us. And, Jer. 50:4, In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah, going and weeping, they shall seek the Lord. Zech. 12:11: And in that day, there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadimmon in the valley of Megiddon. It's good to lie and wait at the door and posts of Wisdom's house, and to lie and attend Christ's tide; it may come in an hour that you would never have believed. O what depth of mercy, when for natural waiting, or upon a poor venture, What if I go to Christ, I can have no less than I have?, the Lord saves, and the wind not looked for turns fair for a sea voyage to heaven, in the Lord's time.

Assertion. The ground moving Christ to renew his love in drawing a fallen saint out of the pit is the same that from heaven shined on him at the beginning. Love is an undivided thing; there are not two loves, or

three loves, in Christ. That which begins the good work, advances it, even the same love which Christ hath taken up to heaven with him, and there ye find it before you when ye come thither. Some love sickness goes before his return, Cant. 3: I was but a little passed, I found him whom my soul loves. The sky divides and rends itself, and then the sun is on its way to rise; the birds begin to sing, then the summer is near; the voice of the turtle is heard, then the winter is gone. When the affections grow warm, the well-beloved is upon a return. You die for want of Christ; absence seems to be at the highest when hunger for a renewed drawing in the way of comforting is great. Let Christ moderate his own pace; hope quietly waiteth; hope is not a shouting and a tumultuous grace. Your disposition for Christ's return can speak much for a renewed drawing, as when the church finds her own pace slow, and prays, Draw me, we will run; then he sendeth ushers before to tell that he will come. Sick nights for the Lord's absence in not drawing are most spiritual signs.

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