

The Broken Column

A Sermon

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At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

“And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee: but”—[Luke 9:61](#).

WHEN YOU have walked through a cemetery, you have frequently seen over a grave a broken column, intended to memorialize the death of some one who was taken away in the prime of manhood, before as yet his life had come to its climax. I shall take that picture of the broken column to represent my text. It is a broken text. You expected me to go on and to conclude the sentence: I have broken it off abruptly. That broken column shall also represent the broken resolutions of full many who were once in a hopeful state. As if prepared to witness a good profession, they said, “Lord, I will follow thee,” when there came a heavy blow from the withering hand of sin; and the column was broken short with a “but.” So let my text stand. I will not finish it. But so let not your determination stand. The Lord grant by his effectual grace that while you mourn with sincere grief the grave of many a fair resolve which never attained the maturity of true discipleship—cut off with the fatal “*but*” of indecision, you may now be quickened to newness of life. Thus you shall come to the fullness of the stature of a man in Christ. Thus, as a building fitly framed together and growing to completeness, you shall be made meet for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

“Lord, I will follow thee: but—.” How remarkably does Scripture prove to us that the mental characteristics of mankind are the same now as in the Saviour’s day! We occasionally hear stories of old skeletons being dug up which are greater in stature than men of these times. Some credit the story, some do not, for there be many who maintain that the physical conformation of man is at this day just what it always was. Certainly, however, there can be no dispute whatever among observant men as to the identity of the inner nature of man. The gospel of Christ may well be an unchanging gospel, for it is a remedy which has to deal with an unaltering disease. The very same objections which were made to Christ in the days of his flesh are made to his gospel now. The same effects are produced under the ministry of Christ’s servants in these modern times as were produced by his own ministry. Still are the promised hopes which make glad the preacher’s heart, blasted and withered by the same blights and the same mildews which of old withered and blasted the prospects of the ministry during our Lord’s own personal sojourn in the world. Oh! what hundreds, nay, what myriads of persons have we whose consciences are aroused, whose judgments are a little enlightened, and yet they vacillate—they live and die unchanged. Like Reuben, “unstable as water, they do not excel.” They would follow Christ, *but* something lies in the way: they would join with

him in this generation, *but* some difficulty suggests itself: they would enter the kingdom of heaven, *but* there is a lion in the street. They lie in the bed of the sluggard instead of rising up with vigor and striving to enter in at the strait gate. May the Holy Ghost in all the plenitude of his power be with us this morning, so that while I shall deal with the character indicated by the text, He may deal with the conscience of those assembled. I can merely attempt what He can effectually perform. I can but speak the words; it is for Him to draw the bow, fit the arrow to the string, and send it home between the joints of the harness. May some who have been in the state of those described by the text be brought to-day to solemn consideration, and to a serious decision through the Holy Spirit of God.

Three things we would labor to do. First of all, let us endeavor to *expose your excuses*, “Lord, I will follow thee, but—.” Secondly, I will try to *expose the ignorance which lies at the bottom of the objection which you offer*. Then, thirdly, in the most solemn manner, would I endeavor to bring before your mind’s eye, O ye who vacillate like Felix, *your sin and your danger*, that your “*buts*” may now be put away—that your profession may be made with unfaltering tongue—that you may henceforth, in very deed, follow Christ whithersoever he goeth.

I. First, then, TO EXPOSE YOUR OBJECTIONS.

I cannot tell man by man, what may be the precise let that causes you to draw back, but perhaps, by giving a list, I may be directed to describe full many a case exactly, and with precision. Some there be who say, and seem very sincere in the utterance, “Lord, I would be a Christian, I would believe in thee, and take up thy cross and follow thee, but *my calling prevents it*. Such is my state of life that piety would be to me an impossibility. I must live, and I cannot live by godliness, therefore I am to be excused for the present from following Christ. My position is such in trade, that I am compelled by its practices to do many things which would be utterly inconsistent with the life of Christ in my soul. I know that I have been called to be where I am, but it is a position which renders my salvation hopeless; if I were anything but what I am, or anywhere but where I am, I might follow Christ, but under existing circumstances, it is far beyond my power.” Let me answer that excuse of yours, and show how idle it is. Man! would you make God the author of sin? And yet if you are prepared to say that God has put you in the calling where you are, and that that calling absolutely necessitates sin, do you not perceive that you make the sin to be rather God’s than yours? Are you prepared to be so blasphemous as that? Will you bring the tricks of your trade, your dishonesties, and your sins, and say, “Great God, thou hast compelled me to do this? “Oh! methinks you cannot have so hardened your brow until it has become like flint. Surely you have some conscience of rectitude left, and if you have, your conscience will respond to me when I say you know you are speaking that which is false. God has not put you where you are compelled to sin, and if you have put yourself there, what ought you to do but to leave that place at once. Surely the necessity to sin, if it arise from your own choice, doth but

render your sin the more exceeding sinful. "But," you reply, "I will confess, then, that I have put myself there by choice." Then I say again, if you have chosen so ill a trade that you cannot live by it honestly, in the fear of God, and in obedience to his precepts, you have made an ill and wicked choice; at all hazards—for the salvation of your soul rests on it—give it up, though it be the renouncing of every worldly prospect. Though wealth be all but in your grasp, unless you would grasp damnation and inherit everlasting wrath, you must renounce it, and renounce it now. Scarcely, however, can I credit that such is the fact, for in all callings, except they be in themselves positively unlawful, a man may serve God. Perhaps the most difficult post for a Christian to occupy is the army, and yet have we not seen,—and do we not see at this day—men of high and exemplary piety, men of undoubted and pre-eminent godliness, who are still in the ranks and are soldiers of Christ? With the example of Colonel Gardner in years gone by, of Hedley Vicars, and Havelock in these modern times, I will not, I dare not take your excuse, nor do I think your conscience would permit it, but if, while the temptations are strong, and your strength is small, you really think that there you cannot serve God, then resign your commission, give it up; it were better for you to enter into life poor and penniless, and without fame or honor, than having glory, and pomp, and wealth, to enter into hell fire. After all, to come nearer to the point, is it your occupation at all? Is it true? Is it not your sin that has made your "but," and not your calling? Be honest with yourself, sir, I pray you. You say that your calling throws temptations in your way: be it so? Do not other men avoid the temptations, and because they hate sin, being taught of God the Holy Spirit, are they not able, even in the midst of temptation, to keep themselves unspotted from the world? It is, then, in your case not necessity, but wilfulness, that makes you continue impious and impenitent. Put the saddle on the right horse; put it not where it should not be, take it home to yourself. There is no objection in the calling, unless, again I repeat it, it be an objectionable calling; the root and real cause of your hardness of heart against Christ is in yourself and yourself alone. You are willingly in love with sin, it is not in your calling in providence.

"Yes, but," saith another, "if it be not in our calling, yet in my case it is my peculiar position in providence. It is all very well for the minister, who has not to mingle with daily life, but can come up into his pulpit and pray and preach, to make little excuse for men; but I tell you, sir, if you knew how I was situated, you would say that I am quite excusable in postponing the thoughts of God and of eternity. You do not know what it is to have an ungodly husband, or to live in a family where you cannot carry out your convictions without meeting with persecution so ferocious and so incessant, that flesh; and blood cannot endure it." "Besides," says another, "I am just now in such a peculiar crisis, it may be I have got into it by my sin, but I feel I cannot get out of it without sin. If I were once out of it, and could start again, and stand upon a new footing, then I might follow Christ, but at the present time there are such things in the house where I live, such circumstances in my business,

there are such peculiar trials in my family, that I think I am justified in saying, ‘Go thy way this time, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee.’” Ah! but, my friend, is this the truth? Let me put it to you in other words than you have stated it. You say, if you follow Christ you will be persecuted. And does not the Word of God tell you the same? And is it not expressly said, “He that taketh not up his cross and followeth not after me cannot be my disciple?” Did not the apostle say, “He that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution?” What! is nature to be changed for you? Must the apostles and the martyrs endure and suffer great things, and are the little trials that you have to bear to be valid excuses for you? No, by that host who waded through slaughter to a throne—the slaughter of themselves,—no, by the men who wear the crowns which they have won on racks and stakes I pray you do not think that this shall be any excuse for you at God’s great day. Or if you think that it be an excuse that is valid for you now, remember, if you reject Christ you reject the crown. If you cannot bear the reproach of Christ, neither shall you have Christ’s riches. If you will not suffer with him, neither shall you reign with him. You say that your circumstances compel you to sin, or else you would get into a world of trouble. And what do you mean by this, but that you prefer your own case to the Master’s service? You have made this your God. Your own emoluments, your own aggrandizement, your own rest and luxury, you have set these up in preference to the command of the God that made you. O sir, do but see the thing in its true light! You have put yourself where the Israelites put the golden calf, and you have bowed down and you have said, “These be thy gods, O Israel!” To these you have offered your peace offerings. Oh, be not deceived! “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” “He that would save his life shall lose it, but he that will lose his life for Christ’s sake shall save it.” Away, then, with these excuses about your circumstances; it is an idle one, and will not endure the light of the day of judgment.

“Yes,” says another, “I would follow Christ; I have often felt inclinations to do so; and I have had some longings after better things: but the way of Christ is too rough for me. It demands that I should give up pleasures which I really love. I know if I should promise to give them up, I should go back to them very soon. I have tried, but they are too much for me. I did not think at one time that I was so thoroughly chained to them. But, when I tried to break away, I found the chains were not as I thought they were—of silk, but of iron, of triple steel. I cannot, sir, I tell you plainly, I cannot. If to be saved requires me to give up my worldly amusements, I cannot do it.” Well, sir, I reply, you have spoken with the candour of an honest man. But, will you please to understand the bargain a little more clearly. Remember, soul, when you say, “I cannot give up the world” you have said, “I cannot be saved, I cannot escape from hell, I cannot be a partaker of the glories of heaven.” You have preferred the dance to the entertainment of glory; you have preferred the revelling merriments at midnight to the eternal splendours of the throne of God. You have in cool blood—now mark it, you have in cool blood, determined to sell your soul for a few hours of giddiness,

a little season of mirth. Look it in the face, and God help you to understand what you have done. If Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, what have you done? Lift up your eyes to heaven, behold the golden harps, and listen to the harmony of the glorious song, and then say, "But I prefer thy music, O earth, to this." Look yonder to the golden streets, and the joy and the bliss which await the true believer, and then coolly write it down, and say, "I have chosen the casino, I have preferred the house of sin to this." Look up and behold the draughts of joy that await believers, and then go to the tavern and sit down in the tap room, and say, "I have preferred the enjoyments of intoxication to the mirth of eternity." Come, I say sir, do look it in the face, for this is what you have done, and if, after weighing the two things in the scales together, you find that the momentary enjoyments of the flesh are to be preferred to the eternal weight of glory which God hath reserved for them that love him, then choose them. But if it be nothing in comparison with eternity; if the flesh be but dross in comparison with the spirit, if this world be emptiness when compared with the world to come, then reverse your foolish decision. May God the Holy Ghost make you wise. The only wise God choose your inheritance for you.

"Oh," says another, "but it is not exactly my pleasures; for I have found no pleasure in sin. It is some time since iniquity ministered pleasure to me; I have drunk the top of the cup. The froth I have already daintily sipped, but now I have come to the dregs."—I know I am speaking to some men to-day, in this very state.—"I have jaded myself," says such-an-one "in the race of pleasure; I have exhausted my powers of enjoyment, and yet though the wine yields no lusciousness to my taste, I drink, for I cannot help it; and though lust affords me no longer any exquisite delight, still impelled as by some secret force, I am driven to it. From old habit it has become a second nature with me, and I cannot, I have tried, I have tried awfully and solemnly, I cannot—I cannot break it off. I am like a man whose boat is taken up by the rapids. I have pulled against the stream with both my arms, till the veins start like whip-cords to my brow, and the blood starts from my nose in agony of vigor, and yet I cannot reverse the stream; nor can I set my boat's head against it. I can see the precipice; I can hear the roaring of the dashing water as it leaps the cascade, and I am speeding on swifter, and swifter, and swifter, till my very blood boils with the tremendous vehemence of my crimes; I am speeding onward to my merited damnation."

Ah, man! yours is a solemn "BUT" indeed. If I thought you meant it all, I would rather speak to you words of encouragement than of warning. For remember this, when you are ready to perish God is ready to save. And when our power is gone, then the plaintive cry, "Lord, save, or I perish," wrung from a despairing heart, shall reach the ears of the Most High, and he that delighteth in mercy shall stretch out his arm to save. There is hope, there in hope for thee yet. What! is the boat's bow already out of the water, and does she seem to leap like a live thing into the midst of the spray? O Eternal God, thou canst save him yet. Thou canst come from above, and take him out of the deep waters, and pluck him out of

the billows that are stronger than he. Yet say now, is this just as you have described it? I fear lest perhaps you make “cannot” only a substitute for “will not.” Do you not love those ways of the transgressor? Can you honestly say you loathe them? I do not believe you can. Remember the dreadful alternative. When you say I cannot renounce these things, and will not look to God to enable you to do it; you have said, “I cannot escape from the flames of hell; I cannot be rescued from the wrath to come; I am damned.” You have, in fact, forestalled your own doom. That awful sentence you have pronounced upon yourself. You have sat in judgment on your own soul, put on the black cap, and read out your own sentence; you have put yourself upon the death-cart; you have adjusted the rope about your own neck, and you are about to draw the bolt and be your own executioner. Oh! weigh your words, and measure your acts, and wake up to a consciousness of what you are about. Do not take the leap in the dark. Look down the chasm first, and gaze a moment at the jagged rocks beneath which soon you must lie a mangled corpse. Now, ere you drink the cup, know the poison that is in the button of it; make sure of what you are doing, and if you are determined that you will clasp your sins with the spasmodic and terrific grasp of a dying, drowning man. Then grasp thy sins and lose thy soul; then keep thy sins, and be thou damned! Hold fast to thine iniquities, and be dashed for ever from the presence of the Eternal One. If it be horrible to hear, how much more horrible to do. If it be dreadful to speak, how much more solemn to perform in cold blood that which our lips have spoken. “But,” saith another, “that is not my case. I can say I will follow Christ, but I am of such a volatile, changeable disposition that I do not think I ever shall fulfill my purpose. When I heard you preach a few sabbaths ago, sir, I went home to my chamber, and I shut the door and I prayed. But, you know, some acquaintance called in; he took me away, and soon every good thought was gone. Often have I sat shivering in the pew while the Word of God has been quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of my joints and marrow, being a discerner of the thoughts and intents of my heart, but the world comes in again; so that I seem sometimes as if I were almost a saint, and then again, the next day I am almost a fiend. Sometimes I think I could do anything for Christ, and the next day I do everything for the world. I promise but I do not perform; I vow and break my vows; I am like the smoke from the chimney—soon blown away and my good resolutions are like a morning cloud, they are there but for the morning, and soon they are gone.” Well, certainly you have described a case which is too frequent. But will you allow me to put that also in a true and scriptural light? Soul, dost thou know thou hast played with heaven? Thou hast made game of eternity, thou art like those men in the parable of whom it is said “they made light of it.” Thou hast thought that the things of this world are more engrossing, to thee than the things of the world to come. Thou art perhaps less excusable than any other, for thou knowest the right and doest it not, thou seest thy sin, and yet thou clingest to it; thou perceivest thy ruin, and yet thou goest onwards towards it; thou hast had wooings of love, thou hast had warnings

of mercy, and yet thou hast shaken all these off. Oh remember that text, "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." "Because I have called," saith God, "and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh." You may perhaps soon be given up to a seared conscience. The Word may be powerless upon you. You may become hardened and desperate, and then, ah! then, not the devils in hell are in a more hopeless condition than thou shalt be.

I have thus gone through the most prominent excuses which men make for scattering from themselves those good thoughts which sometimes seek to get possession of their hearts. "I will follow thee Lord, but—" I cannot of course point out the distinct persons in this large assembly who are in this condition. That there are such is certain. I pray God the Holy Spirit to find them out, and make them judge themselves that they be not judged.

II. I shall now come to the second part of my discourse. May the Lord be our helper. Soul, thou who sayest, "I will follow Christ, but—" I now come to EXPOSE THINE IGNORANCE AND THE ILL STATE OF THY HEART.

Soul! thou hast as yet no true idea of what sin is. God the Holy Spirit has never opened thine eyes to see what an evil and bitter thing it is to sin against God, or else there would be no "buts." Picture a man who has lost his way, who has sunk into a slough; the waters and the mire are come up to his very throat. He is about to sink in it, when some bright spirit comes, stepping over the treacherous bog, and puts forth to him his hand. That man, if he knows where he is, if he knows his uncomfortable and desperate state, will put out his hand at once. You will not find him hesitating with "buts," and "of," and "peradventures." He feels that he is plunged into the ditch, and would come out of it. And *you* apparently are still in the wilderness of your natural state. You have not yet discovered what a fool might see, though a wayfaring man, that sin is a tremendous evil, that thy sin is all destructive, and will yet swallow thee up quick and utterly destroy thy soul. I know that when God the Holy Spirit tell me to see the blackness of sin, I did not need any very great pressing to be willing to be washed. My only question was, "Would Christ wash me?" Ask any poor penitent sinner that knows what the burden of sin is, whether he will have it taken off his shoulders, and he will not say, "I would have it taken off; but—" No, he will need but the very mention of the removal of his load; "Lord," saith he, "do but take it away from me: do but take it away, and I am well content."

Again: soul, it seems plain to me that thou hast never yet been taught by the Holy Spirit what is thy state of condemnation. Thou hast never yet learnt that the wrath of God abideth on thee. So long as thou art out of Christ, thou art under a curse. If that word "*condemnation*" had once been rung in thine ears, thou wouldst have no *ifs* and *buts*. When a man's house is on fire, and he stands at the window, and the fire escape is there and his

hair begins to be crisp with the hot tongues of fire that scorch his cheeks, he has no “buts” about it, but down the escape he goes at once. When Lot began to see the fiery shower coming down from heaven, he had no “buts” about making the best of his way out of the city and escaping to the mountains. And you, O may God the Holy Ghost show to you, sinner, where you are to-day! Oh that he would make you know that your sentence is pronounced, that God’s messengers are out after you to take you to prison. Then you will leave off your “buts,” your presences, and excuses, and you will say, “Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do? “And be it what it may, your soul will make no demurs about it.

Surely, methinks you cannot have felt the danger you are in of daily destruction. If you have not felt that, I do not think the Spirit of God has ever come into your soul after a real and saving fashion. You have no proof that you are one of Christ unless you have felt the danger of your natural state. Do you see there?—there is a scaffold raised; a man is brought out to execution,—there is the block and here stands the headsman with his sharp gleaming axe, gleaming in the morning sun. The man has just laid his neck upon the block in the little hollow place shaped out for it; there he lies, and the headsman has just lifted up the axe to cleave his head from his body As that man lies there, if a messenger should come from the king and say, “Here is a pardon, will you accept it?” do you believe he would say, “I will accept it, *but*—? No, springing up from what he thought would be his last resting place, he would say, “I thank his majesty for his abundant grace, and cheerfully do I rejoice in accepting it.” You cannot have known where you are, or else “but” would be impossible to you. Such is your state, remember, whether you know it or not: you put your neck upon the block of insensibility, but the axe of justice is ready to smite you down to hell. The Lord help you to see your state and put the “buts” away from you.

It seems to me, too, that you are ignorant altogether of what the wrath of God must be in the world to come. Oh! could I take you to that place where hope has ever been a stranger: if you could put your ear a moment to the gratings of those gloomy dungeons of which despair is the horrid warder—if I could make you listen to the sighs, the useless regrets, and the vain prayers of those who are cast away, you would come back affrighted and alarmed, and sure I am your “buts” would have been driven out of you. You would say, “Great God, if thou wilt but save me from thy wrath, do what thou wilt with me, I will make no conditions, I will offer thee no objections; if I must cut off my right arm, or pluck out my right eye, he it so, if from this place of woe thou wilt but save me. Oh! from this fire that never can be quenched, from this worm of endless folds which can never die, great God deliver me. If rough be the means, and unpleasant to the flesh, yet grant me but this one request,—save me, O God, save me from going down into the pit. “If a soul were just sinking to hell, and God could send some bright angel to pluck it from the flames just as it entered there, can you imagine its being so mad as to say, “I would be plucked as a brand from the burning,

but—?” No, no. Glad to embrace the messenger of mercy, it would rejoice to fly from hell to heaven.

Again, sinner, it seems clear to me, inasmuch as you say, “but,” that you can have no idea of the glory of the person of Christ. I see you sitting down in your misery, in the bare uncomfortable cottage of your natural estate: yourself naked and filthy, with your hair matted over your eyes. Behold a bright chariot stays at your door, the sound of music is heard, and the King himself, stepping down from the chariot of his glory comes in, and he says, “Sinner, poor, hopeless, weak, miserable, look unto me and be thou saved. The chariot of my mercy awaits thee, come thou with me, my chariot is paved with love for such as thou art. Come with me, and I will bear thee to my splendours away from thy degradation and thy woe.” You sit there and you will not look at him, for if you did look, you must love him. You could not behold his face, you could not see the mercy that is written there, the pity that trembles in his eye, the power that is in his arm, but you would say at once, “Jesu, thou hast overcome my heart, thy gracious beauty is more than a match for me.

“Dissolv’d by thy goodness I fall to the ground,
And weep to the praise of the mercy I’ve found.”

What shall I say more? Yet this once again I will admonish thee. O thou procrastinating, objecting sinner, thou hast never known what heaven is, or else thou wouldst never have a “but.” If you and I could peep but for an instant within the pearly gates; could you listen to that seraphic song; could you behold the joy which flows and overflows the bosoms of the blessed; could you but spell heaven, not in letters but in feelings; could you wear its crown a moment, or be girt about with its pure white garments, you would say, “If I must go through hell to reach heaven, I would cheerfully do it. What are ye, riches? ye are bubbles. What are ye, pomps? ye are drivelling emptinesses. What are ye, pleasures? ye are mocking, painted witcheries. What are ye, pains? ye are joys. What all be ye, sorrows? ye are but bliss. What are ye, tribulations? ye are lighter than feathers when I compare ye with this exceeding and eternal weight of glory. If we could have but a glimpse of heaven, but a shadow of an idea of what is the eternal rest of God’s people, we should be prepared to endure all things, to give up all things, to bear all things, if we might but be partakers of the promised reward. Your “buts” betray your ignorance; your ignorance of self, ignorance of sin, ignorance of condemnation, ignorance of the punishment, ignorance of the Saviour’s person, and ignorance of the heaven to which he promises to being his people.

III. Now, I have my last work to do, and that would I do briefly. Oh, may strength superior to mine come now, and tug, and strive, and wrestle with your hearts! May the Spirit of God apply the words which I shall now use! “Lord, I will follow thee: but—.” Sinner, sinner, let me SHOW THEE THY SIN. When thou saidst, “But,” thou didst contradict thyself. The meaning of that rightly read is this, “Lord, I will *not* follow thee.” That “but” of thine puts the negative on all the profession that went before it. I wish, my hearers, that this

morning you would either be led by grace to say, "I will believe, "or else were permitted honestly to see the depravity and desperate hardness of your own hearts so as to say, "I will not believe in Christ. "It is because so many of you are neither this nor that, but halting between two opinions, that you are the hardest characters to deal with. Sinners who reject Christ altogether wilfully are like flints. When the hammer of the Word comes against them, the flint gives forth the precious spark, and flies to atoms. But you are like a mass of wax moulded one day into one shape, and moulded the next day into another. I know a gentleman of considerable position in the world, who, after having been with me some little time, said, "Now that man is going away, and I shall be just what I was before;" for he had wept under the Word. He compared himself, he said, to a gutta-percha doll; he had got out of his old shape for a little while, but he would go back to what he was before. And how many there are of you of this kind. You will not say, "I will not have Christ," you will not say, "I will not think of these things." You dare not say, "I disbelieve the Bible," or, "I think there is no God, and no hereafter," but you say, "No doubt it is true, I'll think of it by-and-bye." You never will, sinner, you never will, you will go on from day to day, harping that till your last day shall come, and you will be found then where you are now, unless sovereign grace prevent. I could have more hope for you if you would say at once, "I love not God, I love not Christ, I fear him not, I desire not his salvation," for then methinks you would get an idea of what you are, and God the Spirit might bless it to you. Let me show you again your sin in another respect. How great has been your pride! When Christ bids you believe on him, take up his cross and follow him, he tells you to do the best thing you can do, and then you set up your judgment in contradiction to him. You say, "But." What! is Christ to mend his gospel by your whims? What! is the plan of salvation to be cut and shaped to suit you? Does not Christ know what is best for you, better than you do yourself? "Will you snatch from his hand the balance and the rod, rejudge his judgement, dictate to God, the Judge of all the earth? And yet this is what you attempt to do. You set up your throne in rivalry to the throne of grace, and insist upon it that there is more wisdom in being a sinner than in being a believer, that there is more happiness to be found apart from God than there is with him, which is to make God a hard Master, if not indeed to call him a liar to his face. Oh! you know not what is the quintessence of iniquity which lies within those words so easily spoken, but which will be so hard to get rid of on a dying bed—"I will follow thee, but—"

I close when I have just, in a moment or so only, described your danger. Soul, thou art quieting thyself and saying, "Ah! it will be well with me at the last; for I intend to be better by-and-bye." Soul, soul, bethink thee how many have died while they have been speaking like that. There were put into the grave, during the past week, hundreds of persons, no doubt, who were utterly careless, but there were also scores who were not careless, and who had often been impressed, and yet they said "But, but, but," and promised better things, but death came in and their better things came not. And then, remember how many have been

damned while they have been saying “But.” They said they would repent, meanwhile they died. They said they would believe, meanwhile in hell they lifted up their eyes being in torments. They meant they said, but inasmuch as they did it not they came where their resolutions would be changed into remorse, and their fancied hopes turned into real despair. On such a subject as this I could wish Baxter were the preacher, and that I were the hearer. As I look around you, though there be full many who can read their title clear to mansions in the skies, yet along these pews what a considerable proportion there is of my hearers who are only deceiving their own selves! Well, sinners, I will make the road to hell as hard for you as I can. If you will be lost, I will put up many a chain and many a bar, and shut many a gate across your way. If you will listen to my voice, God helping me, you shall find it a hard way—that way of transgressors; you shall find it a hard thing to run counter to the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. But why will ye die, O house of Israel, why will ye die? Where is your reason fled? Have beasts become men and men become beasts? “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib,” but ye know not. What! are you become like the silly sheep that goes willingly to his slaughter? Are the swallows and cranes more wise than you? for they know the senses and they judge the times, but you know not that your summer is almost over, that your leaves are falling in the autumn of your life, and that your dreary winter of despair and of hopelessness is drawing nigh. Souls, are these things fancies? If so, sleep while I preach of them. Are they dreams? Do I bring out these doctrines but as bugbears to alarm you as if you were some children in a nursery? No, but as God is true, are not these the most solemn realities that ever rested on the lip of man or moved the heart of hearer? Then why is it, why is it, why is it that you make light of these things still? Why is it that you will go your way to-day as you did before? Why will ye say, “Well, the preacher has warned me faithfully, and I will think of it, but—; I was invited and I will consider, but—; I did hear the warning, but—?” Ah, souls, while you shall be saying “But,” there shall be another “But” go forth, and that shall be “But cut him down, why cumbereth he the ground?” Wake, vengeance, wake! The sinner sleeps. Pluck out thy sword, O Justice! let it not rest in its scabbard, come forth! Nay, nay, oh! come not forth devouring sword! oh, come not forth! O Justice, be thou still! O Vengeance, put away thy sword, and Mercy, reign thou still! “Today if ye will hear his voice harden not your hearts as in the provocation,” but if ye harden your hearts, remember he will swear in his wrath that ye shall not enter into his rest. Oh! Spirit of God, do thou the sinner turn, for without thee he will not turn; our voice shall miss its end, and he will not come to Christ.