﻿**CHAPTER II.**

**TREATMENT OF CASES IN THE PASTORAL WORK.**

Charles Bridges

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The Christian Ministry

Part V: The Pastoral Work of the Christian Ministry,

section II: Treatment of Cases in the Pastoral Work

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The many subdivisions of the two grand classes which divide the world, offer a great variety of cases, the just treatment of which is a matter of the greatest moment. We venture a few hints on some of the most important of them—chiefly drawn from the observation of the New Testament ministry, as illustrative of the several specialities of our Ministrations.

**I.—THE INFIDEL.**

MANY of us come in contact with infidelity in its most malignant and popular forms—impatient of all moral restraints— breaking with a bold hand all social bonds, and defying the authority of the government of God. There is the sensual infidel. His belly or his money is his god. He wants to be persuaded that there is no God, because he wishes there were none: and because he is afraid, lest there should be. This class are not thinking men; but they " have heard the blasphemy of some:" they try to believe a doctrine, which they trust will quiet their consciences, and prove the warrant, encouragement, and refuge of sin. They " beseech us to depart out of their coasts"—"saying—Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Our Lord traces this infidelity to its source—not the want of evidence, but the love of sin; and teaches us to deal with it, by aiming at the conscience; setting forth the sentence of condemnation; convincing of sin; exhibiting the correspondence of ﻿the heart with the declarations of God; and contrasting with it the holy character of the work of God.

There is also ***the* *imitative infidel*,—**such as those who are often  in infidel society. They dare not confess a cause, which is a standing jest with men of wit. They cannot endure their scorn. They are overpowered by their bold assurance. They hear plausible arguments advanced, or some witty speech uttered against religion. They take it up as their own. The ambition of being thought a little above their own class makes them retail it. This is common among young men, just advancing into all the pride and pruriency of self-conceit. We can only expose their foolish pride, inculcate a teachable spirit, and bring before them the simple authority of the Divine testimony, which to candid minds will come with more powerful conviction than all the witty sayings of wise fools.

There is also ***the shrewd infidel*,—**such as Hume, Gibbon, and Paine. Here we find the love of sin gathering strength from the pride of reasoning. Refusing to believe what they do not understand (a palpable proof of inconsistency and ignorance; for upon this principle they must reject the works as well as the word of God); they degrade revelation by the supposition, that a system within the grasp of the puny intellect of man could be worthy of God, or proceed from God. How can their principles account for prophecy, miracles, the establishment of the Gospel in the world by such weak instruments in opposition to all the power and learning of man, its civilizing and new-creating influence? Let them be pressed with their own difficulties— ﻿far greater than those of the Gospel. Let them be convicted of credulity, in being constrained to believe the greatest improbabilities, in order to make way for their disbelief of Revelation. Let them be shown the cruelty of their scheme— " despoiling" men of their only hope—excluding every glimmer of light in the vista of futurity—offering nothing for the present distress—promising nothing but doubt, anxiety, and despair. Can a system so dark and gloomy have proceeded from a God ﻿of love? Is there not a far stronger motive to embrace, than to reject, the Gospel? If it be false, believers are as safe as unbelievers. If it be true (and has the unbeliever no misgiving here?) where is his lot for eternity?

﻿St. Paul's Ministry at Athens teaches us to set forth Christ to infidels of every class and character. And indeed this—as a remedy commensurate with every distress—is the strongest testimony for the Gospel. The prevalence of this poison should lead us to inculcate upon all, especially the young, the study of the evidences of Christianity, that they may " be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh them, a reason of the hope that is in them, with meekness and fear."

﻿**II.—THE IGNORANT AND CARELESS.**

SUCH were the multitude in our Lord's time. The spirituality and requirements of his law—the most searching developments of the heart, mingled however with the strongest encouragement; the nature and immediate duty of faith in himself; the awful consequences of rejecting his salvation; uncompromising exhibitions of the terms of the Gospel; the most unfettered invitations to all that were willing to accept them—these formed the prominent topics of his general instruction. In individual cases he dealt closely with the conscience by tangible points of conviction. The exhortations of the Apostles were of course more explicit. Their arrows of conviction were dipped in the blood of Christ; and the display of the cross was the ground of their successful pleadings of love.0

This, like every other class, must be treated according to character. The principle of unbelief needs to be laid open to them, as the source of all the proud reasonings against the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and of the awful contempt of its gracious offers; and issuing at length in hardness of heart, and stupidity under the ﻿means of grace.   Let them be charged solemnly upon the inexpressible sinfulness and danger of their state, especially in the aggravated guilt of the rejection of the Saviour. We must picture before us men asleep in the immediate neighbourhood of fire, " saving them with fear, pulling them out of the fire." A solemn statement has often been owned with an awakening blessing. The man also should be brought, if possible, to a point, and some appeal fastened upon his own declarations. He thinks but little of eternity; yet he hopes to go to heaven, because he wishes to go thither. Here is ground to work upon—the folly of making his indolent wishes the ground of his hopes. He would give everything on a deathbed to be assured of his safety : why is he not in earnest now? He knows Christ as a Saviour, but has no personal interest in him—no sense of want, no spiritual exercise of faith. He needs instruction, like a babe or a heathen, upon the elementary truths of the Gospel. The hardened of this class must be treated with the greatest mildness; speaking to their condition with the most compassionate regard, and with the most " beseeching" entreaties—" Be ye reconciled to God."  Let them not suppose, that by denouncing the judgments of God, we seal their condemnation; but rather that we endeavour to awaken them to escape from it—that we " shut them up under" wrath, only as the means of " bringing them to Christ." Let us connect every exposure of willful infatuation with the invitations of the Gospel. Many, who are repelled by remonstrance, and proof against reasoning, have been overpowered by love. The cross of Calvary has arrested the attention of the most ignorant; wrought irresistibly upon the most stubborn; and displayed the vanity and wretchedness of the world to the conviction of its most determined votaries. The exhibition of the Saviour in his all-sufficiency, suitableness, faithfulness, and love, affords ample warrant for enlivening hope in the most desperate cases.

﻿**III.-THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS.**

THE young ruler exemplifies our Lord's treatment of this case. Conviction was wanted, and the law was the medium employed. Ignorance of the law is the root of self-deception. An acquaintance with its spirituality unveils the hidden world of guilt and defilement, brings down self-complacency, and lays the sinner prostrate before the cross.  In another case, he made the necessity of an entire change of heart the instrument of conviction.  He denounced the enmity or hypocrisy of this spirit, as the willful rejection of his gospel, and as making a " stumbling-stone and rock of offence " of the foundation laid for the trust, glory, and salvation of his people. The Epistles to the Romans and Galatians exhibit this principle, entrenched in a system of external religion, without faith, love, contrition, separation from the world, or spiritual desires; or depending on the mercy of God, even in the rejection of the ordained means of its communication; of which the man has no other notion, than as a help to supply deficiencies, upon the condition of future amendment.

﻿What makes the case of the selfjusticiary so affecting, is. that we have no gospel message to deliver to him. Our Master " came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."  The righteous need him not, seek him not, and have no interest in him. Our commission is to sinners; and, judging from this man's own account of himself; of the goodness of his heart; the correctness of his conduct; and the multitude and excellency of his meritorious actions—we should conceive him not to belong to that " lost" race, whom " the Son of man came" expressly and exclusively " to save." Indeed his spiritual ignorance presents a difficulty, at the outset, in dealing with him. We have with all simplicity and plainness proved to him the fallacy of his expectations. We have " judged him out of his own mouth." Yet the ﻿next conversation finds him as far as ever removed even from the comprehension of the gospel; expressing the same dependence upon his  own  performances, as if no attempt had been made to undeceive him, and no confession extorted of the weakness of his foundation.

﻿To pursue the self-justiciary into all his " refuges of lies" and to sweep them away before his face, is a most laborious task. When disturbed in his first refuge of his own righteousness, he flies to repentance. Half-distrusting his security, he strengthens it by the merits of his Saviour, by the delusive substitution of sincerity for perfection, or by the recollection of his best endeavours, as. a warrant for his hope in the mercy of God. But place him on his death-bed: is he sure that his works are not deficient in weight, that he has attained the precise measure, commensurate with the full and equitable demands of his holy and inflexible Judge? What if " the hand-writing " should then be seen " upon the wall," " against him, and contrary to him? " Let sin, the law, and the Saviour, be exhibited before him, fully, constantly, and connectedly; let the pride, guilt, ingratitude, and ruin of unbelief, be faithfully and affectionately applied to his conscience; let him know, that the substitution of any form of doctrine, or course of duties, in the place of a simple reliance on Christ, turns life itself into death, and hinders not only the law, but even the Gospel, from saving him. Who knoweth, but thus he may be humbled, enlightened, and accepted, in the renunciation of his own hopes, and the reception of the Gospel of Christ?

﻿There is another form of spiritual self-righteousness requiring different treatment. When the sinner is held back from the gospel by a sense of unworthiness, his worthiness is the implied ground of his coming to the gospel—his work—not Christ's. When the Christian longs for a deeper view of sin, and love to Christ, and ﻿forgets, that, when attained, he will have the same need as before of the blood and righteousness of Christ—this is again to put spiritual self in the place of Christ. To such the Apostle would say—" Christ is become of no effect to you; ye are fallen from grace. Having begun in the Spirit, are ye made perfect in the flesh? "  If our ground be sure in Christ, let this be our only confidence in our highest frame; and it will be a satisfactory stay in our lowest. And under all variations, let us give glory to God by simply believing.

﻿**IV.-THE FALSE PROFESSOR.**

THIS is the man, who has listened to the Gospel—who has been " persuaded of these things," but not " embraced them." He gives us his words. He exhibits " the form of godliness." His lusts are either restrained by conviction, or dormant from the absence of temptation, or overcome by some dominant propensity; or he is frightened into hypocrisy by the dread of imminent danger; or perhaps he has relinquished some outward evils. But what is the amount of the work accomplished? Instead of "the axe being laid to the root of the tree," the branches are pruned, only to sprout again with fresh luxuriance. The birds, instead of being driven away, are only chased from bough to bough. Instead of the fountain being dried up, only the course of the stream is changed. Sin is not touched in its principles. The heart is unrenewed. It is of little use to sweep away the open viciousness, when the seeds of the evil lie within in active operation.

Let us mark the scriptural treatment of this character. Our Lord sifted him, by applying to his conscience the spirituality of his doctrines, the extent of his requirements, the connection between the heart and conduct, and the remembrance of the different standards of God and the world. The Apostle convicts him in the ﻿proof, that union with Christ, and consequent renewal of the heart—not outward attainments or privileges— show the real Christian. The Epistle of St. John brings him mainly to the test of love, as the presiding and animating principle of the heart and conduct.

﻿But the false professor is a very Proteus, evading our grasp by a constant change of form. Yet if he speaks of his comforts, how unlike the awakening and serious consolations of the Christian! There is no dread of self-deception, no acquaintance with his own sinfulness, no assault from Satan, because there is no real exercise of grace, or incentive to diligence. If he speaks of his state before God, can he abide the test of the holiness of God, of the " exceeding breadth" of his law, with its fearful disclosure of his utter depravity and defilement? Can he bear to have the detailed evidences of a radical change, the indispensable importance of an interest in Christ, and the solemn alternative, of " having the Spirit of Christ," or " being none of his "—closely pressed upon him? Has the awful consideration —that if u Christ is not in him," " though he speak with the tongues of men and of angels," he is a " reprobate "—ever led him to " examine himself, whether he be in the faith, and to prove his own self? " If he speaks of his love, he owns his obligations; but what are his views of the Divine excellency of the Saviour? Where is his readiness to bear his cross, the proof of delight in his word, or of union with his people? How often is the Saviour's merit made— whether avowedly or not— a support for a bold confidence in insensibility to all spiritual affection and Christian deportment! And therefore, as the sum of the whole inquiry —" Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love."

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﻿This case is sometimes beyond the reach of ordinary discernment. Notwithstanding all our vigilance, some counterfeit coin will pass for gold. Judas among the ﻿Apostles, and Ananias and others in the Primitive Church, are standing mementos, that it is not our prerogative to search the heart. The form of godliness may be maintained accurate in every feature, and complete in every limb. Generally speaking, however, there will be some inconsistency betraying the self-deceiver, and affording a handle of conviction in dealing with him. Dislike to spiritual religion, and-to conversation connected with it; prevalent love of the world; and unsubdued inveterate tempers, indicate his insincere reception of the truth.   The love of holiness, and the desire of conformity to his Saviour, were never in his aim. The truth was received as a speculative dogma; "not in the love of it." Being loosely held, it was therefore ineffectively applied, and' (when inconvenience was threatened) readily surrendered. Such persons are the great stumbling-blocks to the unestablished Christian—and not less so to the world. Their discovery should make us cautious and slow in forming our judgment of characters; at the same time not treating the sincere with coldness and suspicion.

**V.—NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL CONVICTIONS.**

THE power of conviction was strongly and variously exhibited under the New Testament Ministry. The thundering discourses of John pierced the conscience. Many were interested, and partially reformed. Under our Lord's first sermon, and in the cases of " the sorrowful young man," and " the chief rulers,"  there must have been strong conviction; yet (as the want of universal obedience proved) without Divine influence. The practical effects in the sons of Zebedee, Matthew, and Zaccheus on the other hand, exhibited spiritual and permanent conviction. Under the Apostolic Ministry, Peter's hearers, Cornelius, Sergius Paulus; Lydia, the jailor, the Gentile hearers at Antioch and other places, showed the fruits of spiritual conviction, ﻿conviction, in faith, love, and universal holiness; while the frantic Jews under Stephen and Paul, and trembling Felix, displayed the power of conscience, overcome by the natural enmity and the love of sin. Few cases more peculiarly need (not, of course, miraculously) the gift of " discerning of spirits," to distinguish between awakenings and humiliation—between a sight of sin, and a loathing of its sinfulness; and thus to determine the character of the conviction, in order to its safe and successful treatment. Its unsoundness or sincerity will be determined—whether it rest in general acknowledgment, or brings out detailed exercises of contrition; whether it respects the misery, or the defilement of sin; its consequences merely, or its character; whether it springs from fear of wrath, or regard for the honour of God's whether it extends to some sins, or to all; whether it is consistent with the love of sin, or producing abhorrence of and separation from it; whether its influence is temporary or abiding; whether it repels us from Christ in despondency, or leads us to him in the exercise of faith. In the early stages of sincerity, it is often a mixture of legal and evangelical principle, resulting more from sense of sin, than from apprehension of Christ, and productive rather of alarm than of contrition—of terror than of tenderness and love." Self-deceitfulness never shows itself more than in a state of conviction. Some are neither at ease in their sins, nor heartily seek for deliverance. Perhaps they will yield partially to the Gospel; but they rest short of a full restoration. In such cases we must be most careful, that we do not heal the wound, before it has been searched, and probed to the bottom. A slight healing is the prelude to the most fatal delusion. Much wisdom however is requisite to discriminate the true work of God. If, indeed, the excitement be merely the irritation of natural conscience by the law,0 it will rest in sullen dissatisfaction, or in " a form of godliness" without the power. It must therefore be kept alive, deepened, ﻿alarmed, and enlightened by close statements of the danger of yielding to the entanglements of unbelief—of the urgency of an immediate application to the Saviour— of the self-delusion and certain ruin of abiding under present convictions; and at the same time of the assured acceptance of the weakest act of faith. ' Contrition—as an old writer observes—(is of no force, unless there be also faith in Christ.' The reception of the Saviour is a proof of spiritual life in conviction, and the spring of its continued exercise. Thus both Peter's and Stephen's hearers were pierced—the former only spiritually changed Whatever feeling, therefore, brings us to Christ, heartily weary of sin, sensible of danger, thirsting for mercy, and anxious to walk by the rules of the Gospel, is the convincing power—not of conscience, but of the Spirit of God. But what tenderness is required, lest we " break the bruised reed! " Let the wide distinction between the indwelling and the indulgence of sin—between its occasional prevalence and its habitual dominion—be accurately marked: nay, even the overruling of its lamented incursions in deepening the contrition, establishing the watchfulness, exercising and strengthening the faith, of the afflicted penitent. Let him view the strong encouragement to repeated applications to Christ. If he be really mourning over his guilt, and desiring the pardon and love of the Saviour (a frame of mind inconsistent with the least indulgence of sin), he has his promise for the rest of his soul. In bringing his wants and desires to the Gospel, he will find increasing fight, consolation, and strength, for the maintenance of the spiritual conflict, until judgment " be brought forth unto victory."

﻿**VI.—THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN.**

﻿JUDGMENT, experience, tenderness, and acquaintance with the natural character, circumstances, and habits of the individual, must direct the treatment of this most important case. The young Christian is awakened and excited, but very imperfectly enlightened. There is much self-deception and self-righteousness. His repentance is sincere, hut partial; more exercised from the trouble, than from the sinfulness of sin; but slightly connected with faith; and with little consciousness of the habitual backsliding of the heart from God. His faith, though genuine, is confused; rather a feeling or a train of feelings, than an influential principle; associated with comfort rather than with holiness; its principle confounded with its exercise, or different exercises mistaken for each other. There is but little of " knowledge and judgment" in his love; so that, though pleasing in its impressions, it is not that uniform and powerful energy of self-denial and devotedness, which characterizes the adult Christian. He has many infirmities to exercise our forbearance; and many difficulties to excite our sympathy. Glad should we be, could he reach at one flight the summit of perfection. But mean-while, let us not, in violation of our Master's instructions, insist upon his maturity.

As the general rule, he must be " fed with milk, not with meat."  Yet this must include a full and explicit exhibition of the Saviour in His personal dignity, in His Mediatorial character, and in His relation to His people, that in the simplicity of the Gospel he may continually come to Him, " that he may have life more abundantly." Our Lord advanced the progress of his disciples by the gradual revelation of himself :  for doubtless to " grow in the knowledge of" Him, is the most efficient means of "growing in grace."

The conflict of faith is a subject of suitable instruction for this case. The perplexities of our Lord's disciples arose from their indistinct perception of the character ﻿and power of faith. They knew nothing of its power in realizing unseen help; and, connecting it only with the sensible comfort of their Master's presence, they were utterly unprepared for any emergency in his temporary absence from them. And thus the young Christian wants to be correctly informed in the nature of faith, as an habitual dependence upon Christ, grounded upon the sense of need, and the Scriptural warrant of his power and love. This principle is perhaps most vigorous in a state of conflict. when striking its roots deeper in the heart, in humility, contrition, and self-abasement; so that spiritual depression, (when not directly arising from the indulgence of sin) is the trial of its reality, and the peculiar season for its exercise.

﻿The true nature of experience must he also set out—its ground —the testimony of the word, not an impression on the mind— its principle—faith, not feeling—its evidence—holiness, not profession. It is not excitement, which, originating in self, can never be permanent; but the active exercise of dependence on Christ. Faith is the habit of dependence—Experience is the consequent habit of enjoyment; faith instrumentally the life of experience. As the ground therefore is wholly independent of feeling, and fixed upon the perfect work and office of Christ; so no set of feelings, whether bright or clouded, must be suffered to remove the eye from the grand object—the soul from the one sure foundation. The changes however in the Divine dispensations, are needful for the trial of the young Christian's grace, and for his establishment in Christ. Let him therefore in his happy experience be directed to be thankful, but watchful; lest it become the occasion of his pride, rather than the matter of his praise; his security, rather than his encouragement; his rest rather than his enjoyment. In clouded experience, let him ask his heart—" Is there not a cause? " Let him be humbled, not discouraged—quickened to prayer, not ﻿The true nature of experience must he also set out—its ground —the testimony of the word, not an impression on the mind— its principle—faith, not feeling—its evidence—holiness, not profession. It is not excitement, which, originating in self, can never be permanent; but the active exercise of dependence on Christ. Faith is the habit of dependence—Experience is the consequent habit of enjoyment; faith instrumentally the life of experience. As the ground therefore is wholly independent of feeling, and fixed upon the perfect work and office of Christ; so no set of feelings, whether bright or clouded, must be suffered to remove the eye from the grand object—the soul from the one sure foundation. The changes however in the Divine dispensations, are needful for the trial of the young Christian's grace, and for his establishment in Christ. Let him therefore in his happy experience be directed to be thankful, but watchful; lest it become the occasion of his pride, rather than the matter of his praise; his security, rather than his encouragement; his rest rather than his enjoyment. In clouded experience, let him ask his heart—" Is there not a cause? " Let him be humbled, not discouraged—quickened to prayer, not ﻿hindered by unbelief. Let him suspect his heart, not the promises of God. Let him see his own weakness and unworthiness, without forgetting the power and love of his Saviour. Let him expect to realize his confidence only in humility, self-denial, love, separation from the world and general consistency  the absence or deficiency of which would cast a shade over the genuineness of his faith in his most elevated enjoyment.

﻿The nature, certainty, and requisites of the cross, were the subject of our Lord's early instructions, that his disciples might wisely calculate the cost of impending trials—an admirable pattern for us, now that the profession of the Gospel is so often taken up in the dream of a flowery path! as if the crown were easily won, or ever could be won, without the daily cross; or as if there could be a moment for the young Christian, when the denial of his own will, wisdom, or lust, will not be imperatively called for. No outward circumstances of the church can alter these requisitions. He is not forced into the service of Christ; but if he will be a follower, these are the terms. He has no reason to complain of their strictness. The subjugation of his mind to the wisest regulations: the loosening of his heart from the world; the support of his Gracious Master; and a closer conformity to his spirit and example; will be the happy and permanent fruits.

﻿" The Spirit of a sound mind " must also be strongly inculcated. A defect in judgment is a frequent attendant upon the early stage of profession. The mind loses its balance under the first influence of a strong excitement. The affections are tumultuous rather than rational. Like " the crackling of thorns under a pot," they blaze furiously, but with little heat, and speedy extinction. Comfort rather than truth is the object of search. Feeling is mistaken for faith—animal sensations for religion, which is too often estimated by their depth and variety, rather than by their connection with the holy character of Scriptural truth. In various ways, enthusiasm, delusion, foolish and unjustifiable practices, often spring up with serious personal injury, and much to the hindrance and discredit of the Gospel. Hours are sometimes wasted, even over the Bible, in a superficial and irregular course, under the mistaken conception, that not only vain pleasures, but solid pursuits, and even relative obligations, are inconsistent with the exclusive claims of God upon the heart. Thus one set of graces is exhibited to the exclusion of others of a different character, but equal importance; presenting a misshapen figure in the place of the symmetry of graces in " the beauty of holiness." The watch needs a regulator as well as a main-spring, to maintain that uniform, harmonious, and subservient motion, which accurately represents the succession of time. Holiness in its first motions may be full of heat and joy. But we must give it time to settle into temper and habit—the gospel acting upon the whole man; regulating every disposition by its authority, and exercising it in its due proportion and combination; thus introducing its subject into the high privilege of " adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."

﻿We must also enforce the importance of inculcating subjection and conformity to superiors (whether in age or relative connection) in all things consistent with the paramount authority of God. Young Christians (those particularly who are young in age) often offend here. Untempered zeal brings needless offence upon religion, and (as they afterwards discover) difficulties into their own path. With a yielding character, firmness in withstanding worldly compliances should be urged. On a naturally firm temperament, submission— especially to parents— should be pressed; else a warm zeal for God will prove to be the indulgence of self-will, and impatience of restraint. Let it be ever recollected, that nothing but the positive ﻿obligation of a Divine command can set aside the deference so justly due to parental authority. To preserve the just equilibrium in this exercise, as well as to assist the progress towards maturity, the counsel of a friend of tried sympathy, experience, and consistency, would be of material service.

﻿But after all—our watchword of counsel, admonition, and encouragement is—u Press forward." Let not the novice satisfy himself with being a sincere Christian. Let him seek to be an advancing Christian. Let him remember, that his present attainments are but the commencement, and not the finishing, of his work. Let him constantly examine and exercise his faith. Let him guard against neglecting his own heart in remissness or security; against needless fellowship with the world; inordinate enjoyment of lawful pleasure; neglect of the Word of God; formality in duty; and the power of besetting sins and temptations. Let him enter upon the course of holy violence, in the assurance that the fruit of his conflict will abundantly recompence his toil. Let him know, that the privileges, which he had anticipated at some indefinitely distant period, were his portion from the earliest dawn of his faith, as being not attached to its degree, but to its sincerity; and that his more full apprehension and enjoyment of them, so far from giving license to indolence, will furnish a fresh stimulus for renewed and increased exertion. Forgiveness of sin is his present possession;! union with Christ is the direct source of his spiritual life—" springing up" by the power of the Spirit in his heart, " unto everlasting life." Thus receiving the promise, the Author, the earnest, and first-fruits of salvation—he "receives salvation" itself, as " the end of his faith."

﻿**VII.—THE BACKSLIDER.**

﻿WHAT Minister is not conversant with this most affecting case; connected with unsoundness of doctrine, love of the world, the indulgence of sin, or the neglect of prayer? Perhaps also, the power of unbelief, and the want of Christian establishment, are causes, less obvious, but not less frequent or injurious. The unsettled professor, unable to plead a certain title to the promises of support, is paralyzed in prayer, and left to his own unassisted weakness. His comforts (if indeed he could speak of them) not being built upon a personal interest in the Gospel, were feelings, fancies, delusions—not faith—no solid ground of support.

﻿Sometimes we find the backslider in a hardened state—flinching from close dealing—advancing rapidly on the high road to apostacy. Solemn recollections (such as " Where is the blessedness that ye spake of?" —Are the thoughts of eternity peaceful?)—the awful declarations of Scripture, or (as in David's case) a sudden and unexpected self-accusation—may however produce conviction. Yet until the man begins to feel restless and miserable, the case is hopeless.

﻿The *convinced backslider* should be treated as if we really grieved over him—not spared, but yet felt for—his conscience probed, yet with tender recollection—the depth of his departure pointed out, yet himself " restored in the spirit of meekness." Thus was the incestuous Corinthian first handled with severity, in order to produce conviction; when convinced, sustained and confirmed In the" most tender regard, "lest haply such a one would be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" and Satan should get advantage of the church. Let him be exhorted to a diligent use of means, and a resolute abandonment of the ways which had drawn him aside. Let him be guided afresh, as if he had never known the way, to the foot of the cross, there to " look on him, whom he has pierced, and mourn;" in the assurance, that the same love that pardons sins, " heals backstidings."  Peter's case ﻿illustrates the tenderness employed at once to deepen conviction, and to complete the restoration. The power of this love will mark the subsequent character with a deeper hatred of sin—a more contrite abasement in the recollection of guilt—a more careful circumspection of conduct,  combined with a constant attention to the means of grace, and with a higher estimation of the Saviour.

﻿**VIII.—THE UNESTABLISHED CHRISTIAN.**

THE sincerity of our Lord's disciples was not more evident than their want of establishment in faith and knowledge. We often remark a similar defectiveness among our people. Grace is more in the seed than in the operation. It wants exercise to draw it out into practical influence, that love may be more fervent; faith more active; prayer, if not more frequent, yet more spiritual. The Apostle did not treat this case with the soothing tone of sympathy, but with the strong stimulants of conviction and reproof. And indeed such professors, if they do not actually—at least " seem to—come short."    If they are alive, it is a bare sickly existence, with little power of exertion, or capacity for enjoyment. If they did not undervalue even their scanty measure of progress, they would reach forth for higher attainments and more aspiring hopes. True grace sets an edge upon the appetite, rather than satisfies it. But where unbelief is faintly resisted; indolence substituted for exertion; and they are " lying on their faces," instead of exercising painful diligence in their work; " the things that remain" for want of being " strengthened," will be " ready to die."  Hence we see a narrowness in their charity, an unconcern for the spiritual wretchedness around them, and a lack of interest and exertion for perishing souls and the grand cause of Christ.

﻿Possibly the first impressions may have been made rather by the novelty than by the direct power of truth. Hence the impulse to shape a religion after our own fancy, instead of embracing the true revelation of God—to live upon the continual excitement of novelty, in preference to the old established truths. This naturally results in an imperfect apprehension of the Gospel, that fully accounts for defects of Christian temper, as well as for an unsteady resistance to the world. The neglect also of the Ministry (the institution expressly ordained for the prevention of this evil) issues in a feeble and inconstant profession. Perhaps the most effectual discipline for this case is the inculcation of an accurate  comprehension of the whole compass of Scripture, as the grand means of arriving at Christian perfection. Favoritism in Scripture is the grand parent both of heresy and instability of profession. The word of God loses its power, when displayed from its position, dissevered from its practical connexion, or when a part, however important, is taken for the whole. It would be well also to set forth the full glory of evangelical privileges, not only for the consolation of the established, but for the excitement and conviction of the indolent. For, what do they know of being " filled with all joy and peace in believing?" How little comprehension have they " with all taints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ," as the medium of being " filled with all the fullness of God! " Should we not warn them against resting in the perception of truth, without realising its experimental and practical influence? And should we not labour to stir up a close self-inquiry, an earnest habit of prayer, deep self-acquaintance and self-abasement, increasing activity in obedience, and a stronger excitement to ascend the elevated stations of faith, that they might gain more extensive, animating, and heavenly prospects? Especially should we not quicken them to a more habitual contemplation of Christ, as the ﻿means of more complete conformity to his image, and a more steady and enlightened profession of his name. Oh! let them remember also, that it is only in the persevering exercise of faith and diligence that our Christian privileges can be enjoyed, or our Christian confidence assured.

﻿**IX.—THE CONFIRMED AND CONSISTENT CHRISTIAN.**

HERE we find the combination of Scriptural doctrine, holy privilege, and consistent practice. The sum of the prayers and exhortations of the Apostles for their converts, was, that their views of doctrine might be enlarged: their sense of obligation more deep and active; their standard of profession more elevated; their enjoyment of privileges more exciting; their fruitfulness more abundant; their course of obedience more complete. The Apostle's example directs us to substitute instruction in the deepest and most solid truths, in the room of the elementary principles of the Gospel; entering largely into the counsels of God concerning his people—the security of his covenant on their behalf—the more full exhibition of his perfections in the work of their redemption, of the office and work of Christ, and of the Divine life derived from him. " By this system of " strong meat" the adult Christian is " nourished up in the words of faith and of sound doctrine," and " his senses " will be yet further " exercised " in spiritual discernment. The same acts indeed belong to the young and to the old Christian; but in the latter they are more grounded and solid. The ordinances of God are attended by the young with greater ardency, but from the old with deeper principle. The affections in the young are more vigorous and lively. But what is gradually lost in the natural decay of their sensible operations, is abundantly compensated in the improvement of their understanding, resolution, and judgment. Spiritual subjects have changed their ﻿seat in the soul. If they are less sensibly exercised in the affections (though here it might sometimes be well to kindle excitement) they are more permanently fixed in the mind. The choice is more settled, intelligent, and uniform. If there be less of spiritual excitement, there is a deeper insight into spiritual corruption, a deeper fixedness of habit in the Gospel.

﻿Apart from affliction (a most important means of grace to the Christian ) the active operation of spiritual life and joy strengthens and establishes his daily progress heavenward. His release from the dominion of sin; his fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, death, and resurrection, his continual view and application of the cross, constrain him with irresistible and most delightful influence. " The beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord" prostrates his soul in admiring, adoring, and transforming contemplation. Sinking in humility, he rises higher and higher in knowledge, holiness, and love. His esteem of his Lord more deeply impresses his heart. He glows with increasing fervour, with more constant and assured delight, with more wakeful and animating gratitude. And thus every exercise of love brings out a growing conformity to the Divine image. It is difficult to turn to human writings for a full exhibition of this heavenly glory. Mr. Romaine has drawn, so far as it extends, a simple and beautiful portrait; imperfect however, as wanting the practical features of the Scriptural sketch. Baxter has thrown out its features with much fire, force, and power of enchantment; but he has often so disguised his figure with his own constrained feelings and metaphysical trammels, that it seems like an angel in fetters.   Perhaps Leighton may be said to have given the full portrait, both in his writings and in his character, with as little touch of human infirmity, as can be looked for, till the brighter days of the church.

﻿Yet with this love, as the grand material and means of edification, must be combined a positive enforcement of Evangelical warning. David expressly acknowledged the value of this Scriptural discipline; nor did the fear of legality deter the Apostles from connecting it, as a part of the Gospel, even with the fullest view of the glories of their Great Master. The warnings of Scripture have indeed each their own meaning; yet applying to both classes of our people. Those threatenings, which to the ungodly " work wrath " in the dread of their enemy and judge— with the righteous, produce a wholesome fear of a " jealous God," love for the holiness of his dispensations, a godly fear of sin, and a quickening stimulus to the use of the appointed means of preservation. A prominent display indeed of ' the terror of the Lord" would savour of the covenant that " gendereth unto bondage;" but an exclusive ministration of the promises of the Gospel, blotting out all enforcement of its threatenings, would not only incur the guilt of mutilating the word of God, and failing to " warn the wicked of his way;" but would deprive the believer of a Divinely-ordained means of his preservation and establishment.

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﻿The Apostle's exhortation to the Hebrews, furnishes an admirable pattern of this mixed mode of address. Though he styles them—" holy brethren, and partakers of the heavenly calling" he does not spare to " rebuke them sharply," as " dull of hearing;" even setting before them the doom of their rebellious forefathers, and of miserable apostates among themselves, as an incentive to that holy fear, which is always a necessary part of the grace of perseverance; while he concludes with expressing his good opinion concerning them, and setting out the " strong consolation," arising from the immutable certainty of the foundation of their hope. Thus the dark ground occupies so large a portion of the canvass, evidently with a view of displaying more vividly the attractive glory of love shedding its beams over the gloom. Thus also the Christian equipoise is maintained. The balance of faith with fear preserves each principle in its due sphere of operation—restrains the former from presumption, the latter from bondage and ﻿The Writer feels deeply impressed with the responsibility of this individual and discriminating Ministry. The recollection, that every word we speak to the several ﻿classes has a bearing upon their eternal state—clothes it with inexpressible importance, as it respects themselves, our own consciences, and the Church of God. Our office acts ultimately upon the conscience, the various perplexities of which require the most skilful treatment. For the right interpretation of the mind of God, we must not only have learning in Divine things, but we must ourselves be Divinely learned. For how can we know the mind of God, but by the unction and teaching of his own Spirit?  To qualify ourselves therefore for this anxious service—we need much acquaintance with the human heart, and with our own heart in particular—a deep-searching knowledge of Scripture—a careful study of the best works on casuistical, and experimental divinity—most of all—a spirit of humble and importunate prayer for constant and increased supplies of " the wisdom which is from above."   Add to this—a knowledge of the constitutional temperament of the individuals is obviously most important. A sanguine mind would give a delusive character of ardour and intensity to religious impressions. A constitutional depression would obscure the symptoms even of a genuine work of faith. An undue confidence, or backwardness, would need a different tone of address—to be restrained, cautioned, or encouraged, " as the matter should require."

﻿The Writer does not pretend to have given in this detail a complete Ministerial directory. So diversified are the features both of sin and grace, that no human sources have ever furnished him with rules, which did not leave many cases unprovided for. He has aimed only to sketch a few broad lines and traits of conversation, ﻿conversation, which might in some measure meet the prominent difficulties, and be readily filled up under Divine teaching at the moment of emergency. Experience shows us, that often the most difficult work remains when we have come down from the pulpit, needing special direction of prayer, study, and careful regard to our Master's ministration for its effectual discharge. On one particular, however, we cannot mistake; that to all, of every class and at every stage, the attractions of the cross must be unfolded, and its heavenly glory made intelligible, for every purpose of conviction and conversion, of instruction and sanctifica-tion; for the establishment, comfort, and eternal salvation of all who are willing to receiveit. It is a grand specific, applicable to every variety and complication of disease, equally powerful to break the hard heart, or to heal the broken heart. The timid or mistaken exhibition of it, is but a feeble instrument of conviction : while the willful disguise and misapprehension of it will be blasted with ineffectiveness.