

Christian Retirement

Part 44

By [Thomas Reade](#)

1837

ON THE CAUTIONS AND WARNINGS OF SCRIPTURE

The word of God abounds with cautions as well as encouragements; with warnings as well as invitations; with threatenings as well as promises. These are necessary and important; otherwise, they would not be as thickly scattered through the sacred volume. We find the need of cautions and warnings in proportion as we are made acquainted with the subtlety of Satan, the deceitfulness of sin, and the treachery of our own heart.

We learn by a thousand painful instances, that "he who trusts to his own heart is a fool." How short-lived are the best resolutions made in our own strength! They resemble the early dew which soon passes away, and the grass upon the housetop which withers before it grows up. What a valuable part of the Bible are the kind admonitions of a loving Savior! How should we prize the salutary counsels of him who spoke as never man spoke; who sticks closer than a brother!

May we ever remember his gracious exhortations; for "they are spirit, and they are life." "Without me, you can do nothing"—"watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" "Take heed and beware of covetousness"—"Strive to enter in at the strait gate"—"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"—"Continue you in my love."

We are here taught by Infinite Wisdom, that of ourselves we can do nothing that is pleasing to God, or effectual towards our salvation: that our spiritual enemies are constantly plotting our destruction, spreading nets for our feet, and holding out their baits to draw us into sin: that the love of the world is a whirlpool down which millions are carried into perdition: that carnal ease and sensual indulgence form the road to hell: that to escape this dreadful end, we must strive, yes, agonize, to enter in at the strait gate which leads unto life eternal. We are exhorted to seek, as the first great object of pursuit, not the honors and wealth of the world, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. We are warned against the smallest approach towards spiritual declension; and to avoid so great an evil, we are commanded to persevere in the good and the right way, by continuing in the constant exercise of a supreme love to Jesus, who loved us,

and gave himself for us. Such are the salutary counsels given to us by our divine Savior, who said to his disciples, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them."

In the Gospel of the blessed God, we are also cautioned against spiritual pride: "Do not be high-minded, but fear."

How prone we are to be proud, although we have nothing to be proud of! Our hearts are strongly inclined to pride, which is the very essence of the fall. Pride cast angels out of heaven, and man out of paradise. Pride fights against the mercy of God; bars the sinner's heart against the Savior; and hurries the proud rebel down the precipice of desperation into the burning gulf of hell! "Happy, then, is the man who fears aways," lest he fall into the condemnation of the devil!

Blessed Jesus! clothe me with humility; destroy this baneful root of pride out of my heart; and make me meek and lowly; resigned to all your wise disposals, however painful they may be to fallen nature.

How needful at all times is this kind admonition: "Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." We are never in such danger of falling as when we think ourselves the most secure. Self-dependence and carnal security are those fatal props by which thousands are upheld through the delusions of Satan, until they drop into everlasting misery.

How good is this caution, also: "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, lest any of you seem to come short of it."

Self-love blinds the eyes of the mind, so that we cannot see our real state and condition. This was the case with the declining church of Laodicea. She imagined herself rich and increased with goods, and as having need of nothing; when, in the eye of the all-searching Jesus, she was wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Of Ephraim it was said, "gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knows not." Of Ephesus, "you have left your first love." Of Sardis, "you have a name that you live and are dead." So blind are we to our spiritual declensions!

All are not believers who believe themselves to be such. The divine touchstone is, "by their fruits you shall know them."

When Christians are sometimes led to doubt the sincerity of their faith, it is often attributed to the temptation of Satan; but this may not always be the case. Had the church of Laodicea exercised a holy jealousy over herself, that very fear of self-deception would have indicated much self-knowledge and spiritual discernment; and might, through grace, have preserved her from degenerating into that state of lukewarmness, which evidently originated in pride and self-conceit.

Satan not infrequently harasses the true believer with desponding fears; while he buoys up the mere nominal professor with presumptuous hopes. These desponding fears, if indulged to excess, are injurious to the believer's advancement in holiness. They wound his peace, and are dishonorable to a faithful, loving Savior.

Yet, if these fearful apprehensions lead him to closer self-examination, and greater searchings of heart; to more fervent supplication, and increased watchfulness; then Satan is foiled, and the believer, rescued from the power of the enemy, through the unfailing grace of the Redeemer, is made to come off more than conqueror, and to sing with joy in the ways of the Lord. When the believer in Jesus has attained to this happy state, his soul is in a right frame: humble, watchful, and holy. Being taught in the school of Christ to know himself and his Savior, he proceeds with steady step towards the heavenly Canaan, under the equalizing influence of hope and fear.

Everything which can comfort the child of God is recorded by the pen of eternal truth. As his salvation is all of grace in its origin, so is it also in its progress and consummation. "God is faithful, who has promised." "He who has begun the good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Nothing can be stronger than the following assurance of love and mercy which is made to every penitent sinner, flying for refuge to the cross of Christ: "God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given us both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to his promise with confidence. This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the line of Melchizedek." Hebrews 6:17-20.

Yet, in the Holy Scriptures, we meet with many alarming passages which ought to awaken our solicitude, and cause us to ponder the path of our feet. "The just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "If we sin willfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." "If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus, Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of

righteousness, than, after they have known it, to depart from the holy commandment delivered unto them."

These and other similar passages show us the importance of that proverb, "the fear of the Lord tends to life and he who has it shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil."

How many do we see in the course of our lives, who, after flourishing for a season, begin to fade and die! Is it not because the root of the matter was not in them? because their hearts were never savingly changed! because they were never really and truly in a state of grace?

Peter calls such characters, "spots and blemishes." Jude styles them, "spots in your feasts of charity"—"clouds without water—trees without fruit, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever!" Awful words indeed! Oh what need there is for close examination, lest we should be found among those self-deceivers who fancy themselves to be something while they are nothing; and who, after they have made a noisy profession before men, will prove at last mere castaways! The blessed Savior has not left us at uncertainties in these important inquiries. He has given us solid marks whereby to judge of our true state and character: "if you love me, keep my commandments"—"you are my friends, if you do whatever I command you"—"follow me."

As love is the surest evidence of faith, so obedience is the truest test of love. How vain, then, is that profession which is destitute of these graces! Universal holiness is the distinguishing mark of genuine Christianity; "Be holy, for I am holy," is the command of him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

Supreme love to the Lord Jesus Christ is the governing principle of every believer. This sacred attachment to the Savior forms the grand distinction between the children of God and the children of the wicked one.

A man may make a reputable profession of religion for a season and appear like a flourishing tree and a fertilizing cloud; but if his heart be destitute of "the true grace of God," he will be found at last to resemble the character reprobated by Jude—"without fruit" and "without water." In seasons of temptation he will wither away, not having a rooted principle of grace in his heart; and thus manifest to the church and the world, by his declension and apostasy, that he was never truly ingrafted into Christ by faith.

The force of temptation soon destroys his feeble attachment to the visible church; and he remains a solemn warning to all who call themselves Christians, of the danger of false profession.

"Oh blessed Lord, preserve me, your unworthy creature from this awful state of self-delusion. Oh give me true grace, deep repentance, and fervent love. Unite

my soul to yourself in the bonds of the everlasting covenant. Let sin be my daily aversion, and holiness my everlasting delight. Prepare me for the enjoyment of yourself here; and crown all your mercies with the gift of yourself, as my everlasting portion, in your kingdom of glory."

In seasons of doubt and gloom,
When Satan would drive to despair,
Then Christ is the life of my hope,
And hope is the life of my prayer.

My sins, like a death-bearing cloud,
Often hide the dear cross from my view;
But Jesus dispersing the mist,
Disperses the enemy too.

How kind is our merciful God!
His word and his promise how true!
He bids me take courage and fight,
With a crucified Jesus in view.

Should Satan come in like a flood,
And fill me with grief and dismay,
The Spirit appears to my aid;
His standard drives Satan away.

By nature unable to stand,
Or vanquish temptation to sin;
Through Jesus, almighty to save,
The crown we are certain to win.

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