

THE WAY TO GOD

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

WORDS OF COUNSEL

“A bruised reed shall He not break” (Isaiah 42:3; Matthew 12:20).

IT IS dangerous for those who are seeking salvation to lean upon the experience of other people. Many are waiting for a repetition of the experience of their grandfather or grandmother.

I had a friend who was converted in a field, and he thinks the whole town ought to go down into that meadow and be converted. Another was converted under a bridge, and he thinks that if any inquirer were to go there he would find the Lord.

The best thing for the anxious is to go right to the Word of God. If there are any persons in the world to whom the Word ought to be very precious it is those who are asking how to be saved.

Excuses Offered

For instance, a man may say: *“I have no strength.”* Let him turn to Romans 5:6. **“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”** It is because we have no strength that we need Christ. He has come to give strength to the weak.

Another may say: *“I cannot see.”* Christ says: **“I am the Light of the world”** (John 8:12). He came, not only to give light, but **“to open the blind eyes”** (Isaiah 42:7).

Another may say: *“I do not think a man can be saved all at once.”*

A person holding that view was in the inquiry room one night; and I drew his attention to Romans 6:23.

“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

How long does it take to accept a gift? There must be a moment when you have it not, and another when you have it—a moment when it is another's, and the next when it is yours.

It does not take six months to get eternal life. It may however in some cases be like the mustard seed, very small at the commencement. Some people are converted so gradually that, like the morning light, it is impossible to tell when the dawn began; while, with others, it is like the flashing of a meteor, and the truth bursts upon them suddenly.

I would not go across the street to prove when I was converted; but what is important is for me to know that I really have been.

It may be that a child has been so carefully trained that it is impossible to tell when the new birth began; but there must have been a moment when the change took place, and when he became a partaker of the divine nature.

Instantaneous Conversions

Some people do not believe in SUDDEN CONVERSION. But I will challenge any one to show a conversion in the New Testament that was not instantaneous. As Jesus passed by He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus, **“sitting at the receipt of custom: and saith unto him, Follow Me. And he arose, and followed Him”** (Matthew 9:9). Nothing could be more sudden than that.

Zaccheus, the publican, sought to see Jesus; and because he was little of stature he climbed up a tree. When Jesus came to the place He looked up and saw him, and said: **“Zaccheus, make haste, and come down”** (Luke 19:5). His conversion must have taken place somewhere between the branch and the ground. We are told that he received Jesus joyfully, and said: **“Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold”** (Luke 19:8). Very few in these days could say that in proof of their conversion.

The whole house of Cornelius was converted suddenly; for as Peter preached Christ to him and his company the Holy Ghost fell on them, and they were baptized (Acts 10).

On the day of Pentecost three thousand gladly received the Word. They were not only converted, but they were baptized the same day (Acts 2).

And when Philip talked to the eunuch, as they went on their way, the eunuch said to Philip: **“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”** Nothing hindered. And Philip said: **“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.”** And they both went down into the water; and the man of great authority under Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:26-38). You will find all through Scripture that conversions were sudden and instantaneous.

A man has been in the habit of stealing money from his employer. Suppose he has taken \$1,000 in twelve months. Should we tell him to take \$500 the next year, and less the next year, and the next, until in five years the sum taken would be only \$50? That would be upon the same principle as gradual conversion.

If such a person were brought before the court and pardoned, because he could not change his mode of life all at once, it would be considered a very strange proceeding.

How to Stop Stealing

But the Bible says: **“Let him that stole steal no more”** (Ephesians 4:28). It is “right about face!”

Suppose a person is in the habit of cursing one hundred times a day. Should we advise him not to utter more than ninety oaths the following day, and eighty the next day; so that in the course of time he would get rid of the habit? The Saviour says: **“Swear not at all”** (Matthew 5:34).

Suppose another man is in the habit of getting drunk and beating his wife twice a month. If he only did so once a month, and then only once in six months, that would be, upon the same ground, as reasonable as gradual conversion.

Suppose Ananias had been sent to Paul, when he was on his way to Damascus breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, and casting them into prison, to tell him not to kill so many as he intended; and to let enmity die out of his heart gradually, but not all at once.

Suppose he had been told that it would not do to stop breathing out threatenings and slaughter, and to commence preaching Christ all at once, because the philosophers would say that the change was so sudden it would not hold out; this would be the same kind of reasoning as is used by those who do not believe in instantaneous conversion.

Then another class say that they are

Afraid That They Will Not Hold Out

This is a numerous and very hopeful class. I like to see a man distrust himself. It is a good thing to get such to look to God, and to remember that it is not he who holds God, but that it is God who holds him.

Some want to get hold of Christ; but the thing is to get Christ to take hold of you in answer to prayer.

Let such read Psalm 121:

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore.”

Some one calls that the “traveler’s” psalm. It is a beautiful psalm for those of us who are pilgrims through this world; and one with which we should be well acquainted.

God can do what He has done before.

- He kept Joseph in Egypt;
- He kept Moses before Pharaoh;
- He kept Daniel in Babylon;
- He enabled Elijah to stand before Ahab in that dark day.

And I am so thankful that these I have mentioned were men of like passions with ourselves. It was God who made them so great. What man wants is to look to God. Real true faith is man’s weakness leaning on God’s strength. When man has no strength, if he leans on God he becomes powerful. The trouble is that we have too much strength and confidence in ourselves.

Again in Hebrews 6:17, 18:

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Fear of Not “Holding Out”

Now these are precious verses to those who are afraid of falling, who fear that they will not hold out. It is God’s work to hold. It is the Shepherd’s business to keep the sheep. Who ever heard of the sheep going to bring back the shepherd?

People have an idea that they have to keep themselves and Christ too. It is a false idea. It is the work of the Shepherd to look after them, and to take care of those who trust Him. And He has promised to do it.

I once heard that when a sea captain was dying he said: “Glory to God! the anchor holds.” He trusted in Christ. His anchor had taken hold of the solid Rock. An Irishman said, on one occasion, that “he trembled; but the Rock never did.” We want to get sure footing.

In Second Timothy 1:12 Paul says: **“I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”** That was Paul’s persuasion.

During the late War of the Rebellion, one of the chaplains, going through the hospitals, came to a man who was dying. Finding that he was a Christian, he asked to what persuasion he belonged, and was told “Paul’s persuasion.”

“Is he a Methodist?” he asked; for the Methodists all claim Paul.

“No.”

“Is he a Presbyterian?” for the Presbyterians lay special claim to Paul.

“No,” was the answer.

“Does he belong to the Episcopal Church?” for all the Episcopalian brethren contend that they have a claim to the Chief Apostle.

“No,” he was not an Episcopalian.

“Then, to what persuasion does he belong?”

“I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.”

It is a grand persuasion ; and it gave the dying soldier rest in a dying hour.

Let those who fear that they will not hold out turn to the twenty-fourth verse of the Epistle of Jude:

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.”

Then look at Isaiah 41:10:

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.”
Then see verse 13: **“For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help, thee.”**

It is God Who Keeps

Now if God has got hold of my right hand in His, cannot He hold me and keep me? Has not God the power to keep? The great God who made heaven and earth can keep a poor sinner like you and like me, if we trust Him. To refrain from feeling confidence in God for fear of falling—would be like a man who refused a pardon, for fear that he should get into prison again; or a drowning man who refused to be rescued, for fear of falling into the water again.

Many men look forth at the Christian life, and fear that they will not have sufficient strength to hold out to the end. They forget the promise that **“as thy days, thy strength”** (Deuteronomy 33:25).

It reminds me of the pendulum to the clock, which grew disheartened at the thought of having to travel so many thousands of miles; but when it reflected that the distance was to be accomplished by “tick, tick, tick,” it took fresh courage to go its daily journey.

So it is the special privilege of the Christian to commit himself to the keeping of his heavenly Father and to trust Him day by day. It is a comforting thing to know that the Lord will not begin the good work without also finishing it.

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Two Classes of Skeptics

There are two kinds of skeptics—one class with honest difficulties; and another class who delight only in discussion.

I used to think that this latter class would always be a thorn in my flesh; but they do not prick me now. I expect to find them right along the journey. Men of this stamp used to hang around Christ to entangle Him in His talk. They come into our meetings to hold a discussion. To all such I would commend Paul’s advice to Timothy: **“But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes”** (II Timothy 2:23).

Unlearned questions! Many young converts make a woeful mistake. They think they are to defend the whole Bible. I knew very little of the Bible when I was first converted, and I thought that I had to defend it from beginning to end against all comers; but a Boston infidel got hold of me, floored all my arguments at once, and discouraged me. But I have got over that now. There are many things in the Word of God that I do not profess to understand.

When I am asked what I do with them, I say, “I don’t do anything.”

“How do you explain them?” “I don’t explain them.”

“What do you do with them?” “Why, I believe them.”

And when I am told, “I would not believe anything that I do not understand,” I simply reply that I do.

There are many things which were dark and mysterious five years ago, on which I have since had a flood of light; and I expect to be finding out something fresh about God throughout eternity. I make a point of not discussing disputed passages of Scripture. An old divine has said that some people, if they want to eat fish, commence by picking the bones. I leave such things till I have light on them. I am not bound to explain what I do not comprehend.

“The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever” (Deuteronomy 29:29); and these I take, and eat, and feed upon, in order to get spiritual strength.

Good Advice

Then there is a little sound advice in Titus 3:9: **“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law: for they are unprofitable and vain.”**

But now here comes an honest skeptic. With him I would deal as tenderly as a mother with her sick child. I have no sympathy with those people who, because a man is skeptical, cast him off and will have nothing to do with him.

I was in an inquiry-meeting, some time ago, and I handed over to a Christian lady, whom I had known some time, one who was skeptical. On looking round soon after I noticed the inquirer marching out of the hall. I asked, “Why have you let her go?”

“Oh, she is a skeptic!” was the reply.

I ran to the door and got her to stop, and introduced her to another Christian worker, who spent over an hour in conversation and prayer with her. He visited her and her husband, and in the course of a week, that intelligent lady cast off her skepticism and came out an active Christian.

It took time, tact and prayer; but if a person of this class is honest we ought to deal with such an one as the Master would have us.

Here are a few passages for doubting inquirers:

“If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17). If a man is not willing to do the will of God, he will not know the doctrine.

There is no class of skeptics who are ignorant of the fact that God desires them to give up sin; and if a man is willing to turn from sin and take the light and thank Him for what He does give, and not expect to have light on the whole Bible all at once, he will get more light day by day; make progress step by step; and be led right out of darkness into the clear light of heaven.

In Daniel 12:10 we are told: **“Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried: but the wicked shall do wickedly and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand.”**

Now God will never reveal His secrets to His enemies. Never! And if a man persists in living in sin he will not know the doctrines of God.

“The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant” (Psalm 25:14).

And in John 15:15 we read:

“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

When you become friends of Christ you will know His secrets. The Lord said, **“Shall I hide from Abraham the things which I do?”** (Genesis 18:17).

Now those who resemble God are the most likely to understand God.

If a man is not willing to turn from sin he will not know God’s will, nor will God reveal His secrets to him. But if a man is willing to turn from sin he will be surprised to see how the light will come in!

Why the Bible Was “Dry”

I remember one night when the Bible was the driest and darkest book in the universe to me. The next day it became entirely different.

I thought I had the key to it.

I had been born of the Spirit. But before I knew anything of the mind of God I had to give up my sin.

I believe God meets every soul on the spot of self-surrender, and when they are willing to let Him guide and lead. The trouble with many skeptics is their self-conceit. They know more than the Almighty! and they do not come in a teachable spirit.

But the moment a man comes in a receptive spirit he is blessed; for **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him”** (James 1:5).

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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