

The Landmark Baptist

"MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD."—John 1:23

Volume 24 Number 6

November/December 2023



THOUGHTS ON IMMORTALITY

by J. C. Ryle
(1816-1900)

"The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." —2 Corinthians 4:18

A subject stands out on the face of this text, which is one of the most solemn and heart-searching in the Bible. That subject is eternity, or immortality.

The subject is one of which the wisest man can only take in a little. We have no eyes to see it fully, no line to fathom it, no mind to grasp it; and yet we must not refuse to consider it. There are star-depths in the heavens above us which the most powerful telescope cannot pierce; yet it is well to look into them and learn something, if we cannot learn everything. *There are heights and depths about the subject of eternity which mortal man can never comprehend; but God has spoken of it, and we have no right to turn away from it altogether.*

The subject is one which we must never approach without the Bible in our hands. The moment we depart from "God's written Word," in considering eternity and the future state of man, we are likely to fall into error. In examining points like these we have nothing to do with preconceived notions as to what is God's character, and what we *think* God ought to be, or ought to do with man after death. We have only to find out what is written. "What says the Scripture? What says the Lord?" It is wild work to tell us that we ought to have "noble thoughts about God," independent of, and over and above, Scripture. Natural religion soon comes to a standstill here. The noblest thoughts about God which we *have a right to hold are the thoughts which He has been pleased to reveal to us in His "written Word."*

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I ask the attention of all into whose hands this sermon may fall, while I offer a few suggestive thoughts about eternity. As a mortal man I feel deeply my own insufficiency to handle this subject. But I pray that God the Holy Spirit, whose strength is made perfect in weakness, may bless the words I have written, and make them seeds of eternal life in many minds.

1. We live in a world where all things are temporary and passing away.

That man must be blind indeed who cannot realize this. Everything around us is decaying, dying, and coming to an end. There is a sense, no doubt, in which "matter" is eternal. Once created, it will never entirely perish. But in a popular practical sense, there is nothing undying about us except our souls. No wonder the poet says—

"Change and decay in all
around I see,
O Thou that changest not,
abide with me!"

We are all "going, going, going," whether high or low, gentle or simple, rich or poor, old or young. We are all going, and shall soon be "gone."

Beauty is only temporary. Sarah was once the fairest of women, and the admiration of the Court of Egypt; yet a day came when even Abraham, her husband, said, Let me **"bury my dead out of sight."**(Gen.23:4). Strength of body is only temporary. David was once a mighty man of val-

or, the slayer of the lion and the bear, and the champion of Israel against Goliath; yet a day came when even David had to be nursed and ministered to in his old age like a child. Wisdom and vitality of brain are only temporary. Solomon was once a prodigy of knowledge, and all the kings of the earth came to hear his wisdom; yet even Solomon in his latter days played the fool exceedingly, and allowed his wives to turn away his heart.

Humbling and painful as these truths may sound, it is good for us to realize them and lay them to heart. The houses we live in, the homes we love, the riches we accumulate, the professions we follow, the plans we form, the relations we enter into, they are only for a time. **"The things seen are temporal." "The fashion of this world passeth away."** (1 Cor. 7:31.)

The thought is one which ought to rouse every one who is living only for this world. If his conscience is not utterly seared, it should stir in him great searchings of heart. Oh, take care what you are doing! Awake to see things in their true light before it be too late. The things you live for now are all temporary and passing away. The pleasures, the amusements, the recreations, the merry-makings, the profits, the earthly callings, which now absorb all your heart and drink up all your mind, will soon be over. They are poor ephemeral things which cannot last. Oh, do not love them not too well; do not grasp them too tightly; do not make

them your idols! You cannot keep them, and you must leave them. Seek first the kingdom of God, and then everything else shall be added to you. **"Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth."** Oh, you that love the world, be wise in time! Never, never forget that it is written, **"The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."** (Col. 3:2; 1 John 2:17.)

The same thought ought to cheer and comfort every true Christian. Your trials, crosses, and conflicts are all temporary. They will soon have an end; and even now they are working for you **"a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."** (2 Cor. 4:17.) Take them patiently; bear them quietly; look upward, forward, onward, and far beyond them. Fight your daily fight under an abiding conviction that it is only for a little time, and that rest is not far off. Carry your daily cross with an abiding recollection that it is one of the "things seen" which are temporary. The cross shall soon be exchanged for a crown, and you shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

2. We are all going towards a world where everything is eternal.

That great unseen state of existence which lies behind the grave, *is forever*. Whether it be happy or miserable, whether it be a condition of joy or sorrow, in one respect it is utterly unlike this world—it

is forever. *There*, at any rate, will be no change and decay, no end, no good-bye, no mornings and evenings, no alteration, no annihilation. Whatever there is beyond the tomb, when the last trumpet has sounded, and the dead are raised, will be endless, everlasting, and eternal. "The things unseen are eternal."

We cannot fully realize this condition. The contrast between now and then, between this world and the next, is so enormously great that our feeble minds will not take it in. The consequences it entails are so tremendous, that they almost take away our breath, and we shrink from looking at them. But when the Bible speaks plainly we have no right to turn away from a subject, and with the Bible in our hands we shall do well to look at the "things which are eternal."

(a) Let us settle it, then, in our minds, for one thing, that the *future happiness* of those who are saved is eternal. However little we may understand it, it is something which will have no end—it will never cease, never grow old, never decay, never die. At God's **"right hand are pleasures for evermore."** (Ps. 16:11.) *Once landed in paradise, the saints of God shall go out no more.* Their inheritance is **"incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."** They **"shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."** (1 Pet. 1:4; 5:4.) Their warfare is accomplished; their fight is over; their work is done. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst

any more. They are traveling on towards an "eternal weight of glory," towards a home which shall never be broken up, a meeting without a parting, a family gathering without a separation, a day without night. Faith shall be swallowed up in sight, and hope in certainty. They shall see as they have been seen, and know as they have been known, and "be forever with the Lord." I do not wonder that the Apostle Paul adds, "**Comfort one another with these words.**" (1 Thess. 4:17, 18.)

(b) Let us settle it, for another thing, in our minds, that the *future misery* of those who are finally lost *is eternal*. This is a dreadful truth, I am aware, and flesh and blood naturally shrink from the contemplation of it. But I am one of those who believe it to be plainly revealed in Scripture, and I dare not keep it back in the pulpit. To my eyes eternal future happiness and eternal future misery appear to stand side by side. I fail to see how you can distinguish the duration of one from the duration of the other. If the joy of the believer is forever, *the sorrow of the unbeliever is also forever*. If Heaven is eternal, so likewise is hell. It may be my ignorance, but I know not how the conclusion can be avoided.

I cannot reconcile the non-eternity of punishment with the *language of the Bible*. Its advocates talk loudly about love and charity, and say that it does not harmonize with the merciful and compassionate character of God. But what says the Scripture? Who ever

spoke such loving and merciful words as our Lord Jesus Christ? Yet His are the lips which three times over describe the consequence of impenitence and sin, as "**their worm dieth not and the fire that is not quenched.**" He is the Person who speaks in one sentence of the wicked going away into "**everlasting punishment**" and the righteous into "**life eternal.**" (Mark 9:43-48; Matt. 25:46.) Who does not remember the Apostle Paul's words about charity? Yet he is the very Apostle who says, the wicked "**shall be punished with everlasting destruction.**" (2 Thess. 1:9.) Who does not know the spirit of love which runs through all John's Gospel and Epistles? Yet the beloved Apostle is the very writer in the New Testament who dwells most strongly, in the book of Revelation, on the reality and eternity of future woe. What shall we say to these things? Shall we be wise above that which is written? Shall we admit the dangerous principle that words in Scripture do not mean what they appear to mean? Is it not far better to lay our hands on our mouths and say, "Whatever God has written must be true." "**Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgements**" (Revelation 16:7)

I lay no claim to any 'special knowledge' of Scripture. I feel daily that I am no more infallible than the Pope of Rome. But I must speak according to the light which God has given to me; and I do not think I should do my duty

if I did not raise a warning voice on this subject, and try to put Christians on their guard. Six thousand years ago sin entered into the world by the devil's daring falsehood, "**Ye shall not surely die.**" (Gen. 3:4.) At the end of six thousand years the great enemy of mankind is still using his old weapon, and trying to persuade men that they may live and die in sin, and yet at some distant period may be finally saved. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. Let us walk steadily in the old paths. Let us hold fast the old truth, and *believe that as the happiness of the saved is eternal, so also is the misery of the lost.*

(a) Let us hold it fast in the *interest of the whole system of revealed religion.* What was the use of God's Son becoming incarnate, agonizing in Gethsemane, and dying on the cross to make atonement, if men can be finally saved without believing on Him? Where is the slightest proof that saving faith in Christ's blood can ever begin after death? Where is the need of the Holy Spirit, if sinners are at last to enter heaven without conversion and renewal of heart? Where can we find the smallest evidence that any one can be born again, and have a new heart, if he dies in an unregenerate state? If a man may escape eternal punishment at last, without faith in the blood of Christ or sanctification of the Spirit, sin is no longer an infinite evil, and there was no need for Christ making an atonement.

(b) Let us hold it fast *for the sake of holiness and morality.* I can imagine nothing so pleasant to flesh and blood as the specious theory that we may live in sin, and yet escape eternal perdition; and that although we "serve diverse lusts and pleasures" while we are here, we shall somehow or other all get to heaven hereafter! Only tell the young man who is "wasting his substance in riotous living," that there is heaven at last, or, at any rate, no eternal punishment, even for those who live and die in sin, and he is never likely to turn from evil. Why should he repent and take up the cross, if he can get to heaven at last, or escape punishment, without trouble?

(c) Finally, let us hold it fast, *for the sake of the common hopes of all God's saints.* Let us distinctly understand that every blow struck at the eternity of punishment is an equally heavy blow at the eternity of reward. It is impossible to separate the two things. No ingenious theological definition can divide them. They stand or fall together. The same language is used, the same figures of speech are employed, when the Bible speaks about either condition. Every attack on the duration of hell is also an attack on the duration of heaven. It is a deep and true saying, "With the sinner's fear our hope departs."

I turn from this part of my subject with a deep sense of its painfulness. I feel strongly with Robert M'Cheyne, that "*it is a hard subject to handle*

lovingly." But I turn from it with an equally deep conviction that if we believe the Bible we must never give up anything which it contains. From hard, austere, and unmerciful theology, good Lord, deliver us! If men are not saved, it is because they "will not come to Christ." (John 5:40.) But we must not be wise above that which is written. No morbid love of liberality, so called, must induce us to reject anything which God has revealed about eternity. Men sometimes talk exclusively about God's mercy and love and compassion, as if He had no other attributes, and leave out of sight entirely *His holiness* and His purity, His justice and His unchangeableness, and *His hatred of sin*. Let us beware of falling into this delusion. It is a growing evil in these latter days.

Low and inadequate views of the unutterable vileness and filthiness of sin, and of the unutterable purity of the eternal God, are prolific sources of error about man's future state. Let us think of the mighty Being with whom we have to do, as He Himself declared His character to Moses, saying, "**The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, patience and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin.**" But let us not forget the solemn clause which concludes the sentence, "**And that will by no means clear the guilty.**" (Exod.34:6,7.) *Unrepented sin is an eternal evil, and can never cease to be sin;* and He with whom we have to

do is an eternal God.

The words of Psalm 145 are strikingly beautiful—"The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all—and His tender mercies are over all His works. ... The LORD upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down. ... The LORD is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works. The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. The LORD preserveth all them that love Him." Nothing can exceed the mercifulness of this language! But what a striking fact it is that the passage goes on to add the following solemn conclusion, "**But all the wicked will He destroy.**" (Psalm 145:8-20.)

3. *Our state in the unseen world of eternity depends entirely on what we are in time.*

The life that we live upon earth is short at the very best, and soon gone. "**We spend our years as a tale that is told.**" "**What is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away**" (Psa.90:9; James 4:14). The life that is before us when we leave this world is an endless eternity, a sea without a bottom, and an ocean without a shore. "**One day in Thy sight,**" eternal God, "**is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.**" (2Pet. 3:8.) In that world time shall be no more. But short as our life is here, and endless as it will be hereafter, it is a tremendous thought that eternity hinges upon time. Our lot after death depends, humanly

speaking, on what we are while we are alive. It is written, God will **"Render to every man according to his deeds. To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath"** —Romans 2:6-8.

We ought never to forget that we are all, while we live, in a state of probation. We are constantly sowing seeds which will spring up and bear fruit, every day and hour in our lives. *There are eternal consequences resulting from all our thoughts and words and actions, of which we take far too little account.* **"That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."** (Matt. 12:36.) Our thoughts are all numbered, our actions are weighed. No wonder that Paul says, **"He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."** (Gal. 6:8.) In a word, what we sow in life we shall reap after death, and reap to all eternity.

There is no greater delusion than the common idea that it is possible to live wickedly, and yet rise again gloriously; to be without religion in this world, and yet to be a saint in the next. When the famous Whitefield revived the doctrine of conversion last century, it is reported that one of his hearers came to him after a sermon and said—"It is all quite

true, sir. I hope I shall be converted and born again one day, but not until after I am dead." I fear there are many like him. I fear the false doctrine of the Romish purgatory has many secret friends! . . . However carelessly men may go on while they live, they secretly cling to the hope that they shall be found among the saints when they die. They seem to hug the idea that there is some cleansing, purifying effect produced by death, and that, whatever they may be in this life, they shall be found "fit for the inheritance of the saints" in the life to come. *But it is all a delusion.*

"Life is the time
to serve the Lord,
The time to insure
the great reward."

The Bible teaches plainly, that as we die, whether converted or unconverted, whether believers or unbelievers, whether godly or ungodly, so shall we rise again when the last trumpet sounds. *There is no repentance in the grave—there is no conversion after the last breath is drawn. Now is the time to believe on Christ, and to lay hold on eternal life. Now is the time to turn from darkness unto light, and to make our calling and election sure.* The night comes when no man can work. As the tree falls, there it will lie. *If we leave this world impenitent and unbelieving, we shall rise the same in the resurrection morning, and find it had been "good for us if we had never been born."* (Mk 14:21.)

I charge every reader of this paper to remember this, and to make a good use of time. Regard it as the stuff of which life is made, and never waste it or throw it away. Your hours and days and weeks and months and years have all something to say to an eternal condition beyond the grave. What you sow in life that now is, you are sure to reap in a life to come. As holy Baxter says, it is "now or never." Whatever we do in religion must be done now.

Remember this in your use of all the means of grace, from the least to the greatest. Never be careless about them. They are given to be your helps toward an eternal world, and not one of them ought to be thoughtlessly treated or lightly and irreverently handled. Your daily prayers and Bible-reading, your weekly behavior on the Lord's day, your manner of going through public worship—all, all these things are important. Use them all as one who remembers eternity.

Remember it, not least, whenever you are tempted to do evil. When sinners entice you, and say, "It is only a little one,"—when Satan whispers in your heart, "Never mind—where is the mighty harm? Everybody does so,"—then look beyond time to a world unseen, and place in the face of the temptation the thought of eternity. There is a grand saying recorded of the martyred Reformer, Bishop Hooper, when one urged him to recant before he was

burned, saying, "Life is sweet and death is bitter." "True," said the good bishop, "quite true! But *eternal* life is more sweet, and *eternal* death is more bitter."

4. *The Lord Jesus Christ is the great Friend to whom we must look for help, both for time and eternity.*

The purpose for which the eternal Son of God came into the world can never be declared too fully, or proclaimed too loudly. He came to give us hope and peace while we live among the **"things seen, which are temporary,"** and glory and blessedness when we go into the **"things unseen, which are eternal."** He came to **"bring life and immortality to light,"** and to **"deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage."** (2Tim. 1:10; Heb.2:15.) He saw our lost and bankrupt condition, and had compassion on us. And now, blessed be His name, a mortal man may pass through things temporal with comfort, and look forward to things eternal without fear.

These mighty privileges our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us at the cost of His own precious blood. He became our Substitute, and bore our sins in His own body on the cross, and then rose again for our justification. He suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God. He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we poor sinful creatures might have pardon and

justification while we live, and glory and blessedness when we die. (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:21.)

And all that our Lord Jesus Christ has purchased for us He offers freely to every one who will turn from his sins, come to Him, and believe. **"I am the light of the world:"** He says—**"he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."** **"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** **"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink."** **"Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."** And the terms are as simple as the offer is free—**"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."** **"Whoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life."** (John 8:12; Matt. 11:28; John 7:37; 6:37 Acts 16:31; John 3:16.)

He who has Christ, has life. He can look round him on the "temporary things," and see change and decay on every side without dismay. He has got treasure in heaven, which neither rust nor moth can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. He can look forward to the "things eternal," and feel calm and composed. His Savior has risen, and gone to prepare a place for him. When he leaves this world he shall have a crown of glory, and be forever with his Lord. He can look down even into the grave, as the wisest Greeks and Romans could never do, and say, **"O, death, where is thy sting? O, grave, where is thy victory?"** (1 Cor. 15:55.) Oh, eternity, where

are your terrors?

Let us all settle it firmly in our minds that the only way to pass through "things seen" with comfort, and look forward to "things unseen" without fear, is to have Christ for our Savior and Friend, to lay hold on Christ by faith, to become one with Christ and Christ in us, and while we live in the flesh to live the life of faith in the Son of God. (Gal. 2:20.) How vast is the difference between the state of him who has faith in Christ, and the state of him who has none! Blessed indeed is that man or woman who can say, with truth, "I trust in Jesus—I believe." When Beaufort lay upon his death-bed, our mighty poet, Shakespeare, describes King Henry as saying, "He dies, but gives no sign." When John Knox, the Scotch Reformer, was drawing to his end, and unable to speak, a faithful servant asked him to give some proof that the Gospel he had preached in life gave him comfort in death, by raising his hand. He heard; and raised his hand toward heaven three times, and then departed. Blessed, I say again, is he who believes! He alone is rich, independent, and beyond the reach of harm. If you and I have no comfort amid temporary things, and no hope for the things eternal, the fault is all our own. It is because we "will not come to Christ, that we may have life." (John 5:40.)

I leave the subject of eternity here, and pray that God may bless it to many souls.

You and I have looked each other in the face perhaps for the first time, and probably for the last time, in our lives. But when and where shall we meet again? Before we part, and perhaps forever, I offer a word of friendly exhortation. I offer to every one within these walls tonight some food for thought, and matter for self-examination.

(1) First of all, *how are you using your TIME?* Life is short and very uncertain. You never know what a day may bring forth. Business and pleasure, money-getting and money-spending, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage—all, all will soon be over and done with forever. And you, what are you doing for your immortal soul? Are you wasting time, or turning it to good account? Are you preparing to meet God?

(2) Secondly, *where shall you be in eternity?* It is coming, coming, coming very fast upon us. You are going, going, going very fast into it. But where will you be? . . . Among the lost or among the saved? Oh, rest not, rest not until your soul is insured! Make sure work—leave nothing un-

certain. It is a fearful thing to die unprepared, and fall into the hands of the living God.

(3) Thirdly, *would you be safe for time and eternity?* Then seek Christ, and believe in Him. Come to Him just as you are. Seek Him while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. There is still a throne of grace. It is not too late. Christ waits to be gracious—He invites you to come to Him. Before the door is shut and the judgment begins, repent, believe, and be saved.

(4) Lastly, *would you be happy?* Cling to Christ, and live the life of faith in Him. Abide in Him, and live near to Him. Follow Him with heart and soul and mind and strength, and seek to know Him better every day. So doing you shall have great peace while you pass through "temporary things," and in the midst of a dying world shall "never die." (John 11:26.) So doing, you shall be able to look forward to "things eternal" with unflinching confidence, and to feel and **"know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."** (2 Cor. 5:1.) Ω



"O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever." —1 Chron. 16:34



FLY FROM THE WRATH TO COME

Charles Haddon Spurgeon
(1834-1892)

“Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

Matthew 3:7.

“Who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” — Hebrews 6:18.

We will first consider the question of John the Baptist: **“When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”** I have no doubt that the Pharisees and Sadducees were very much surprised to hear John addressing them in that way; for men, who wish to win disciples, ordinarily adopt milder language than that, and choose more attractive themes, for they fear that they will drive their hearers from them if they are too personal, and speak too sharply. There is not much danger of that nowadays, for the current notion abroad now is that gospel ministers can sew with silk without using a sharp needle; and that, instead of piercing men with the sword of the Spirit, they should show them only the hilt of it; let them see the bright diamonds on the scabbard, but never let them feel the sharpness of the two-edged blade. They should always comfort, and console, and cheer, but never allude to

the terror of the Lord.

That appears to be the common interpretation of our commission; but John the Baptist was of quite another mind. There came to a him a Pharisee, a very religious man, one who observed all the details of external worship, and was very careful even about trifles, a firm believer in the resurrection, and in angels and spirits, and in all that was written in the Book of the law, and also in all the traditions of his fathers, a man who was overdone with external religiousness, a Ritualist of the first order, who felt that, if there was a righteous man in the world, he certainly was that one. He must have been greatly taken aback when John talked to him about the wrath of God, and plainly told him that that wrath was as much for him as for other people. Those phylacteries and the broad borders of his garment, of which he was so proud, would not screen him from the anger of God against injustice and transgression; but, just like any common sinner, he would

need to **"flee from the wrath to come."** I daresay that the Sadducee was equally taken aback by John's stern language. He, too, was a religious man, but he combined with his religion greater thoughtfulness than the Pharisee did;—at least, so he said. He did not believe in traditions, he was too large-minded to care about the little details and externals of religion. He observed the law of Moses, but he clung rather to the letter of it than to its spirit, and he did not accept all that was revealed, for he denied that there was such a thing as an angel or a spirit. He was a Broad Churchman, a man of liberal ideas, fully abreast of the age. He professed to be a Hebrew of the Hebrews; yet, at the same time, the yoke of religion rested very lightly upon his shoulders. Still, he was not irreligious; yet here is John the Baptist talking to him, as well as to the Pharisee, about **"the wrath to come."** They would both have liked to have a little argument with him, but he talked to them about fleeing from the wrath to come. They would both have been pleased to discuss with him some theological questions, and to bring up the differences between their two sects, just to hear how John would handle them, and to let them see which way he would lean. But he did not waste a moment over the matters in dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees; the one point he had to deal with was the one of which he would have spoken to a congregation of publicans and harlots, and he spoke of it in just the same way to these nominally religious people. They must **"flee from the wrath to come;"** or else, as surely as they were living men, that wrath would come upon them, and they would perish under it. So John just kept to that one topic; he laid the axe to the root of the trees as he warned these hypocritical professors to escape for their lives, else they would perish in the common destruction which will overwhelm all ungodly men. This was not the style of preaching that John's hearers liked; but John did not think of that. He did not come to say what men wished him to say, but to discharge the burden of the Lord, and to speak out plainly what was best for men's eternal and immortal interests. He spoke, therefore, first, concerning the wrath of God; and, next, he spoke concerning the way of escape from that wrath.

Those shall be our two topics also. First, *the tremendous peril: "the wrath to come;"* and, secondly, *the means of escape: "Flee from the wrath to come."*

I. First, dear friends, let us think of *THE TREMENDOUS PERIL* which overtakes all men who do not escape from it. That tremendous peril is *the wrath of God*. There is a wrath of God, which abides on every ungodly man. Whether men like that truth or not, it is written, **"God is angry with the wicked every day;"** and, also, **"he that believeth not is condemned already, because**

he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God;" and yet again, **"he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."**

But *this wrath is in abeyance for a time*; and, consequently, men do not think much either of the wrath that now is, or of "the wrath to come." It will not, however, always be in abeyance. The sluices of the great deep will be pulled up, and the awful torrents will come leaping forth, and will utterly overwhelm all who are exposed to their fury. This **"wrath to come"** will in part fall upon men at death, but more fully at the day of judgment, and it will continue to flow over them *for ever and ever*. This **"wrath to come"** is that of which John spake, and of which we will now think for a while.

I remark, first, that *this "wrath to come" is absolutely just and necessary*. If there be a God, He cannot let sin go unpunished. If He be really God, and the Judge of all the earth, He must have an utter abhorrence of all evil. It cannot be possible that He should think the same of the honest and the dishonest, of the chaste and the unchaste, of the sober and the drunken, of the truthful and the lying, of the gracious and the dissolute. Such a god as that would be one whom men might rightly despise; but the true God, if we understand aright what He is, must hold all sin in detestation. All evil must be utterly abhorrent to his pure and holy soul; and it is not only because He can do it, but be-

cause He must do it, that He will, one of these days, let loose the fury of His wrath against sin. As it is necessary, in the very nature of things, that there should be certain laws to govern His creation, so is it equally necessary, in the very nature of things, that sin should be punished, and that every transgression and disobedience should receive a just recompense of reward. This is the inevitable consequence of sin; there is nothing arbitrary about such a result. It is fixed, in the very nature of things, that **"for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment;"** and for every sinful action, they must appear before the bar of God. Do not think when we speak about the wrath of God, that we picture God to you as a tyrant. We do but tell you that this is only the nature of things, — that just as if you take poison, it will kill you; or if you indulge in drunkenness, or if you take almost any form of disease, it will bring pain and mischief to you, — so, sin must bring upon you the wrath of God, it cannot be otherwise. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of God's law can pass away till all be fulfilled, and one part of that law requires that He should punish all transgression, iniquity, and sin.

And if now, for a time, the full manifestation of that anger is delayed, I beseech you, men and brethren, do not therefore trifle with it. The longer God's arm is uplifted,

the more terrible will be the blow when at last He strikes. To sin against the patience and longsuffering of Almighty God, is to sin with a vengeance. You do, as it were, defiantly put your finger into the very eye of God when you know that He sees you sin, and yet you go on sinning because He does not immediately take vengeance upon you for all your evil works. It is in great love that He restrains His wrath, for He is **"slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy."** But as a torrent, that is dammed up for a while, gathers force and strength, and every hour in which it is kept back it gets to be more irresistible, so must it be with **"the wrath to come"** when at last it does come upon you. If it has waited for some of you for seventy, or sixty, or fifty, or even for twenty years, it will come as an overwhelming flood when at length it bursts the barriers which at present hold it back. Trifle not, therefore, with that longsuffering of God which may be blest to your salvation.

Nor is "the wrath to come" any the less sure because it is delayed. Because sentence is not at once given against an evil work, therefore men say, "We need not trouble ourselves. 'How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?' Behold, He winks at our iniquities; He counts them as mere trifles. No harm will come to us because of them." But, sirs, if you are prepared to cast away the Bible, I can understand a little that you should talk like

that; but if you really believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God, you know what the consequences of your sin must be. Concerning the wicked, it is written, **"If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death."** Even if you are so foolish as to cast away your Bibles, yet, unless you think yourselves to be mere dogs and cattle that shall rot back into the ground from whence you came, and be done with for ever, you must expect that there will be another state of existence in which right shall be vindicated and wrong shall be punished. It seems to lie upon the very conscience of man, in the unwritten code of intuitive knowledge, or of knowledge handed down from father to son, that there must come a time in which God will surely bring every secret thing to light, and visit with judgment the proud and the high-handed oppressor, and vindicate the rights of men and the rights of His own throne. It must be so; and if the wrath tarries for a while, it is none the less sure.

I feel quite staggered as I try to speak of this **"wrath to come"** because, *when it does come, it must be something very terrible because divinity enters into the essence of it.* The wrath of man is sometimes very terrible; but what must the wrath of God be? O sirs, I have tried, these many years, humbly yet earnestly to preach the love of God, and I

have never yet reached the height of that great argument, for His love is boundless; but so are all His attributes; and if you consider any one of them, you must say, **"It is high, I cannot attain unto it."** But the just indignation of God against sin must be commensurate with His absolute purity. That man, who trifles with right and wrong, and thinks that these are mere arbitrary terms, has no indignation when he sees wrong done; but God, who is infinitely pure and holy, cannot— it is not possible that He should— look upon sin without an awful abhorrence. "Oh!" says He, by the mouth of his servant Jeremiah, **"do not this abominable thing that I hate."** He is not indifferent to sin, but He hates it, and He pleads with men not to do it because it is so abominable and so hateful in His sight.

What will **"the wrath to come"** be? If God but touches a man, as it were, with only His little finger, the strongest must at once fail and fall, the mightiest can scarcely open his eyes, and the seal of death is speedily imprinted on his brow. But what will it be when the hand of God shall begin to plague the ungodly, when He shall pour out all the vials of His wrath upon them, and crush them with the bosses of His buckler? What will be their portion when He says, "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies"? Think, too, what must be the meaning of that terrible passage, — let me repeat it to you slowly and solemnly,—**"Now consider this,**

ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

Thus have I faithfully tried to set before you **"the wrath to come."** Now listen to me for a few minutes, and let me have your impartial judgments, while I still further speak upon this important theme. Who, think you, are the more honest men, — those who tell you plainly what the Scriptures say concerning this wrath of God, or those who smooth it over, or deny it altogether? I will not judge them; before the Judge of quick and dead let those appear who dare to be apologists for sin, and to diminish the dread thought of God's anger against it. But I might, without any breach of Christian charity, be permitted to suspect the honesty of those who use flattering words to please and deceive their hearers; but I could not suspect the honesty of those who preach an unpalatable truth which grieves themselves as much as it is distasteful to those who hear it.

Let me also ask you which style of preaching has the greater moral effect upon yourself? Will you be likely to go and sin after you have heard of God's anger against it, or will you more readily commit iniquity when you have it salved over, and you are told that it is but a little thing, of which God takes no account? I was in the cabin of a vessel, one day, with a brother-minister who was disputing with me upon the non-eternity of future punishment; and a friend came in, and

said, "What are you discussing down here? The scenery is beautiful, come up on deck, and admire it." So I said to him, "This is the question in dispute, whether the punishment of sin is eternal, or not." "Well," said he, "we cannot have any theological discussion just now;" but, turning to my opponent, he said, "Don't you go on deck, and talk to my sailors any of your rubbish. They are bad enough as they are; but if you tell them what I heard you say just now, they will swear and drink worse than ever." Then, turning to me, he said, "You may talk to the men as much as you like; you will do them good, and not harm by telling them that God will certainly punish their sin." Now, there is common sense in that argument of my friend; you know that there is. *That which is most likely to do good, and to repress sin, is most likely to be right; but that which gives me latitude to offend my conscience, leads me to suspect whether it could ever have come from God at all, and makes me seriously doubt whether it can be true.*

And what, sirs, will be the consequence if it should turn out that we are mistaken when we preach to you concerning the wrath of God? What losers will those of us be who have fled to Christ for refuge? But suppose it should turn out that we are right, where will you be who have despised the wrath of God? We have two strings to our bow; but, to my mind, you have none at all. I would not

like to lie down upon my death-bed in the hope that death would be an eternal sleep; that would be a miserable hope even if it could ever be fulfilled. I would not like to risk my destiny in the world to come upon the prospect of being annihilated because I was an unbeliever. It would be a wretched thing to hope for; but what if even that poor hope should fail me? Where should I be then? But I can go with confidence before my God, and say to him, "Be thy wrath what it may, — I know that it must be terrible to the last degree, — but be it what it may, I will not dare it; and even if it would not hurt me, yet I would not make thee angry, O God, by sinning against thee; and if there were no punishment for sin but the loss of thy love, if there were nothing but the loss of heaven, the loss of having failed to please thee, my God, I would count that loss to be tremendous and terrible. Let me be reconciled to thee, my Maker. Tell me how thou canst be just, and yet forgive the guilty. To thee I fly; oh, save me from the wrath to come!"

Thus have I set before you, as best I can, the tremendous peril.

II.

Now, in the second place, I want, just for a few minutes, to tell you about *THE MEANS OF ESCAPE*. John said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "**Who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?**"

By this question, he seemed to imply that *there is no way of deliverance from "the wrath*

to come" but by flight. Sinner, thou canst not endure the wrath of God. If thy ribs were granite, and thy nerves were brass, thou couldst not endure the wrath of the Almighty; nay, not even for a moment. If a man had the toothache, how dreadful it would seem to him to have to bear that pain for twelve months for certain, even if he knew that there would be an end to it then; but what must the anger of God be when He comes to deal with our entire manhood, and to punish our sin for ever and ever? We cannot bear it; we must flee from it. What does this mean?

It means, first, *immediate action*. Thou must escape, man. If thou remainest where thou now art, thou wilt certainly perish. Thou art in the City of Destruction which is to be overwhelmed with the fiery flood of **"the wrath to come."** Thou must be in earnest to escape from it ere judgment is executed upon the place, and all who are in it; thou must **"flee from the wrath to come."**

Fleeing means, not only immediate action, but *swift action*. He that flees for his life does not creep and crawl; he runs at his utmost speed, and he wishes that he could ride on the wings of the wind. No pace that he can reach is fast enough for him. Oh, if God the Holy Spirit will make you, whom I am now addressing, feel your imminent danger, you will want to fly to Christ with the swiftness of the lightning-flash; you will not be satisfied to linger as you are

even for another hour. What if that gallery should fall about your ears? What if God should smite the house while you are still in your sins? What if, in walking home, you should walk into your graves? What if your beds should become your tombs? It may be so with any one of you, so there is no time to linger or delay. Haste is the word for you; God sends it to you, and says, **"To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;"** **"behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."**

To flee means also to go *straight away at your object*. A man who flees for his life does not want any circuitous, round-about roads. He takes short cuts, he goes over hedge and ditch that he may get where he wants to be in the shortest possible space of time. So, straight away to Jesus is the only direction for you just now. Some people will recommend you to read books which I am certain you cannot understand, for no living soul can; or perhaps you may meet with persons who want to explain to you some wondrous mystery. Listen to them, if you like, at the day of judgment, when the great business of your salvation is over; but just now you have not any time for mysteries, you have no time for puzzlements, you have no time to be confused and confounded; the one thing you have to do is to go straight away to Jesus, straight away to Jesus. You are a sinner, and He is the only Saviour for sinners; so, trust Him, God help you to

trust him, and thus to find immediate salvation! It is a straight road to Christ. The plan of salvation is not a thing that is hard to be understood. **"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;"** and he shall never come into condemnation; for he has passed from death unto life. There is the gospel in a nutshell; lay hold of it, and live by it. You have not time for anything else, and you have no need of anything else; so flee, **"flee from the wrath to come."**

Notice how John the Baptist explained to those Pharisees and Sadducees the way in which they had to flee. He told them, first, that *they must repent*. There is no going to heaven by following the road to hell. *There is no finding pardon while continuing in sin*. Depend upon it, Mr. Drunkard, you will not be forgiven for your drunkenness if you still go on with your drinking. Let not the man who is unchaste imagine that he can go on with his sin and yet be forgiven. Let not the thief dream that there is any pardon for him unless he quits his evil course, and tries to make such restitution as he can to those whom he has wronged.

There must be repentance, then, and that repentance must be practical. Note how John put it: **"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,"**—evidences of true amendment of life. It is no use whining and crying, and going into the enquiry-rooms with a lie in your right hand, and then going home to swear and drink, or to break the Sab-

bath, and to live as you like, and all the while hoping to enter heaven. *No, sin and you must part, or else Christ and you can never keep company.* You remember that message that John Bunyan thought he heard when he was playing at tip-cat on the Sunday on the village green. He suddenly stood still with the stick in his hand, for he thought he heard a voice saying to him, "Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to heaven, or have thy sins, and go to hell?" That is the alternative which both the law and the gospel put before men. **"Flee from the wrath to come;"** but there is no fleeing from wrath except by repentance of sin, and by fruits meet for repentance, evidences of a real change of heart and life.

Then John went on to say to the Pharisees and Sadducees that they must *give up all the false hopes which they had cherished*: **"Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father."** Those Pharisees said, in deed, if not in word, "It really does not matter though we do act the hypocrite, for Abraham is our father;" and the Sadducees said, in effect, "Though we are unbelievers, it is of small consequence, for Abraham is our father." "No," answered John, "you must abandon all such false hopes as that." And if any of you, dear friends, have said, "We shall be all right, because we are regular church people;" or if you have said, "We are all right, for we are Baptists, we are Methodists, we are Presbyterians; our father and

mother, and our grandfather and grandmother were good Christian people." Ah, yes! and so may your great grandfather and great grandmother have been, but your pedigree will avail you nothing unless you personally quit your sins, and lay hold on Christ as your Saviour. Nor is there anything else upon which you can depend for salvation. Your baptism, your church-going, your chapel-going, your eating of the Lord's supper, your saying of collects, your family prayers, your giving of your guineas, everything of your own put together will all be less than nothing, and vanity, if you trust to it. You must flee away from all such false hopes as that, and get a better hope, even that of which my second text speaks: **"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."**

John the Baptist did not tell his hearers all this, for he did not come to preach the gospel to them. He came to preach the law, but he did sufficiently indicate where they must go, for he said to them, **"There standeth one among you, whom ye know not." "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."** It is to Him, even to Jesus, that you must flee; if you would be saved, you must be among those who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you. That is the real refuge for sinners, — the laying hold of Christ, the getting a faith-grip of Jesus as the

one atoning sacrifice, the looking to him with tearful but believing eye, and saying, "Jesus, Son of God, I trust in thee; I put myself into thy hands, and leave myself there, that thou mayest deliver me from **'the wrath to come.'**"

I pray you, brethren and sisters, wherever you are, you who think you are so good, *be anxious to get rid of all that fancied goodness of yours.* I beseech you, if you have any self-righteousness about you, to ask God to strip it off you at once, I should like you to feel as that man did, who had a forged bank note and some counterfeit coin in his possession. When the policeman came to his house, he was anxious not to have any of it near him; so, shake off your self-righteousness. You will be as surely damned by your righteousness, if you trust in it, as you will by your unrighteousness. Christ alone, the gift of the free grace of God, this is the gate of heaven; but all self-satisfaction, all boasting, all exaltation of yourself above your fellow-men, is mischievous and ruinous, and will surely be deadly to your spirit for ever.

How does Christ deliver us from **"the wrath to come"**? Why, *by putting himself into our place, and putting us into his place.* Oh, this blessed plan of salvation by substitution, — that Christ should take a poor, guilty sinner, and set him up there in the place of acceptance and joy at the right hand of God, and that, in order to be able to do so,

Christ should say, "Here comes the great flood of almighty wrath; I will stand just where it is coming, and let it flow over me." And you know that it did overflow Him till He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood, and more, till He cried aloud, "**My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**" and still more, till he cried, "**It is finished,**" and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.

"He bore, that you might never bear,
His Father's righteous ire;"

—and so, suffering in your stead, and putting you into the place of acceptance which He Himself so well deserves to occupy, He saves you from "**the wrath to come.**"

I used to think that, if I once told out this wondrous story of "free grace and dying love," everybody would believe it; but I have long since learned that **so hard is the heart of man, that he will sooner be damned than be saved by Christ.** Well, you must make your choice, sirs, you must make your choice for yourselves; only do me this one favour, when you have made your choice, do not blame me for having tried to persuade you to act more wisely than I fear your choice

will be. I sometimes tremble as I think of the account I have to give in concerning the many thousands who crowd this place to listen to my voice. What if my Master should say to me, at the last, "You flattered them; you tried to run with the times; you did not dare to preach to them the old-fashioned gospel, and to tell them of hell, and of judgment, and of atonement by blood"? No, my Master, thou wilt never be able to say that to me. With all my faults, and infirmities, and imperfections, I have sought to declare thy truth, so far as I knew it, to the sons of men. Therefore, my hearers, I shake my skirts free of your blood. If any one of you shall reject Christ, I will have nothing to do with your damnation. Be spiritual suicides if you will; but I will not be your soul-murderer, nor act like Saul wished his armour-bearer to do when he bade him thrust him through with the sword. I implore you to "**flee from the wrath to come.**" Escape by quitting your sins, and laying hold on Jesus; and do it this very moment, for you may never have another opportunity to do it. May the Lord, of His infinite mercy, grant you grace to trust in Jesus! Amen and Amen. Ω



"Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."—Psalm 30:4

THE FAKE AND FRAUD OF Christmas

By Charles Halff

The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy says in II Timothy 4:1-4: **"I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables."**

My friends, that time is here now when people are turning away their ears from the truth and have turned unto fables, that which is not true. I often wondered why the apostle Paul made the statement, **"Be instant in season and out of season"** but after careful study I believe I understand what he meant by **"in season and out of season."** "In season" is when the people like it and "out of season" is when they don't like it, and with many people the Word of God is out of season! It is not liked very much. Nevertheless the apostle Paul said, **"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season."** That is, give it to them when they like

it and when they don't. Preach the Word when they smile and when they frown. Therefore, I want to honestly and earnestly present the truth and nothing but the truth.

A great many people ask why do I continue to bother the doctrines of men. "Don't you know you can't stop preachers from preaching what they are preaching?" Well I can do like a man told his wife about a calf that was running away with him. He couldn't stop the calf, and his wife told him to turn him loose, but he said, "I may not stop him but I can slow him down." I mean to tell you that I am trying to preach the truth and call the people's attention to the mistakes preachers are making. Many honest souls are being misled and when these honest people learn the truth, they are going to demand of the preachers that they preach the Bible as it is written. We won't stop them but we will slow them down. You can do as a lady told me a few days ago. She said, "I realize I can't stop the church I am a member of from teaching false doctrine, but I can stop myself and come out of it and not take part in it." That is the way to do. If you can't stop them, you can stop yourself.

Does Christmas really celebrate the birthday of Jesus? Was He born on December 25th? Did Paul, the apostles, and the early Church of the New Testament celebrate Christmas? Do you know what the Bible says about the Christmas tree?

Christ Not Born In Winter

Stop and think! Very few know why we do the things we do— where our customs came from! We were born into a world filled with customs. We grew up practicing them, taking them for granted, but never questioning why!

Let me read from Luke 2:8, **"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night."** Now this one text alone is practically sufficient evidence that we might know that Christmas, or the birth of Christ, could not be December 25. This verse tells us that shepherds were in the field and their flocks were pasturing there the night of the birth of Christ. As the shepherds were watching their flocks, the message came to them of the birth of Jesus. Now it is a well known fact that December is the rainy season in Palestine and the sheep are kept in the fold at that time of year.

Jesus was not even born in the winter season! When the Christ child was born **"there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night"** (Luke 2:8). This never could have occurred in Palestine in the

month of December. The shepherds always corralled and brought their flocks from the mountain sides and fields not later than October 15, to protect them from the cold rainy season that followed that date.

Heathen Custom

But what about Christmas? The word "Christmas" means "Mass of Christ," or, as it later became shortened, "Christ-Mass." It came to us as a Roman Catholic mass. And where did they get it? From the Heathen celebration of December 25th, as the birthday of Sol the Sun-God! It is, actually, an ancient rite of Baalism, which the Bible condemns as the most abominable of all idolatrous worship!

It is not so much as mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. It was never observed by Paul, the apostles, nor the early true Christian church!

The idea Jesus was born December 25th is one of the fables the apostle Paul prophesied (II Tim. 4:4) would deceive the world in these latter days.

The plain truth is, Christmas is not Christ's birthday at all! And this festival, important as it seems to so many, is not of Christian, but of pagan—Babylonish—origin! But does that make any difference? Isn't it all right to go ahead and observe it anyway? Isn't the "Christmas spirit" a good and splendid thing, regardless of how it got started? We shall see! Any encyclopedia authority, will tell you that

Christ was not born on December 25. The Catholic Encyclopedia frankly states this fact.

With this I would like to read to you some facts taken from the Catholic encyclopedia on "Christmas:" "Christmas was not in the early church. Birthday observances were forbidden. Bible proof of the date contradicts December 25; reference to birth of Mithra—son of light." Then it goes on to compare the birth of Mithra with the birth of Christ and says that there is no proof for December 25 as the birth of Christ. Mithra is the pagan god of Persia. I wish that sometimes you would read this from the Catholic encyclopedia for yourself, since the Catholic Church has had a great deal to do with handing this down to us. You would see all the disagreements that had to be ironed out in changing this day from a heathen festival to a Christian holiday. The birth of Christ has been celebrated April 5, December 26, etc. In fact there are so many days that have been used at different times that one writer says that every month of the year has been used and proof offered to prove that that was the date of the birth of Christ.

I'd like to read from "Anniversaries and Holidays" by Hazeltine. p. 162—"Christmas, originally Christes Masse' . . . The date of Christ's birth is not known. in the 4th century Pope Julius established December 25 . . . The selection of that day was due largely to the fact it coincided with that

of the greatest pagan festivals which celebrated the winter solstice—the birthday of the new sun about to return to the earth."

Origin Of Christmas

Now regarding the origin of Christmas. They chose to set apart December 25 as the holiday commemorating the birth of Christ. As I go into this and think of the various stories connected with this, and some of them conflicting stories, I am reminded again that every good gift that God has had for His people, Satan has always had a substitute all prepared to try to keep men from accepting what God would offer them.

Now let us go back into history, prior to the birth of Christ. We go to the history of the city of Ninevah—part is history and part is tradition, but history bears out the fact that the founder of Nineveh was a great ruler and his wife, Semiramis actually overshadowed him in power and rulership. After his death she took over the rulership, and her conquests were greater than his. If you look up her name in the encyclopedia you get a great deal of interesting information about her. She was a great historical character, but much about her life is mythical. She was a great leader when it came to establishing things and putting up highways over the mountains and doing things for her people, so that she attracted a great following and had the respect of the people.

After her husband had been dead for some time there was born to her a son. She claimed that her husband had become the sun god and that his spirit had come back and shadowed her hence the miraculous birth of Tammuz or Adonis, her son. Adonis was the Egyptian (Canaanite) name for Tammuz. This story was taken up by her followers and broadcast throughout the land that this son, Tammuz was a supernatural son of his father, who was now the sun god. Now his birth was reputed to have come about December 24. Some said December 23, some December 22, and some December 25, and some December 24. But it was at that time of year commonly called the winter solstice.

Now this boy, according to the popular belief of that time, was the son of the sun god and had a miraculous birth. Then add to that the fact that this was the time of the year when the days became longer and you can see the whole story. Remember also that Baal worship—the worship of the sun—existed at that time. The sun was god.

I want you to see, friends, in all this the counterfeit in advance of the virgin birth of Christ. I want you to see how Satan had anticipated the birth of Jesus. Satan himself planned all this doctrine so that when Jesus actually did come according to the prophecy of Isaiah, immediately individuals would be tempted to discount it and say, "Oh, yes, it is just the same doctrine and the same story as that of

Semiramis and Tammuz." And so Satan had it all planned. He had a heathenish doctrine all worked out, and then when Christ came to earth with a truly miraculous birth, it would bear little weight and be called another deception. So Satan had it all planned.

Scripture Silent

There is not one word in the New Testament, or anywhere in the Bible, telling us to observe Christmas. The Christians of the first century, under the inspired teachings of Peter, and Paul, and the apostles, never observed it. There is no Bible authority for its observance, strange as it may seem.

I would like to read again from the Catholic Encyclopedia, under the caption CHRIST-MAS "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church . . . the first evidence of the feast is from Egypt . . . Pagan customs, centering around the January calends, gravitated to Christmas." And, further, we find this truth acknowledged: "In the Scripture, sinners alone, not saints, celebrate their birthday."

Encyclopedia Britannica has this: "Christmas (i.e., the Mass of Christ). Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church." It was not instituted by Christ or the apostles, or by Bible authority—it was picked up afterward from paganism.

The Encyclopedia Americana says: "Christmas. It was, according to many authorities, not celebrated in the first

centuries of the Christian church, as the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons, rather than their birth" (The Lord's Supper," which is instituted by New Testament Bible authority, is a memorial of the Death of Christ.) "A feast was established in memory of this event (Christ's birth) in the fourth century. In the fifth century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed."

Now notice! These recognized historic authorities show Christmas was not observed by Christians for the first two or three hundred years—a period longer than the entire history of the United States as a nation! It got into the Western, or Roman church, by the Fourth Century A. D. It was not until the Fifth Century the Roman church ordered it to be celebrated as an official "Christian" festival!

Heathen Relics

There are a great many things that come in connection with the celebration of Christmas. For instance the Christmas tree and the decorations. This text in Jer. 10:2-4 is interesting in this connection and I would like to read it here: **"Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen. and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain; for one**

cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not." This sounds like the decorating of a Christmas tree, doesn't it? What does history tell us is the origin of the Christmas tree and its decorations? Let me read from the "World Book" on Christmas: "The giving of presents, the use of holly, mistletoe, Yule logs have all descended from the days of Paganism . . . When the pagans of northern Europe became Christians they made their sacred evergreen trees a part of the Christian festival and decorated the trees with gilt, nuts and apples in admiration of the stars." Another writer makes the statement that these various worshippers worshipped the stars and planets and they colored these decorations on the trees to typify the planets and the stars and then hung them on the tree, representing the planets' motion around the sun. The text in Jeremiah brought out the same idea — be not dismayed at the signs of the heavens, the planets and the stars, for the heathen are dismayed at them. They couldn't understand them as they worshipped them.

The custom of having the tree came in because so many of those old religions honored the tree in their worship. In Egypt the palm tree was honored and signified the year because it was supposed to develop one new leaf each

month. When the tradition of Christmas came in amongst the Anglo-Saxons they transferred the sanctity to the fir and the evergreen trees, pointing heavenward and because it never dies.

There is something also that we should consider about mistletoe, because it is used in connection with the Christmas season. In the old Anglo-Saxon time they made their way into the woods and would cut off some of the mistletoe, and it was brought back with a great deal of solemnity and was supposed to protect those who took any of it and it would bring great happiness to them. The use of holly came in also. This also has a heathen origin in the sense that it was called the holy plant and then later called the holly plant. The little fruit was added because at that time the plant did not have the little red fruit, and the worshippers tried to add to its beauty by the adding of red berries. It seems that the whole intent of tree and floral decorations dates back to the use of trees in connection with the worship of their pagan gods. Over and over the Bible refers to Israel going into idolatry and worshipping in the groves, and when a reform was brought in, these groves were ordered cut down. The Anglo-Saxon worshipped Saturn, and their worship was carried on underneath the trees. They would build up a great booth and there would worship the god of Saturn. So the tree found its way into the English and German celebration in honor

of Christmas.

Santa Claus

Now what about Santa Claus? How did that come about? It is something that we have always talked about, but where did it come from? This statement is taken from *Holidays and their Customs*, p. 453 (By Eichler)—"Santa Claus coming down the chimney seems to come from the English custom of sweeping the chimney clean each New Year." There is something else that I should bring in here and that is that New Year and Christmas are identical in their origin. It was a custom, as a matter of good luck, to sweep out the chimney and Santa Claus came down the chimney.

And so there we have the history of Santa Claus. There is a great deal in old writings regarding St. Nicholas. He was always surprising people and giving good gifts to them. There is one story that is told, just for an example I give it here, of three virgins who were unable to get married. They were orphans and therefore they had no dowry money. So St. Nicholas heard about this and one time as they were in their room mourning about this, he came flying along and threw in three bags of money and they were married and lived happily ever after.

Traditions vs. Scripture

The real origin of Christmas goes back to the ancient Babylon. It is bound up in the organized apostasy with which

Satan has gripped a deceived world these many centuries! In Egypt, it has always been believed the son of Isis (Egyptian name for "Queen of Heaven") was born December 25th. Paganism celebrated this famous birthday over most of the known world for centuries before the birth of Christ.

December 25th is not the birthday of Jesus, the true Christ! The apostles and the early true church never celebrated Christ's birthday at any time. There is no command or instruction to celebrate it in the Bible—rather, the celebrating of birthdays is a heathen, not a Christian custom, believe it or not!

The Bible condemns the observance of days, months, and seasons. **"Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain."**—Gal. 4:10.11:

An Abomination To God

Christmas is boosted by the commercial world. It is the greatest money-making season of the year. Professed Christian business men look forward to the Christmas season, not for the sake of Christ, but for the sake of financial gain.

Quoting from the press of November, 1952, "Americans are going on the biggest buying spree in history this Christmas season, surveys throughout the nation reveal. Storekeepers, the land over are looking forward to the greatest Yuletide business

they ever had."

Christmas is an abomination in the sight of the Lord.

"And he (Jesus) said unto them (the Pharisees), Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."—Luke 16:15. This latter

statement is true regardless of who is being addressed.

Just what did Christ name in this verse as being "abomination?" "That which" means,

"Anything which." Then anything which men highly esteem is abomination. Men esteem Christmas more highly

than almost anything else. It is the only thing requiring a two-week holiday in schools

over the nation. Business houses that never close any other time of the year close

for Christmas. It is the only time of the year that some people will give a gift; the only

time some people get drunk; the only time many firms will give employees a

bonus. Many large stores have a "Christmas Saving Fund" for customers. Immediately after Christmas, customers begin depositing money

into these saving accounts, to assure them, not of grocery or doctor bills, but to assure

them of spending money for the next Christmas. Preparations are made further in

advance for Christmas than for any other large event.

Christmas is so highly esteemed among men that according to the press of

November 13, 1948, "Last December retail sales reached a

staggering total of \$12,641,000,000," and "they expect sales to reach about \$14,000,000,000 this December.

Since Christmas is so highly esteemed among men, it is definitely included in the abomination spoken of by Christ.

Flesh Gratifying

Christmas time is a time of great reveling and the gratifying of the flesh. We are told in Rom. 13:14, "**Make not provision for the flesh,**" yet much provision is made for the flesh in the Christmas season. "**And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.**"—Gal. 5:24. Peter said, "**Abstain from fleshly lusts.**"—I Peter 2:11. "**Abstain from all appearance of evil.**"—1 Thess. 5:22.

The question may be asked, "But what harm is there in telling the children of Santa Claus, or in having a tree for them?" Soberly and honestly consider: "Santa Claus," a mere myth, a fable having its origin in Roman Catholicism, that wicked, idolatrous system, be owned of God? Or is it unquestionably a thing of the religious and secular world? If it is (as no honest Christian can deny), how then can you, a blood-washed child of the living God, dare to associate the birth of His beloved Son with an idol of Catholicism and a god of this world? Oh, consider it well, and may the Spirit of God anoint your eyes with eye-

salve that you may see the monstrous sin of it.

Do You Lie To Your Children?

Through the year, parents punish their children for telling falsehoods. Then, at Christmas time, they themselves tell their little children this "Santa Claus" lie! Is it any wonder many of them, when they grow up and learn the truth, begin to believe God is a myth, too?

Some will argue for the "keeping" of Christmas" on the ground of "giving the kiddies a good time." But why do this under the cloak of honoring the Saviour's birth? Why is it necessary to drag in His holy name in connection with what takes place at that season of carnal jollification? Is this taking the little ones with you out of Egypt (Ex. 10:9,10) a type of the world, or is it not plainly a mingling with the present-day Egyptians in their "pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25)? Scripture says, "**Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.**"—Prov. 22:6.: Scripture does command God's people to bring up their children "**in the nurture and admonition of the Lord**" (Eph. 6:4), but where does it stipulate that it is our duty to give the little ones a "good time?" Do we ever give the children a "good time" when we engage in anything upon which we cannot fittingly ask the Lord's blessing?

Xmas Cards, An Abomination

What about sending out "Christmas cards" with a text of Scripture on them? That also is an abomination in the sight of God. Why? Because His Word expressly forbids all unholy mixtures; Deut. 22:10, 11 typified this. What do we mean by an "unholy mixture?" This: the linking together of the pure Word of God with the Romanish "Christ-mass." By all means send cards (preferably at some other time of the year) to your ungodly friends, and Christians too, with a verse of Scripture, but not with "Christmas" on it. What would you think of a printed program of a vaudeville having Isa. 53:5 at the foot of it? Why, that would be altogether out of place, highly incongruous. But in the sight of God the circus and the theatre are far less obnoxious than the "Christmas celebration" of Romish and Protestant "churches." Why? Because the latter are done under the cover of the holy name of Christ; the former are not.

Merry Making And Gifts

But when it comes to the most important part of all, in this Christmas observance, the Christmas shopping season—the buying and exchanging of gifts — many will exclaim triumphantly, "Well, at least the Bible tells us to do that! Didn't the wise men give gifts, when Christ was born?"

The wise men gave their gifts to Jesus; not to one an-

other, and even this did not happen on the birthday of Jesus. So there is no connection between Christmas and the birthday of Jesus in this respect.

But what are we to do? If we fail to send out gifts, our friends will think hard of us, probably deem us stingy and miserly. The honest course is to go to the trouble of notifying them—by letter if at a distance—that from now on you do not propose to send out any more "Christmas gifts" as such. Give your reasons. State plainly that you have been brought to see that "Christmas merry-making" is entirely a thing of the world, devoid of any Scriptural warrant; that it is a Romish institution, and that now you see this, you dare no longer have any fellowship with it (Eph. 5:11); that you are now the Lord's "free man" (I Cor. 7:22), and therefore you refuse to be in bondage to a costly custom imposed by the world.

Let us as born again Christians use our money this season of the year, not for foolish and unnecessary presents, but to spread the Gospel message to a lost and dying world.

Oh, Christian, I beseech you, turn from the world and its holy days, touch not the unclean thing; associate not the birth of the Holy Son of God with the fables of the world and apostate Christendom. Hear His pleading voice, **"Be ye separate, O my people."** Ω

From *The Baptist Examiner*
December 18, 1954



STUMBLING IN THE DARKNESS

By Pastor Wm. Troy Sheppard
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“The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.” (Proverbs 4:19)

Wicked, careless, ignorant men live in darkness concerning God’s truth and His wisdom. Their lives become more and more dysfunctional each passing day as they keep hurting themselves and others with what they cannot see, though it is right before their eyes.

What a contrast between the wicked man’s life of Proverbs 4:19 and the just man’s life of Proverbs 4:18. The just man is like the sunshine which increases until the full light of day shines forth. As he learns and applies God’s truth and wisdom, God gives him more understanding in the same way a sunrise chases away darkness and eventually brings full and clear daylight. But the wicked cannot see, for they walk in darkness. They do not know why they trip and fall, for they cannot see the errors in their *own* thinking and doing. They often blame shift or make other excuses to ease their conscience. Their conceit is a great curse, for there is more hope of a fool than a man who “thinks” he is right (Prov. 26:12). They hurry on in sin, until suddenly it surprises them with agonizing results (Psa. 36:1-2; 50:21,22). Consider this truth well! The fornicator thinks he has found great pleasure and someone who really understands him, until he wakes up lonely, broke, and used (Prov. 5:3-5; Prov. 7:21-27; II Pet. 2:14; Heb. 13:4). The man who has “just a little fun” with a lot of sinning doesn’t know why His reputation stinks (Ecc. 10:1). The hypocrite loves religion, worship, and talking about God, but doesn’t understand why God leaves him in despair (Job 8:13-15; 20:5-7). The lazy fool indulges himself by sleeping in, but he is frustrated he cannot afford anything (Prov. 21:25). The pleasure lover living above his means doesn’t understand why he is poor and in debt (Prov. 21:17). The drunkard wants just “one more for the road”, but just can’t understand how he ended up in the Hospital (Prov. 23:29-35). The covetous woman waists hours on Facebook every day, but can figure out why she is depressed and bitter (Heb. 13:5). The carnal man fritters his days away

watching YouTube and playing video games but just doesn't have time to fix his leaky roof, his broken marriage, or his wayward children (Eph.5:15-17). If faced with any of this folly, each one will have their "reasons" (Prov.26:12; 12:15). Are you stumbling? Are you often in a fix, but you keep saying it is someone else's fault? Are you hurt, but don't know why? Listen up! *You are in the dark!* Get out before you fall again! There is light in Scripture! Listen! Hear! Consider! **"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"** (Psa. 119:105). **"The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes"** (Psa.19:8). **"For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life"** (Prov. 6:23). Quit slighting God's *plain* commandments! Quit making excuses! Repent and turn to Jesus Christ, He is the light of the world! Humbly turn to Him, trust Him, forsake your ways, follow Him, and He will give you light (John 8:12; Eph. 5:14). **Ω**

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High."—Psalm 92:1



"Giving of thanks is more noble and perfect in itself than petition; because in petition often our own good is eyed and regarded, but in giving of thanks only God's honour. The Lord Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Now a subordinate end of petition is to receive some good from God, but the sole end of thanks is to give glory unto God."

William Ames (1576-1633)
From Treasury of David- Vol. 2