

J. C. Ryle Tracts

These tracts are classics of Gospel Truth that readers of J. C. Ryle have come to expect from all his writings. His tracts are "pure gold." Many of these tracts, not published since the 19th Century, have come into my possession, and I offer you some of these inspiring works exactly word for word as they were first published by Drummond's Tract Depot, Stirling, Scotland.

HOW DO YOU DO?

"Let us go again and visit our brethren, . . . and see how they do."
—ACTS xv. 36.

THE question, which forms the title of this paper, is one of the commonest questions that Englishmen ever ask. Millions of people, I doubt not, have said to one another this very day, "How do you do?"

The question in most cases is asked formally, and answered hastily. It is a mere civil form of speech, which means little, and goes for little. Yet, there is a sense in which the question is one of vast importance. That sense is the spiritual sense:—"How do you do in the matter of your soul?"—This is what St. Paul meant when he said to Barnabas, in the Acts of the Apostles, "Let us go again and visit our brethren, . . . *and see how they do.*"—That is what I meant when I wrote the title of this tract. I want, as a friend, to make a friendly inquiry about your soul. I ask in Christ's name, this day,—“How are you in spiritual things? Is your soul in health? Does it prosper? (3 John 2). How do you do?”—Give me your attention for a few minutes, and I will try to show you that the question is not to be despised. Listen to me, and I will show you reasons why it is good to have the inquiry pressed home on your attention,—“How do you do about your soul?"

We live in an age of peculiar *spiritual privileges*. Since the world began, there never was such an opportunity for a man's soul to be saved as there is in England at this time. There never were so many signs of religion in the land, so many sermons preached, so many services held in churches and chapels, so many Bibles sold, so many religious books and tracts printed, so many societies for evangelising mankind supported, so much outward respect paid to Christianity.

Things are done everywhere now-a-days which a hundred years ago would have been thought impossible. Bishops support the boldest and most aggressive efforts to reach the unconverted. Some of them are not ashamed to preach in warehouses and railway stations, and speak openly of the necessity of conversion. Deans and Chapters throw open the naves of cathedrals for Sunday evening sermons, and even York Minster admits a revival preacher! Clergy of the narrowest High Church Schools advocate special missions, and vie with their Evangelical brethren in proclaiming that going to church on Sunday is not enough to take a man to heaven.

An American lay preacher comes over to our country and carries the attention of myriads by storm. Armed with nothing but his Bible, and the simplest elements of the Gospel, without any special gifts of eloquent language, like Whitefield, Guthrie, Chalmers, or M'Neile, he gathers masses of people to hear him at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast, Dublin, Liverpool, Sheffield, Man-

chester, Birmingham, such as were never known to come together before. He comes up to London at last, and excites the attention of such multitudes that even the daily press is taken by surprise. The scenes under his preaching at Islington and the Opera House, were scenes that no one anticipated, and no one seems able to explain.

In short, there is a stir about religion now-a-days to which there has been nothing like since England was a nation, and which the cleverest sceptics and infidels cannot deny. If Romaine, and Venn, and Berridge, and Rowlands, and Grimshaw, and Hervey, had been told that such things would come to pass about a century after their deaths, they would have been tempted to say, with the Samaritan nobleman,—“If the Lord should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be” (2 Kings vii. 19). But the Lord has opened the windows of heaven. There is more taught now-a-days in England of the real Gospel and of the way of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ in one week, than there was in a year in Romaine’s time. Surely, I have a right to say that we live in an age of spiritual privileges. But, reader, are you any better for it? In an age like this, it is well to ask, “How do you do about your soul?”

We live in an age of peculiar *spiritual danger*. Never, perhaps since the world began, was there such an immense amount of mere outward profession of religion as there is in the present day. A painfully large proportion of all the congregations in the land consists of unconverted people, who know nothing of heart-religion, never come to the Lord’s Table, and never confess Christ in their daily lives. Myriads of those who are always running after preachers, and crowding to hear special sermons, are nothing better than empty tubs, tinkling cymbals, the stony-ground hearers, without a jot of real vital Christianity at home.

The parable of the sower is continually receiving most vivid and painful illustrations. The wayside hearts, the stony-ground hearts, the thorny-ground hearts abound on every side. The religious life of many, I fear, in this age, is nothing better than a continual course of spiritual dram-drinking. They are always morbidly craving fresh excitement; and they seem to care little what it is if they only get it.

Worst of all, there are hundreds of young unestablished believers who are so infected with the same love of excitement, that they actually think it a duty to be always seeking it. Insensibly almost to themselves, they take up a kind of hysterical, sensational, sentimental Christianity, until they are never content with the “old paths,” and, like the Athenians, are always running after something new. To see a calm-minded young believer, not stuck up, not self-confident, not self-conceited, and not more ready to teach than learn, but content with a daily steady effort to grow up into Christ’s likeness, and to do Christ’s work quietly and unostentatiously, at home, is really becoming quite a rarity.

Too many young professors, alas, behave like young recruits who have not spent all their bounty money. They show how little deep root they have, and how little knowledge of their own hearts, by noise, forwardness, demonstrativeness, readiness to contradict and set down old Christians, and overweening trust in their own fancied soundness and wisdom! Surely in times like these there is great need for self-examination.

Reader, when you look around you, you will not wonder that I ask, “How do you do about your soul?”

In handling this question, I think the shortest plan will be to suggest a list of subjects for self-inquiry and to go through them in order. By so doing I shall hope to meet the case of every one into whose hands this paper may fall. Reader, give me your attention for a few short minutes. I approach you not as an enemy, but as a friend. My heart's desire and prayer to God is that you may be saved. (Rom. x. 1). Bear with me if I say things which at first sight look harsh and severe. Believe me, he is your best friend who tells you the most truth.

(1) Let me ask, in the first place, *Do you ever think about your soul at all?* Thousands of English people, I fear, cannot answer that question satisfactorily. They never give the subject of religion any place in their thoughts. From the beginning of the year to the end they are absorbed in the pursuit of business, pleasure, politics, money, or self-indulgence of some kind or another. Death, and judgment, and eternity, and heaven, and hell, and a world to come, are never calmly looked at and considered. They just live on as if they were never going to die, or rise again, or stand at the bar of God, or receive an eternal sentence! They do not openly oppose religion, for they have not sufficient reflection about it to do so;—but they eat, and drink, and sleep, and get money, and spend money, as if religion was a mere fiction and not a reality. They are neither Romanists, nor Socinians, nor infidels, nor High Church, nor Low Church, nor Broad Church. They are just *nothing at all*, and do not take the trouble to have opinions.

A more senseless and unreasonable life cannot be conceived; but they do not pretend to reason about it. They simply never think about God, unless frightened for a few minutes by sickness, death in their families, or an accident. Barring such interruptions, they appear to ignore religion altogether, and hold on their way cool and undisturbed as if there were nothing worth thinking of except this world. It is hard to imagine a life more unworthy of an immortal creature, for it reduces a man to the level of a beast. But it is literally and truly the life of multitudes in England; and as they pass away, their place is taken by multitudes like them. The picture, no doubt, is horrible, distressing and revolting: but, unhappily, it is only too true.

In every large town, in every market, on every stock exchange, in every club, you may see specimens of this class by scores,—men who think of everything under the sun except the one thing needful,—the salvation of their souls. Like them of old, they do not “consider their ways,” they do not “consider their latter end;” they do not “consider that they do evil.” (Isaiah i. 3; Hag. i. 7; Deut. xxxii. 29; Eccles. v. 1). Like Gallio they “care for none of these things: they are not in their way. (Acts xviii. 17). If they prosper in the world, get rich, and succeed in their line of life, they are praised, and admired by their contemporaries. Nothing succeeds in England like success! But for all this, they cannot live forever. They will have to die and appear before the bar of God, and be judged; and then what will the end be?

Reader, when a large class of this kind exists in our country, you will not wonder that I ask you whether you belong to it. If you do, you ought to have a mark set on your door, as there used to be a mark on a plague-stricken house two centuries ago, and the words, “Lord have mercy on us,” written on it. Look at the class I have been describing, and then look at the title of this tract,—“How do you do about your soul?”

(2) Let me ask, in the second place, *whether you ever do anything about*

your soul? There are multitudes in England who think occasionally about religion, but unhappily never get beyond thinking. After a stirring sermon,—or after a funeral,—or under the pressure of illness,—or on Sunday evening,—or when things are going on badly in their families,—or when they meet some bright example of a Christian,—or when they fall in with some striking religious book or tract,—they will at the time think a good deal, and even talk a little about religion in a vague way.

But they stop short, as if thinking and talking were enough to save them. They are always meaning, and intending, and purposing, and resolving, and wishing, and telling us that they know what is right, and hope to be found right at last, but they never attain to any *action*. There is no actual separation from the service of the world and sin, no real taking up the cross and following Christ, no positive *doing* in their Christianity. Their life is spent in playing the part of the son in our Lord's parable, to whom the father said, "Go, work to-day in my vineyard . . . and he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not" (Matt. xxi. 28).

They are like those whom Ezekiel describes, who liked his preaching, but never practised what he preached:—"They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them. . . And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not" (Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32).

Reader, in a day like this, when hearing and thinking, without *doing*, is so common, you cannot wonder that I press upon you the absolute need of self-examination. Once more, then, I ask you to consider the question of my text,—“How do you do about your soul?”

(3) Let me ask you, in the third place, *whether you are trying to satisfy your conscience with a mere formal religion?* There are myriads in England at this moment, who are making shipwreck on this rock. Like the Pharisees of old, they make much ado about the outward part of Christianity, while the inward and spiritual part is totally unknown. They are careful to attend all the services of their church or chapel, and regular in using all its forms and ordinances. They are never absent from Communion when the Lord's Supper is administered. Sometimes they are most strict in observing Lent, and attach great importance to saints' days. They are often keen partisans of their own Church, or sect, or congregation, and ready to contend with any one who does not agree with them.

Yet, all this time there is no *heart* in their religion. Any one who knows them intimately can see with half an eye that their affections are set on things below, and not on things above; and that they are trying to make up for the want of inward Christianity, by an excessive quantity of outward form. And this formal religion does them no real good. They are not satisfied. Beginning at the wrong end, by making the outward things first, they know nothing of inward joy and peace, and pass their lives in a constant struggle, secretly conscious that there is something wrong, and yet not knowing why. Well if they do not go on from one stage of formality to another, until in despair they take a fatal plunge, and fall into Popery!

Reader, when professing Christians of this kind are so painfully numerous, you cannot wonder if I press upon you the paramount importance of close self-examination. If you love life, do not be content with the husk and shell and

scaffolding of religion. Remember our Saviour's words about the Jewish formalists of His day: "This people draweth nigh with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship" (Matt. xv. 8, 9). It needs something more than going diligently to Church, and receiving the Lord's Supper, to take our souls to heaven. Means of grace and forms of religion are useful in their way, and God seldom does anything for His Church without them. But beware of making shipwreck on the very lighthouse which helps to show the channel into the harbour. Once more, I ask, "How do you do about your soul?"

(4) Let me ask, in the fourth place, *whether you have received the forgiveness of your sins?* Few reasonable Englishmen would think of denying that they are sinners. Many would probably say that they are not so bad as many, and that they have not been so very wicked, and so forth. But few, I repeat, would pretend to say that they had always lived like angels, and never done, or said, or thought a wrong thing all their days. In short, all of us must confess that we are more or less "sinners," and, as sinners, are guilty before God, and, as guilty, must be forgiven, or lost and condemned for ever at the last day.

Now it is the glory of the Christian religion that it provides for us the very forgiveness that we need,—full, free, perfect, eternal, and complete. It is a leading article in that well-known creed which most Englishmen learn when they are children. They are taught to say, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." This forgiveness of sins has been purchased for us by the eternal Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. He has purchased it for us by coming into the world to be our Saviour, and by living, dying, and rising again, as our Substitute, in our behalf. He has bought it for us at the price of His own most precious blood, by suffering in our stead on the cross, and making satisfaction for our sins.

But this forgiveness, great, and full, and glorious as it is, does not become the property of every man and woman as a matter of course. It is not a privilege which every member of a church possesses merely because he is a churchman. It is a thing which each individual must receive for himself by faith, lay hold on by faith, appropriate by faith, and make his own by faith, or else, so far as he is concerned, Christ will have died in vain. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John iii. 36).

No terms can be imagined more simple and suitable to man. As good old Latimer said, in speaking of the matter of justification, "It is but believe and have." It is only faith that is required; and faith is nothing more than the humble, heartfelt trust of the soul which desires to be saved. Jesus is able and willing to save; but man must come to Jesus and believe. All that believe are at once justified and forgiven: but without believing there is no forgiveness at all.

And here is exactly the point, I am afraid, where multitudes of English people fail, and are in imminent danger of being lost forever. They know that there is no forgiveness of sin excepting in Christ Jesus. They can tell you that there is no Saviour for sinners, no Redeemer, no Mediator, excepting Him who was born of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, dead, and buried. But here they stop and get no further. They never come to the point of actually laying hold on Christ by faith, and becoming one with Christ and Christ in them. They can say, He is a Saviour, but not "my Saviour,"—a Redeemer, but not "my Redeemer,"—a Priest, but not "my

Priest,”—an Advocate, but not “my Advocate”: and so they live and die unforgiven! No wonder that Martin Luther said, “Many are lost because they cannot use possessive pronouns.”

Reader, when this is the state of many in this day, you will not wonder that I ask if you have received the forgiveness of your sins. An eminent Christian lady once said, in her old age,—

“The beginning of eternal life in my soul was a conversation I had with an old gentleman, who came to visit my father when I was only a little girl. He took me by the hand one day, and said, ‘My dear child, my life is nearly over, and you will probably live many years after I am gone. But never forget two things. One is, that there is such a thing as having our sins forgiven while we live. The other is, that there is such a thing as knowing and feeling that we are forgiven.’ I thank God I have never forgotten his words.”

Reader, how is it with you? Rest not till you “know and feel,” as the Prayer-book says, that you are forgiven. Once more, I ask, in the matter of forgiveness of sins, “How do you do?”

(5) Let me ask you, in the fifth place, *whether you know anything by experience of conversion to God*. Without conversion there is no salvation. “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” —“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. —“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.”—“If any man be in Christ he is a new creature.” (Matt. xviii. 3; John iii. 8; Rom. viii. 9; 2 Cor. v. 17). We are all by nature so weak, so worldly, so earthly-minded, so inclined to sin, that without a thorough change we cannot serve God in life, and could not enjoy Him after death. Just as ducks, as soon as they are hatched, take naturally to water, so do children, as soon as they can do anything, take to selfishness, lying and deceit, and none pray or love God unless they are taught.

High or low, rich or poor, gentle or simple, we all need a complete change,—a change which it is the special office of the Holy Ghost to give us. Call it what you please,—new birth, regeneration, renewal, new creation, quickening, repentance,—the thing must be had if we are to be saved: and if we have the thing it will be *seen*. Sense of sin and deep hatred to it, faith in Christ and love to Him, delight in holiness and longing after more of it, love to God’s people and distaste for the things of the world,—these, these are the signs and evidences which always accompany conversion. Myriads, it may be feared, around us know nothing about it: they are, in Scripture language, dead, and asleep, and blind, and unfit for the kingdom of God. Year after year, perhaps, they go on repeating the words of the Creed, “I believe in the Holy Ghost;” but they are utterly ignorant of His changing operations on the inward man. Sometimes they flatter themselves they are born again, because they have been baptized, and go to church, and receive the Lord’s Supper; while they are totally destitute of the marks of the new birth, as described by St. John in his first Epistle. And all this time the words of Scripture are clear and plain: “Except ye be converted, . . . ye shall not enter into the kingdom” (Matt. xviii. 3).

Reader, in times like these you will not wonder that I press the subject of conversion on your soul. No doubt there are plenty of sham conversions in such a day of religious excitement as this. But bad coin is no proof that there is no good money: nay, rather it is a sign that there is some money current

which is valuable, and is worth imitation. The devil's sham Christians are indirect evidence that there is such a thing as real grace among men. Search your own heart then, and see how it is with you. Once more, I ask, in the matter of conversion, "How do you do?"

(6) Let me ask, in the sixth place, *whether you know anything of practical Christian holiness?* It is as certain as anything in the Bible that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. xii. 14). It is equally certain that it is the invariable fruit of saving faith, the real test of regeneration, the only sound evidence of indwelling grace, the certain consequence of vital union with Christ.

Holiness is not absolute perfection and freedom from all faults. Nothing of the kind! The wild words of some who talk of enjoying "unbroken communion with God" for many months are greatly to be deprecated, because they raise unscriptural expectations in the minds of young believers, and so do harm. Absolute perfection is for heaven, and not for earth, where we have a weak body, a wicked world, and a busy devil continually near our souls. Nor is real Christian holiness ever attained, or maintained, without a constant fight and struggle. The great Apostle, who said I fight,—I labour,—“I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor ix. 27), would have been amazed to hear of *sanctification without personal exertion*, and to be told that believers only need to sit still, and everything will be done for them!

Yet, weak and imperfect as the holiness of the best saints may be, it is a real true thing, and has a character about it as unmistakable as light and salt. It is not a thing which begins and ends with noisy profession: it will be *seen* much more than *heard*. Genuine Scriptural holiness will make a man do his duty at home and by the fireside, and adorn his doctrine in the little trials of daily life. It will exhibit itself in passive graces as well as in active. It will make a man humble, kind, gentle, unselfish, good tempered, considerate for others, loving, meek, and forgiving. It will not constrain him to go out of the world, and shut himself up in a cave, like a hermit. But it will make him do his duty in that state to which God has called him, on Christian principles, and after the pattern of Christ. Such holiness, I well know, is not common. It is a style of practical Christianity which is painfully rare in these days. But I can find no other standard of holiness in the Word of God,—no other which comes up to the pictures drawn by our Lord and His Apostles.

Reader, in an age like this you cannot wonder if I press this subject, also, on your attention. Once more I ask, in the matter of holiness, how is it with your soul? "How do you do?"

(7) Let me ask you, in the seventh place, *whether you know anything of enjoying the means of grace?* When I speak of the means of grace, I have in my mind's eye five principal things,—the reading of the Bible, private prayer, public worship, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the rest of the Lord's day. They are means which God has graciously appointed, in order to convey grace to man's heart by the Holy Ghost, and to keep up the spiritual life, after it has begun.

As long as the world stands the state of a man's soul will always depend greatly on the manner and spirit in which he uses means of grace. The *manner and spirit*, I say deliberately and of purpose. Many English people use the means of grace regularly and formally, but know nothing of enjoying them: they attend to them as a matter of duty, but without a jot of feeling, interest, or

affection. Yet surely common sense might tell us that this formal, mechanical use of holy things, is utterly worthless and unprofitable. Our *feeling* about them is just one of the many tests of the state of our souls.

How can that man be thought to love God who reads about Him and His Christ as a mere matter of duty, content and satisfied if he has just moved his mark on so many chapters?—How can that man suppose he is ready to meet Christ, who never takes any trouble to pour out his heart to Him in private as a Friend, and is satisfied with saying over a string of words every morning and evening, under the name of “prayer,” scarcely thinking what he is about?—How could that man be happy in heaven for ever, who finds the Sunday a dull, gloomy, tiresome day,—who knows nothing of hearty prayer and praise, and cares nothing whether he hears truth or error from the pulpit, or scarcely listens to the sermon?—What can be the spiritual condition of that man whose heart never “burns within him,” when he receives that bread and wine which specially remind us of Christ’s death on the cross, and the atonement for sin?

Reader, these inquiries are very serious and important. If means of grace had no other use, and were not mighty helps toward heaven, they would be useful in supplying a test of our real state in the sight of God. Tell me what a man does in the matter of Bible-reading and praying, in the matter of Sunday, public worship, and the Lord’s Supper, and I will soon tell you what he is, and on which road he is travelling. Reader, how is it with you? Once more I ask, in the matter of means of grace, “How do you do?”

(8) Let me ask you, in the eighth place, *whether you ever try to do any good in the world?* Our Lord Jesus Christ was continually “going about doing good” while He was on earth. (Acts x. 38). The Apostles, and all the disciples in Bible times, were always striving to walk in His steps. A Christian who was content to go to heaven himself, and cared not what became of others, whether they lived happy and died in peace or not, would have been regarded as a kind of monster in primitive times, who had not the Spirit of Christ. Why should we suppose for a moment that a lower standard will suffice in the present day? Why should fig trees which bear no fruit be spared in the present day, when in our Lord’s time they were to be cut down as “cumberers of the ground?” (Luke xiii. 7). These are serious inquiries and demand serious answers.

There is a generation of professing Christians now-a-days who seem to know nothing of caring for their neighbours, and are wholly swallowed up in the concerns of number one,—that is, their own and their family’s. They eat, and drink, and sleep, and dress, and work, and get money, and spend money, year after year; and whether others are happy or miserable, well or ill, converted or unconverted, travelling toward heaven or toward hell, appear to be questions about which they are supremely indifferent. Can this be right? Can it be reconciled with the religion of Him who spoke the parable of the good Samaritan, and bade us “go and do likewise?” (Luke x. 37). I doubt it altogether. There is much to be done on every side. There is not a place in England where there is not a field for work, and an open door for being useful, if any one is willing to enter it. There is not a Christian in England who cannot find some good thing to do for others, if he has only a heart to do it. The poorest man or woman, without a single penny to give, can always show his deep sympathy to the sick and sorrowful, and by simple good nature and tender helpfulness, can lessen the misery and increase the comfort of somebody

in this troubled world.

But alas, the vast majority of professing Christians, whether rich or poor, Churchmen or Dissenters, seem possessed with a devil of detestable selfishness, and know not the luxury of doing good. They can argue by the hour about baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and the forms of worship, and the union of Church and State, and such like dry-bone questions. But all this time they seem to care nothing for their neighbours. The plain practical point, whether they love their neighbour as the Samaritan loved the traveller in the parable, and can spare any time and trouble to do him good, is a point they never touch with one of their fingers. In too many English parishes in short, both in town and country, true love seems almost dead, and wretched party-spirit and controversy are the only fruits that Christianity appears able to produce.

Reader, in a day like this you must not wonder if I press this plain old subject on your conscience. Do you know anything of genuine Samaritan love to others? Do you ever try to do any good to any one beside your own friends and relatives, and your own party or cause? Are you living like a disciple of Him who always "went about doing good," and commanded His disciples to take Him for their "example?" (John xiii. 15). If not, with what face will you meet Him in the judgment day? In this matter also, how is it with your soul? Once more I ask, "How do you do?"

(9) Let me ask you, in the ninth place, *whether you know anything of living the life of habitual communion with Christ?* By "communion," I mean that habit of "abiding in Christ" which our Lord speaks of in the fifteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, as essential to Christian fruitfulness. (John xv. 4-8). Let it be distinctly understood that union with Christ is one thing, and communion is another. There can be no communion with the Lord Jesus without union first; but unhappily there may be union with the Lord Jesus, and afterwards little or no communion at all.

The difference between the two things is not the difference between two distinct steps, but the difference between the higher and lower ends of an inclined plane. Union is the common privilege of all who feel their sins, and truly repent, and come to Christ by faith, and are accepted, forgiven, and justified in Him. Too many believers, it may be feared, *never get beyond this stage!* Partly from ignorance, partly from laziness, partly from fear of man, partly from secret love of the world, partly from some unmortified besetting sin, they are content with a little faith, and a little hope, and a little peace, and a little measure of holiness. And they live on all their lives in this condition—doubting, weak, halting, and bearing fruit only "thirty-fold" to the very end of their days!

Communion with Christ is the privilege of those who are continually striving to grow in grace, and faith, and knowledge, and conformity to the mind of Christ in all things,—who do not look to the things behind, and count not themselves to have attained, but "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 14). Union is the bud, but communion is the flower: union is the babe, but communion is the strong man. He that has union with Christ does well; but he that enjoys communion with Him does far better. Both have one life, one hope, one heavenly seed in their hearts,—one Lord, one Saviour, one Holy Spirit, one eternal home: but union is not so good as communion!

The grand secret of communion with Christ is to be continually "living the

life of faith in Him,” and drawing out of Him every hour the supply that every hour requires. “To me,” said St. Paul, “to live is Christ.”—“I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” (Gal. ii. 20; Phil. i. 21)—Communion like this is the secret of the abiding “joy and peace in believing” which eminent saints like Bradford and Rutherford notoriously possessed. None were ever more humble or more deeply convinced of their own infirmities and corruption. They would have told you that the seventh chapter of Romans precisely described their own experience. They would have endorsed every word of the “confession” put into the mouths of true believers in our Prayer-book Communion Service. They would have said continually, “the remembrance of our sins is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable.” But they were ever looking unto Jesus, and in Him they were ever able to rejoice.

Communion like this is the secret of the splendid victories which these men won over sin, the world, and the fear of death. They did not sit still idly, saying, “I leave it all to Christ to do for me,” but, strong in the Lord, they used the Divine nature He had implanted in them, boldly and confidently, and were “more than conquerors, through Him that loved them” (Rom. viii. 37). Like St. Paul they would have said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. iv. 13).—Ignorance of this life of communion is the simple reason why so many in this age are hankering after the Confessional, and strange views of the real presence in the Lord’s Supper. It all springs from imperfect knowledge of Christ, and obscure views of the life of faith in a risen, living, and interceding Saviour.

Is communion with Christ like this a common thing? Alas! it is very rare indeed! The greater part of believers seem content with the barest elementary knowledge of justification by faith, and half-a-dozen other doctrines, and go doubting, limping, halting, groaning along the way to heaven, and experience little either of the sense of victory or joy. The Churches of these latter days are full of weak, powerless, and uninfluential believers, saved at last, “but so as by fire,” but never shaking the world, and knowing nothing of an “abundant entrance” (1 Cor. iii. 15; 2 Peter i. 11). Despondency and Feeble-mind and Much-afraid, in “Pilgrim’s Progress,” reached the celestial city as really and truly as Valiant-for-the truth and Greatheart. But they certainly did not reach it with the same comfort, and did not do a tenth part of the same good in the world!

Reader, when things are so in the Churches, you will not wonder that I inquire how it is with your soul. Once more I ask, in the matter of communion with Christ, “How do you do?”

(10) Let me ask you, in the tenth and last place, *whether you know anything of being ready for Christ’s second coming?* That He will come again the second time is as certain as anything in the Bible. The world has not yet seen the last of Him. As surely as He went up visibly and in the body on the Mount of Olives, before the eyes of His disciples, so surely will He come again in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. (Acts i. 11). He will come to raise the dead, to change the living, to reward His saints, to punish the wicked, to renew the earth, and take the curse away,—to purify the world, even as He purified the temple,—and to set up a kingdom where sin shall have no place, and holiness shall be the universal rule.

The Creeds which we repeat and profess to believe, continually declare that Christ is coming again. The ancient Christians made it a part of their religion

to look for His return. *Backward* they looked to the cross and the atonement for sin, and rejoiced in Christ crucified. *Upward* they looked to Christ at the right hand of God, and rejoiced in Christ interceding. *Forward* they looked to the promised return of their Master, and rejoiced in the thought that they would see Him again. And we ought to do the same.

What have we really got from Christ? and what do we know of Him? and what do we think of Him? Are we living as if we long to see Him again, and love His appearing?—Readiness for that appearing is nothing more than being a real, consistent Christian. It requires no man to cease from his daily business. The farmer need not give up his farm, nor the shopkeeper his counter, nor the doctor his patients, nor the carpenter his hammer and nails, nor the bricklayer his mortar and trowel, nor the blacksmith his smithy. Each and all cannot do better than be found doing his duty, but doing it *as a Christian*, and with a heart packed up and ready to be gone.

Reader, in the face of truth like this, you cannot feel surprised if I ask, How is it with your soul in the matter of Christ's second coming? The world is growing old and running to seed. The vast majority of Christians seem like the men in the time of Noah and Lot, who were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, planting and building, up to the very day when flood and fire came. "Remember Lot's wife." "Take heed . . . lest at any time your heart be overcharged . . . with the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luke xvii. 32; xxi. 34). Once more I ask, in the matter of readiness for Christ's second coming, "How do you do?"

Reader, I end my inquiries here. I might easily add to them; but I trust I have said enough to stir up self-inquiry and self-examination in your soul. God is my witness that I have said nothing that I do not feel of paramount importance to my own soul. I only want to do good to you. Suffer me to conclude all with a few words of practical application.

(a) Are you *asleep and utterly thoughtless about religion*? Oh, reader, awake and sleep no more! Look at the churchyards and cemeteries. One by one the people around you are dropping into them, and you must lie there one day. Look forward to a world to come, and lay your hand on your heart, and say, if you dare, that you are fit to die and meet God. Ah! you are like one sleeping in a boat drifting down the stream towards the falls of Niagara! "What meanest thou, oh sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God!" "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!" (Jonah i. 6; Ephes. v. 14).

(b) Are you *feeling self-condemned, and afraid that there is no hope for your soul*? Cast aside your fears, and accept the offer of our Lord Jesus Christ to sinners. Hear Him saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink" (John vii. 37). "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). Doubt not that these words are for you as well as any one else. Bring all your sins, and unbelief, and sense of guilt, and unfitness, and doubts, and infirmities,—bring all to Christ. "This Man receiveth sinners," and He will receive you. (Luke xv. 2). Do not stand still, halting between two opinions, and waiting for a convenient season. Arise, He calleth thee! Come to Christ this very day.

(c) Are you a professing believer in Christ, but a *believer without much joy and peace and comfort*? Take advice this day. Search your own heart, and

see whether the fault be not entirely your own. Very likely you are sitting at your ease, content with a little faith, and a little repentance, a little grace, and a little sanctification, and unconsciously shrinking back from extremes. You will never be a very happy Christian at this rate, if you live to the age of Methuselah.

Change your plan, if you love life and would see good days, without delay. Come out boldly, and act decidedly. Be thorough, thorough, thorough in your Christianity, and set your face fully towards the sun. Lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset you. Strive to get nearer to Christ, to abide in Him, to cleave to Him, and to sit at His feet like Mary, and drink full draughts out of the fountain of life. "These things," says St. John, "write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 John i. 4). "If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (1 John i. 7).

(d) Are you *a believer oppressed with doubts and fears*, on account of your feebleness, infirmity, and sense of sin? Remember the text that says of Jesus, "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench" (Matt. xii. 20). Take comfort in the thought that this text is for you. What though your faith be feeble? It is better than no faith at all. The least grain of life is better than death. Perhaps you are expecting too much in this world. Earth is not heaven. You are yet in the body. Expect little from self, but much from Christ. Reader, look more to Jesus, and less to self.

(e) Are you *sometimes downcast* by the trials you meet with in the way to heaven, bodily trials, family trials, trials of circumstances, trials from neighbours, and from the world? Look up, dear friend, to a sympathizing Saviour at God's right hand, and pour out your heart before Him. He can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities, for He suffered Himself being tempted.

Are you alone? So was He. Are you misrepresented and calumniated? So was He. Are you forsaken by friends? So was He. Are you persecuted? So was He. Are you wearied in body and grieved in spirit? So was He.—Yes! He can feel for you, and He can help as well as feel. Then learn to draw nearer to Christ. Yet a little time, and all will be over: we shall soon be "with the Lord." "There is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off" (Prov. xxiii. 18).

Reader, once more I ask the question, "HOW DO YOU DO?"