

Consider Your Ways

"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways." Haggai 1:7

Beloved Friends and Brethren, I wish to say a few words to you about your souls. I want those souls to be saved. And I invite you all to take the advice I give you today, and that is, to "Consider your ways." I speak to you because the time is short. The day of grace is slipping away- the day of judgment is drawing near- the thread of life is winding up- a few more short years, and every soul of us will have gone to his own place- we shall each of us be in heaven or hell! I dare not wait until you pay attention to my sermon. By all means I must try to save some of you. If you will not consider, when I speak to you from the pulpit, it may be you will consider when I speak to you in print. I cannot reach your hearts, I know well. It is not in me, it needs the finger of God. But I can set before you my earnest wishes for every class among you, and I will do it- the Lord being my helper. Bear with me if I say things that sound sharp and hard. Set it down to my anxiety for your salvation; I mean it all for your good. I write no other things but what I have gathered from the Bible, and as such I commend them to your consciences. Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.

There are some true Christians among you whom I long to see more holy and more bright. You are they who have found out your own sinfulness and lost estate, and really believe on Jesus for the saving of your souls. The eyes of your understanding have been opened by the Spirit- He has led you to Christ, and you are new men. You have peace with God. Sin is no longer pleasant to you- the world has no longer the first place in your heart- all things are become new. You have ceased from trusting in your own works. You are willing to stand before the bar of God, and rest your soul on the finished work of Him who died for the ungodly. This is all your confidence, that you have

washed your robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. I thank God heartily for what He has wrought in your souls, but I ask you also to consider your ways.

Brethren, I write to you about your sanctification. There are those who do you think are a class in our congregations that require little writing to- you are within the pale of salvation- you may be almost let alone. I cannot see it. I believe you need your minister's care and exhortation as much as any, if not more. I believe that on your growth in grace and holiness, not merely your own comfort, but the salvation of many souls, under God, depends. I believe that the converted members of a Church should be preached to, spoken to, warned, counseled, far more than they are. You need many words of direction. You are still in the wilderness. You have not crossed Jordan. You are not yet at home. I see Paul beseeching the Thessalonians that as they have received of Him, how they ought to walk and please God, so they would abound more and more. I see him warning them not to sleep, as others do, but to watch and be sober. I see Peter telling believers to give diligence to make their calling and election sure; to go on adding one grace to another- to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ.

I wish to follow in their steps. I would remind you "that this is the will of God, even your sanctification," and I ask you to make it plain that it is your will too. You were not chosen out of the world to go to sleep, but that you might be holy. You were not called of God that you might sit still, but that you might walk worthy of your calling. Recollect those solemn words, "He that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." (2 Peter i. 9.) Why do I say these things? Is it because I do think you do not know them? No! but I want to stir you up by putting you in remembrance. Is it because I wish to discourage the poor in spirit, and make the heart of the righteous sad? No indeed! I would not willingly do this. Is it

because I think true Christians can ever fall away? God forbid you should suppose I mean such a thing. But I say what I say because I am jealous for my Lord's honor.

I wish the elect of God to be indeed a holy nation, and the sons of adoption to live as becomes the children of a King. I want those who are light in the Lord to walk as children of light, shining more and more every day. And I say it for the good of the world. You are almost the only book that worldly people read. Surely your lives should be epistles of Christ, so plain that he who runs may read them. The world cares little for doctrine- the world knows nothing of experience- but the world can understand a close walk with God. And not least I say it because of the times you live in. I write it down deliberately, I believe there never were so many lukewarm saints as there are now. There never was a time in which a low and carnal standard of Christian behavior so much prevailed. There never were so many babes in grace in the family of God; so many who seem to sit still, and live on old experience; so many who appear to have need of nothing, and to be neither hungering nor thirsting after righteousness, as at the present time. I write this with all sorrow. It may be too painful to please some. But I ask you, as in God's sight, is it not true?

There is a generation of Christians in this age who grieve me to the heart. They make my blood run cold. I cannot understand them. For anything that man's eye can see, they make no progress. They never seem to get on. Years roll on, and they are just the same- the same besetting sins, the same infirmities of disposition, the same weakness in trial, the same chilliness of heart, the same apathy, the same faint resemblance to Christ; but no new knowledge, no increased interest in the kingdom, no freshness, no new strength, no new fruits, as if they grew. Are they not forgetting that growth is the proof of life- that even the tree grows, and the snail and the sloth move? Are they not forgetting how awfully far a man may go, and yet not be a true Christian? He may be like a wax

figure, the very image of a believer, and yet not have within him the breath of God- he may have a name to live, and be dead after all.

Brethren, these are the reasons why I write so strongly. I want your Christianity to be unmistakable. I want you all to grow really, and to do more than others. Let us all henceforth remember Sardis and Laodicea- let us resolve to be more holy and more bright. Let us bury our idols. Let us put away all strange gods. Let us cast out the old leaven. Let us lay aside every weight and besetting sin. Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God. Let us renew our covenant with our beloved Lord. Let us aim at the highest and best things. Let us resolve by God's blessing to be more holy, and then I know and am persuaded we shall be more useful and more happy. I name some things for prayerful consideration.

1. Let us then, for one thing, begin with a humble confession of past unprofitableness and shortcomings. Let us acknowledge with shame and contrition that we have not hitherto lived up to our light. We ought to have been the salt of the earth- but there has been little savor of Christ about us. We ought to have been the light of the world- but we have most of us been little glimmering sparks that could scarcely be seen. We ought to have been a peculiar people- but the difference between us and the world has been faint and small. We ought to have been, like the Levites in Israel, a distinct people among professing Christians- but we have too often behaved as if we belonged to some other tribe. We ought to have looked on this world as an inn, and we have settled down in it as if it were our home- it ought to have been counted our school of training for eternity, and we have been at ease in it as if it were our continuing city, or trifled away time in it, as if we were meant to play and not to learn. We ought to have been anxious for nothing, and we

have been anxious and troubled about many things- we have allowed the affairs of this life to eat out the heart of our spirituality, and have been cumbered with much serving.

How rarely we have heard the Gospel like men in earnest- and read the Bible as if we were feeding on it- and prayed as if we wanted an answer! How poor and feeble has been our witness against sin! How seldom have we looked like men about our Father's business! How little have we known about singleness of eye, and wholeness of heart, and walking in the spirit! How weak has been our faith, how feeble our hope, how cold our charity! How few of us have lived as if we believed all that is written in the Word, and moved through life like pilgrims traveling to a better land. Oh! Brethren, have we not good reason to be ashamed when we think on these things? Very grievous are they, and we ought to feel it. Let us begin with self-abasement; let us cry, "God be merciful to us sinners take away our iniquity, for we have done very foolishly."

2. In the next place, let us all seek to "abide in Christ" more thoroughly than we have hitherto. Christ is the true spring of life in every believer's soul, the head on which every member depends, the corner stone of all real sanctification. Whenever I see a child of God becoming less holy than he was, I know the secret of it- he is clinging less firmly to Christ than he did. Our root must be right, if our fruit is to abound. Brethren, let us strive after close union and communion with Christ. Let us go to Him oftener, speak with Him more frequently, trust Him more wholly, look to Him more constantly, lean upon Him more entirely. This is the way to go through the wilderness without fainting, and to run the race set before us with patience. Let us live the life of faith in the Son of God. He is the vine, and we are the branches; let all our strength be drawn from Him- separate from Him we can do nothing. He is the Sun of righteousness- let us seek our comfort in Him, and not in our own frames and feelings.

He is the bread of life- let us feed on Him day by day, as Israel on the manna, and not on our own experiences. Let Christ become more and more all things to us! His blood our peace- His intercession our comfort- His word our warrant- His grace our strength- His sympathy our support- His speedy coming our hope. Let others spend their time on new books if they will, let us rather study to learn Christ. We know a little of Christ as our Savior, but Oh! how small a portion have we seen of the fulness that is in Him! Like the Indians, when America was first discovered, we are not aware of the amazing value of the gold and treasure in our hands. Believe me, if we did but realize the blessedness of free and full forgiveness in Him, we should be men of a different stamp. The man who feels the blood of atonement sprinkled on his conscience- the man who enjoys assurance that he is washed, and justified, and accepted in the Beloved, this is the man who will be holy indeed, this is the man who will bear much fruit. He will labor cheerfully- he will suffer patiently- he will witness confidently- he will press on unflinchingly- he will love warmly.

Redemption is ever fresh upon his mind, and his thought is, "what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?" Brethren, let us cleave to Christ more closely. Let us draw near to the cross. Let us sit at the feet of Jesus. Let us drink into the spirit of the apostle, when he said, "to me to live is Christ." Let us do this, and we shall grow.

3. And let us beware of excuses. Reasons will never be lacking in our minds why we cannot be bright and eminent Christians just now. It is very possible to admire a high standard of spirituality in others, while we are content with very low practice in ourselves. We persuade ourselves there is something peculiar in our particular case, which makes it almost impossible to shine. But let all excuses be received, like Babylonian ambassadors, with great suspicion. They are generally the devil's coinage. Let us settle it firmly in our hearts, that there are few of us indeed who cannot glorify God just where we are without any change. All our excuses are as dust in the balance, when placed against that promise, "My grace is sufficient for you."

Let us not deceive ourselves. By the grace of God we may be bright saints even now. Let us not say, "We have bad health." Remember the apostle Paul- he had a thorn in the flesh- some never ceasing ailment probably, and yet it seemed a spur rather than a hindrance to his soul. Let us not say, "We have many trials." Remember Job- wave upon wave came rolling over him, and yet his faith did not give way- and the record of his patience is on high. Let us not say, "We have families and children to make us anxious and keep us back." Remember David- none was ever so tried at home as he was, yet he was a man after God's own heart. Let us not say, "We have much distracting business to attend on." Remember Daniel- he had far more affairs on his hands, probably, than any of us, yet he found time to pray three times a day, and was a proverb for godliness.

Let us not say, "I stand alone, the times are evil, and none around me serve God." Remember Noah- the whole world was against him, yet he did not give way. By faith he held fast. Let us not say, "We live in families where God is not thought of." Remember Obadiah in Ahab's house, and Nero's servants at Rome. What are our difficulties compared with theirs? Let us not say, "We are poor and unlearned." Remember Peter and John. They were as poor and unlearned as any of us, yet they were pillars of the early Church; they were of the number of those who turned the world upside down.

No! Brethren, such excuses for not being more holy will never do, while grace may be had. Let us say rather, "We are slothful, and take no trouble- we are unbelieving, and make no bold attempt- we are worldly, and our eyes are too dim to see the beauty of holiness- we are proud, and we cannot humble ourselves to take pains." Let us say this, and we shall more likely speak the truth.

There are always ways in which we may glorify God- there are passive graces as well as active graces. But the way of the slothful is always a hedge of thorns. The wall of Jerusalem was soon

built when the Jews had "a mind to work." We complain of the devil, but there is no devil after all like our own hearts! We have not grace because we do not ask it. The fault is all our own.

4. Let us be on our guard against false doctrine. Unsound faith will never be the mother of really sound practice, and in these latter days, departures from the faith abound. See then that your loins be girt about with truth, and be very jealous of receiving anything which cannot be proved by the Bible. Do not think for a moment that false doctrine will meet you face to face, saying, "I am false doctrine, and I want to come into your heart." Satan does not go to work in that way. He dresses up false doctrine like Jezebel- he paints her face and attires her hair, and tries to make her like truth. Do not think that those who preach error will never preach anything that is true. Error, would do little harm if that was the case. No! error will come before you mingled with much that is sound and scriptural.

The sermon will be all right excepting a few sentences. The book will be all good excepting a few pages. And this is the chief danger of religious error in these times- it is like the subtle poisons of days gone by- it works so deceitfully that it throws men off their guard. Brethren, take care.

Remember, that even Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Keep clear of any system of religion which confounds the world and true believers, and makes no broad distinction between those who are true children of God in a congregation, and those who are not. Do not be carried away by an appearance of great self denial and humility. It is far easier to fast and wear sackcloth, and be of a sad countenance, than to receive thoroughly the doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law.

Call no man father upon earth. Do not build your faith on any minister or set of ministers. Let no man become your Pope. Make no Christian your standard of what is right in faith or practice, however high his name, his rank, or his learning. Let your creed be the Bible, and nothing but the

Bible; and your example Christ, and nothing short of Him. Take heed, lest your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Be careful what books you read on religious subjects- many books of this day are leavened with doctrines which spoil the Gospel. Examine yourselves often whether you are standing in the old paths— our lost estate by nature- our recovery through our Savior's kindness and love- our need of regeneration and renewal- our justification through grace- these are the grand doctrines, as Paul told Titus; and these are the points on which we must be sound, if we would maintain good works.

5. Let us resolve to make conscience of little things in our daily religion. Let us not neglect little duties- let us not allow ourselves in little faults. Whatever we may like to think, nothing is really of small importance that affects the soul. All diseases are small at the beginning. Many a death-bed begins with a "little cold." Nothing that can grow is large all at once- the greatest sin must have a beginning. Nothing that is great comes to perfection in a day- characters and habits are all the result of little actions. Little strokes of the hammer made that ark which saved Noah. Little pegs held firm that tabernacle which was the glory of Israel. We too are traveling through a wilderness- let us be like the family of Merari, and be careful not to leave the pegs behind. (Numbers 4: 32.) Believers, do not forget how full the Epistles are of instruction about the particulars of Christian life. The apostles seem to take nothing for granted. They do not think it sufficient to say, "be holy," -they take care to specify and name the things in which holiness is shown. See how they dwell on the duties of husbands and wives, masters and servants, parents and children, rulers and subjects, old people and young. See how they single out and urge upon us industry in business, kindness in temper, forgivingness in disposition, honesty, truthfulness, temperance, meekness, gentleness, humility, charity, patience, courtesy.

See how they exhort us to honor all men, to govern our tongues, to season our speech with grace, to abstain from foolish talking and jesting, not to please ourselves only, to redeem the time, to be content with such things as we have, and whether we eat or drink, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, some people think that to dwell on such things is bondage; but I believe it good to remind you of them- I am sure it is safe. If the Spirit of God thought it wise to dwell so much on them in the word, I cannot doubt it must be wise for us to attend to them in our walk. It is much more easy to profess holiness in a general way, than to carry it out in particulars; and I fear that many talk familiarly of sanctification in the lump, who know but little of it in the piece. I firmly believe that looseness about these little things in our daily behavior, is a special means of grieving the Spirit of God, and of bringing upon us, in consequence, barrenness and leanness of soul.

6. Let us be more active in endeavors to do good to the world. Surely we may all do far more for unconverted souls than we have ever done yet. Many of us, alas! take things so quietly, that a man might suppose every one about us was converted, and the kingdom of Christ fully set up. I pray you let us lay aside these lazy habits. Are all our friends and relations in Christ? Are all our neighbors and acquaintances inside the ark? Have all within our reach received the truth in the love of it? Have we asked them all to come in? Have we told them all the way of salvation, and our own experience that the way is good? Have we done all that we can? Have we tried every means? Is there no one left to whom we can show Christian kindness, and offer the Gospel? Can we lift up our hands to God, as one by one, souls around us are taken away, and say, "Our eyes, O Lord, have not seen this blood, and its loss cannot in any wise be laid at our door!"

Surely, my Brethren, grace ought to be as active a principle in trying to spread godliness, as sin is in trying to spread evil. Surely, if we had a tenth part of the zeal which Satan shows to enlarge his kingdom, we should be far more full of care for other men's souls. Where is our mercy and

compassion, if we can see disease of soul about us, and not desire to make it less? Let us awake to a right understanding of our responsibility in this matter. We complain of the world being full of wickedness. It is so. But do we each do our own part in trying to make it better? Do we act upon the old saying, "The city is soon clean when every man sweeps before his own door?" Let us try more to do good to all. Let us reckon it a painful thing to go to heaven alone- let us endeavor, as far as we can, to take companions with us. Let us no longer be silent witnesses, and muffled bells. Let us warn, and beseech, and invite, and rebuke, and advise, and testify of Christ, on the right hand and on the left, according as we have opportunity, saying to men, "Come with us, and we will do you good- the light is sweet, come and walk in the light of the Lord." Let us not suppose no good is done in this way, because our eyes do not see it- we must walk by faith, and not by sight. Let us not be weary in well doing, because we appear to labor in vain; we may rest assured we are in the hands of a good Master- in due time we shall reap if we faint not.

Activity in doing good is one receipt for being cheerful Christians- it is like exercise to the body, it keeps the soul in health. It is one great proof of love towards the Lord Jesus, and a proof that can only be given while we are alive. Now is the time for doing good to others, and not hereafter. In heaven there will be no missionary societies, no Bible societies, no visiting societies, no careless to warn, no ignorant to instruct, no sick to minister to, no mourners to comfort, no fainting saints to cheer. In heaven there will be love, joy, peace, thankfulness- but in heaven there will be no place for faith, zeal, courage, labor, patience- their occupation will be over- if ever we mean to show these graces it must be now. Oh! let us make haste, for the time is short. Let us be like Christian, in Pilgrim's Progress, when his burden fell off at the sepulcher, his first act was to try to awaken sleeping souls.

7. Lastly, let us believers take more pains to edify others! It is incredible and sad to see how Scripture speaks on this matter, and then to observe the conduct of many of Christ's people. Paul tells the Corinthians, that the members of Christ "should have the same care one for another." He says to the Thessalonians, "Edify one another, even as also you do." He says to the Hebrews, "Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin;" and again, "Consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching." Brethren, I fear we fall very short of the New Testament Christians in this respect. We are sadly apt to lose sight of this edifying one another when we are in the company of believing friends. Prayer, and the Word, and godly conversation are not put in the foremost place, and so we separate, being nothing the better, but rather worse. Far too often there is so much coldness, and restraint, and reserve, and backwardness, that a man might imagine we were ashamed of Christ, and that we thought it proper to hold our tongues, and not make mention of the name of the Lord.

These things ought not so to be. We profess that we are all fighting the same fight- contending with the same enemies- plagued with the same evil hearts- trusting in the same Lord- led by the same Spirit- eating the same bread- journeying towards the same home. Then why should we not show it? Why should we not be always ready to commune with each other? Why should we not try to help each other forward- to profit by each others experience- to bear each others burdens- to strengthen each others hands- to quicken each others hearts- to speak with each other, like Moses and Jethro, of the things pertaining to our King. There is a fault among us here, and one that ought to be amended.

Let us bring out the Bible more when we get together. We none of us know it all yet; our brother may have found some pearl in it which has escaped our eyes, and we perhaps may show him

something in return. It is the common map by which we all journey; let us not behave as if we had each a private map to be studied in a corner, and kept to ourselves. Oh! that the Word were like a burning fire shut up in our bones, so that we could not forbear speaking of it.

Let us speak oftener about the eternal home towards which we travel. Children, before their holidays, love to talk of home- their hearts are full, they cannot help it- why should not we? Surely, it ill becomes the citizens of heaven to say nothing of heaven to those with whom they expect to dwell forever. Let us aim at closer communion with all true believers. This will go far to procure Christ's presence with us on our journey. The two disciples who went to Emmaus were talking of holy things when they were joined by the Lord. Let us speak often one to another, and the Lord will hearken, and remember it. This too will mightily promote the growth and comfort of our souls. The fire within us needs constant stirring, as well as feeding, to keep it bright. Many can testify that they find Christian fellowship a special means of grace. As iron sharpens iron, so does the countenance of a man his friend- and the weakest too may sharpen the strongest, even as the whetstone does the scythe. He that tries to promote holiness in others shall reap a blessed reward in his own soul- he waters others, and he shall be watered himself.

Brethren, I have thought it good to name these things in writing to you about sanctification. I desire to do it in all humility. I need reminding of them as much as any. Let us all resolve to set them before ourselves, and I am sure we shall not repent of it. And now, beloved Brethren, I am done; I have told you one and all the longings and desires of my heart. Conversion for the unconverted, decision for the wavering, growth in grace for the believer- this seals up the sum of my wishes for you. I can wish you nothing better, for this is the way to true happiness. I will wish you nothing less, for without these things I am sure there is no peace.

Consider well what I have said. Death may be busy among us very soon- let us all be found in Christ and prepared. Satan will be busy among us no doubt- let us all watch and pray. Let us beware of a spirit of slumber and formality, and especially in private reading and praying. Let our path to the fountain be worn with daily journeys, let our key to the treasury of grace be bright with constant use. Let us pray more, and let us pray more earnestly. Let those who never prayed begin to pray. Let those who have prayed pray better. Pray for yourselves- that you may know the Lord Jesus, and cleave to Him- that you may be kept from falling- that you may serve your generation- that you may be sober in prosperity, patient in trial, and humble at all times. Pray for the congregation to which you belong- that the word of the Lord may have free course in it, and be glorified- that the household of faith may become stronger and stronger, and the household of unbelief weaker and weaker. Pray for your country- that her ministers may preach the Gospel, and be sound in the faith- that her rulers may value the Bible, and govern according to it- and that so her candlestick may not be taken away. And pray not least for your minister- that he may be strong to work, and willing to labor for your good, that all his sicknesses may be sanctified, and all his health given to the Lord- that he may be ever taught of the Spirit, and thus be able to teach others- that he may be kept faithful unto death, and so be ready to depart when he is called. Let us all pray, one for the other- I for you, and you for me- and we shall be blessed in our deed!

"God is my record how greatly I long after you all." Philippians 1:8.

Amen