

False Professors Solemnly Warned

A Sermon Delivered on Sabbath Evening, August 24, 1856, by the
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"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."—Philippians 3:18-19.

Paul was the very model of what a Christian minister should be. He was a *watchful* shepherd over the flock; he did not simply preach to them, and consider that he had done all his duty when he had delivered his message; but his eyes were always upon the Churches, marking their spiritual welfare, their growth in grace, or their declension in godliness. He was the unsleeping guardian of their spiritual welfare. When he was called away to other lands to proclaim the everlasting gospel, he seems always to have kept an eye upon those Christian colonies that he had founded in the midst of heathen darkness. While lighting up other lamps with the torch of truth, he did not fail to trim the lamps already burning. Here you observe he was not indifferent to the character of the little church at Philippi, for he speaks to them and warns them.

Note, too, that the apostle was a very *honest* pastor—when he marked anything amiss in his people, he did not blush to tell them; he was not like your modern minister, whose pride is that he never was personal in his life, and who thus glories in his shame, for had he been honest, *he would have been personal*, for he would have dealt out the truth of God without deceitfulness, and would have reproved men sharply, that they might be sound in the faith. "I tell *you*," says Paul, "because it concerns you." Paul was very honest; he did not flinch from telling the whole truth, and telling it often too, though some might think that once from the lip of Paul would be of more effect than a hundred times from any one else. "I have told you often," says he, "and I tell you yet again there are some who are the enemies of the cross of Christ."

And while faithful, you will notice that the apostle was, as every true minister should be, extremely *affectionate*. He could not bear to think that any of the members of the churches under his care should swerve from the truth, he wept while he denounced them; he knew not how to wield the thunderbolt with a tearless eye; he did not know how to pronounce the threatening of God with a dry and husky voice. No; while he spoke terrible things the tear was in his eye, and when he reproved sharply, his heart beat so high with love, that those who heard him denounce so solemnly, were yet convinced that his harshest words were dictated by affection. "I have told you often, and I tell you, *even weeping*, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ."

Beloved, I have a message to deliver tonight that is to the same effect as that of the Apostle Paul, and I am afraid it is as necessary now as it was in his time. There are many now among us, as there were then, who walk in such a manner that we recognize them at once as the "enemies of the cross of Christ." I do fear that the evil, instead of having decreased, has multiplied and grown in danger. We have more profession now than there was in the age of Paul, and consequently we have more hypocrisy. It is a crying sin with our churches that there are many in their midst who never ought to be there, who would

be fit members of an ale-house or any favourite resort of the gay and frivolous, but who never ought to sip the sacramental wine or eat the holy bread, the emblems of the sufferings of our Lord. We have—O Paul, how wouldst thou have said it to-night, and how wouldst thou have wept while saying it!—we have many in our midst who are the "enemies of the cross of Christ," because "their God is their belly, they mind earthly things," and their life is not consistent with the great things of God.

I shall endeavour, for a short time tonight, to tell you the reason of the apostle's extraordinary sorrow. I never read that the apostle wept when he was persecuted. Though they ploughed his back with furrows, I do believe that never a tear was seen to gush from his eye while the soldiers scourged him. Though he was cast into prison, we read of his singing, never of his groaning. I do not believe he ever wept on account of any sufferings or dangers to which he himself was exposed for Christ's sake. I call this an extraordinary sorrow, because the man who wept was no soft piece of sentiment, and seldom shed a tear even under grievous trials. He wept for three things: he wept on account of *their guilt*; on account of *the ill effects of their conduct*; and on account of *their doom*.

I. First, Paul wept on account of the **GUILT** of those persons who, having a name to live, were dead, and while uniting themselves with a Christian church, were not walking as they should do among men and before God. Notice the sin with which he charges them. He says, "Their God was their belly;" by this I understand that *they were sensual persons*. There were those in the early church who, after they sat at God's table, would go away and sit at the feasts of the heathen, and there indulge in gluttony and drunkenness; others indulged in lusts of the flesh, enjoying those pleasures (so miscalled) which, afterwards, bring unutterable pain even to the body itself, and are disgraceful to men, much more to professors of religion. Their God was their belly. They care more about the dress of their body than the dress of their soul; they regarded more the food of the outward carcass than the life of the inner man. Ah! my hearers; are there not many everywhere in our churches who still bow before their belly-god, and make themselves their own idols? Is it not notorious, in almost every society, that professing men can pamper themselves as much as others? I mean not all, but some. Ay, I have heard of drunken professors; not men who positively reel through the street, who are drunken in mid-day or intoxicated before their fellow-men, but men who go to the very verge of drunkenness in their social parties; men who take so much, that while it would be an insult to their respectability to call them intoxicated, it would be equally an insult to the truth to call them sober. Have we not some men in our churches (it is idle to deny it) who are as fond of the excesses of the table and surfeit in the good things of this life as any other class of men? Have we not persons who spend a very fortune upon the dress of their bodies, adorning themselves far more than they adorn the doctrine of their Saviour; men whose perpetual business it is to take good care of their bodies, against whom flesh and blood never had any cause to complain, for they not only serve the flesh, but make a god of it? Ah! sirs, the church is not pure; the church is not perfect; we have scabbed sheep in the flock. In our own little communion, now and then, we find them out, and then comes the dread sentence of excommunication, by which they are cut off from our fellowship; but there are many of whom we are not aware, who creep like snakes along the grass, and are not discovered till they inflict a grievous wound upon religion, and do damage to our great and glorious cause. Brethren, there are some in the church (both established and dissenting)—let us say it with the deepest sorrow—"whose god is their belly."

Another of their sins was that *they did mind earthly things*. Beloved, the last sentence may not have touched your consciences, but this is a very sweeping assertion, and I am afraid that a very large proportion of Christ's church is verily guilty here. It is an anomaly, but it is a fact, that we hear of ambitious Christians, although Christ has told us that he who would be exalted must humble himself. There are among the professed followers of the humble Man of Galilee, men who strive to gain the topmost round of the ladder of this world; whose aim is, not to magnify Christ, but to magnify themselves at any hazard. It had been thought at one time that a Christian would be a holy, a humble, and contented man; but it is not so nowadays. We have (Oh, shame, ye churches!) mere professors; men who are as worldly as the worldiest, and have no more of Christ's Holy Spirit in them than the most carnal who never made a profession of the truth. Again, it is a paradox, but it stares us in the face every day, that we have covetous Christians. It is an inconsistency. We might as well talk of unholy seraphim, of perfect beings subject to sin, as of covetous Christians; yet there are such men, whose purse strings were never intended to slide, at least at the cry of the poor; who call it *prudence* to amass wealth, and never use it in any degree in the cause of Christ. If you want men that are hard in business, that are grasping after wealth, that seize upon the poor debtor and suck the last particle of his blood; if you want the men who are grasping and grinding, that will skin the flint, and take away the very life from the orphan, you must come—I blush to say it, but it is a solemn truth—you must come sometimes to our churches to find them. Some such there are amongst the highest of her officers, who "mind earthly things," and have none of that devotion to Christ that is the mark of pure godliness. These evils are not the fruits of religion, they are the diseases of mere profession. I rejoice that the remnant of the elect are kept pure from these, but the "mixed multitude" are sadly possessed therewith.

Another character that the Apostle gives of these men is that they *gloried in their shame*. A professing sinner generally glories in his shame more than any one else. In fact, he miscalls it. He labels the devil's poisons with the names of Christ's medicines. Things that he would reckon vices in any other man are virtues with himself. If he could see in another man the selfsame action which he has just performed—if another could be the looking-glass of himself, oh! how he would thunder at him! He is the very first man to notice a little inconsistency. He is the very strictest of Sabbatarians; he is the most upright of thieves; he is the most tremendously generous of misers; he is the most marvelously holy of profane men. While he can indulge in his favourite sin, he is forever putting up his glass to his eye to magnify the faults of others. *He* may do as he pleases; *he* may sin with impunity; and if his minister should hint to him that his conduct is inconsistent, he will make a storm in the church, and say the minister was personal, and insulted him. Reproof is thrown away on him. Is he not a member of the church? Has he not been so for years? Who shall dare to say that he is unholy? O sirs, there are some of your members of churches who will one day be members of the pit. We have some united with our churches who has passed through baptism and sit at our sacramental tables, who, while they have a name to live, are dead as corpses in their graves as to anything spiritual. It is an easy thing to palm yourself off for a godly man now-a-days. There is little self-denial, little mortification of the flesh, little love to Christ wanted. Oh, no. Learn a few religious hymns; get a few cant phrases, and you will deceive the very elect; enter into the church, be called respectable, and if you cannot make all believe you, you

will yet smooth your path to destruction by quieting an uneasy conscience. I am saying hard things, but I am saying true things; for my blood boils sometimes when I meet with men whom I would not own, whom I would not sit with anywhere, and who yet call me "brother." They can live in sin, and yet call a Christian "brother." God forgive them! We can feel no brotherhood with them; nor do we wish to do so until their lives are changed, and their conduct is made more consistent.

You see, then, in the Apostle's days there were some who were a disgrace to godliness, and the Apostle wept over them because he knew their guilt. Why, it is guilt enough for a man to make a God of his belly without being a professor; but how much worse for a man who knows better, who even sets up to teach other people better, still to go on and sin against God and against his conscience, by making a solemn profession, which is found in his case to be a lie. Oh! how dreadful is such a man's guilt! For him to stand up and say,

"'Tis done; the great transaction's done.

I am the Lord's, and he is mine,"

and yet to go and sin like others; to use the same conversation, to practice the same chicanery, to walk in as ungodly a manner as those who have never named the name of Christ—ah! what guilt is here! It is enough to make us weep if we have been guilty ourselves; ay, to weep tears of blood that we should so have sinned against God.

II. But the Apostle did not so much weep for them as for **THE MISCHIEF THEY WERE DOING**, for he says, emphatically, that they are, "The enemies of the cross of Christ." "*The enemies*;" as much as to say, the infidel is *an* enemy; the curser, the swearer, the profane man, is *an* enemy; Herod, yonder, the persecutor, is *an* enemy; but these men are the chief soldiers—the life-guards in Satan's army. "*The enemies of the cross of Christ*" are Pharisaic professors, bright with the whitewash of outside godliness, whilst they are rotten within. Oh! methinks there is nothing that should grieve a Christian more than to know that Christ has been wounded in the house of his friends. See, there comes my Saviour with bleeding hands and feet. O my Jesus, my Jesus, who shed that blood? Whence comes that wound? Why lookest thou so sad? He replies, "I have been wounded, but guess where I received the blow?" Why, Lord, sure thou wast wounded in the gin-palace; thou wast wounded where sinners meet, in the seat of the scornful; thou wast wounded in the infidel hall. "No, I was not," saith Christ; "I was wounded in the house of my friends; these scars were made by those who sat at my table and bore my name, and talked my language; *they* pierced me and crucified me afresh, and put me to an open shame." Far worst of sinners they that pierce Christ thus whilst professing to be friends. Caesar wept not until Brutus stabbed him; then it was that he was overcome, and exclaimed, "*Et tu, Brute!*" And thou, "Hast *thou* stabbed me?" So, my hearers, might Christ say to some of you. "What! thou, and thou, and thou, a professor, hast stabbed me?" Well might our Saviour muffle up his face in grief, or rather bind it in clouds of wrath, and drive the wretch away that has so injured his cause.

If I must be defeated in battle, let me be defeated by mine enemies, but let me not be betrayed by my friends. If I must yield the citadel which I am willing to defend even to the death, then let me yield it, and let my foes walk over my body; but oh! let not my friends betray me; let not the warrior who stands by my side unbar the gate and admit the foemen. That were enough to break one's heart twice—once for the defeat, and the second time at the thought of treachery.

When a small band of Protestants were striving for their liberties in Switzerland, they bravely defended a pass against an immense host. Though their dearest friends were slain, and they themselves were weary, and ready to drop with fatigue, they stood firm in the defense of the cause they had espoused. On a sudden, however, a cry was heard—a dread and terrible shriek. The enemy was winding up a steep acclivity, and when the commander turned his eye thither, O how his brow gathered with storm! He ground his teeth and stamped his foot, for he knew that some caitiff [evil, cowardly] Protestant had led the bloodthirsty foe up the goat track to slay his friends. Then turning to his friends, he said "On!" and like a lion on his prey, they rushed upon their enemies, ready now to die, for a friend had betrayed them. So feels the bold-hearted Christian, when he sees his fellow-member betraying Christ, when he beholds the citadel of Christianity given up to its foes by those who pretended to be its friends. Beloved, I would rather have a thousand devils out of the church, than have one in it. I do not care about all the adversaries outside; our greatest cause of fear is from the crafty "wolves in sheep's clothing," that devour the flock. It is against such that we would denounce in holy wrath the solemn sentence of divine indignation, and for such we would shed our bitterest tears of sorrow. They are "the enemies of the cross of Christ."

Now, for a moment, let me show you how it is that the wicked professor is the greatest enemy to Christ's church.

In the first place, *he grieves the church more than any one else*. If any man in the street were to pelt me with mud, I believe I should thank him for the honor, if I knew him to be a bad character, and knew that he hated me for righteousness sake. But if one who called himself a Christian should injure the cause with the filthiness of his own licentious behaviour: ah! that were more injurious than the stakes of Smithfield, or the racks of the Tower. The deepest sighs the Christian has ever heaved, have been fetched from him by carnal professors. I would not weep a tear if every man should curse me who was a hater of Christ; but when the professor forsakes Christ, and betrays his cause: ah! that indeed is grievous; and who is he that can keep back the tear on account of so vile a deed?

Again: *nothing divides the church more*. I have seen many divisions in journeying through the country, and I believe almost every division may be traced to a deficiency of piety on the part of some of the members. We should be more one, if it were not for cants that creep into our midst. We should be more loving to each other, more tenderhearted, more kind, but that these men, so deceptive, coming into our midst, render us suspicious. Moreover, they themselves find fault with those who walk worthily, in order to hide their own faults against God, and against justice. The greatest sorrows of the church have been brought upon her, not by the arrows shot by her foes, not by the discharge of the artillery of hell, but by fires lit in her own midst, by those who have crept into her in the guise of good men and true, but who were spies in the camp, and traitors to the cause.

Yet again: *nothing has ever hurt poor sinners more than this*. Many sinners coming to Christ would get relief far more quickly, if it were not for the ill lives of false professors. Now let me tell you a story, which I remember telling once before: it is a very solemn one; I hope to feel its power myself, and I pray that all of you may do the same. A young minister had been preaching in a country village, and the sermon apparently took deep effect on the minds of the hearers. In the congregation there was a young man who felt acutely the truth of the solemn words to which the preacher had given utterance. He sought the preacher after the service, and walked with him. On the road, the minister

talked of every subject except the one that had occupied his attention in the pulpit. The poor soul was under great distress, and he asked the minister a question or two, but they were put off very coolly, as if the matter was of no great importance. Arriving at the house, several friends were gathered together, and the preacher commenced very freely to crack his jokes, to utter his funny expressions, and to set the company in a roar of laughter. That, perhaps, might not have been so bad, had he not gone even farther, and uttered words which were utterly false, and verged upon the licentious. The young man suddenly rose from the table; and though he had wept under the sermon, and had been under the deepest apparent conviction, he rose up, went outside the door, and stamping his foot, said, "Religion is a lie! From this moment I abjure God, I abjure Christ; and if I am damned I will be damned, but I will lay the charge at that man's door, for he preached just now and made me weep, but now see what he is! He is a liar, and I will never hear him again." He carried out his threat; and some time afterwards, as he lay dying, he sent word to the minister that he wanted to see him. The minister had removed to a distant part, but had been brought there by providence, I believe, purposely to chasten him for the great sin he had committed. The minister stepped into the room with the Bible in his hand to do as he was accustomed—to read a chapter and to pray with the poor man. Turning his eyes on him, the man said, "Sir, I remember hearing you preach once." "Blessed be God," said the minister, "I thank God for it," thinking, no doubt, that he was a convert, and rejoicing over him. "Stop," said the man, "I do not know that there is much reason for thanking God, at any rate, on my part. Sir, do you remember preaching from such-and-such a text on such-and-such an evening?" "Yes, I do." "I trembled then, sir; I shook from head to foot; I left with the intention of bending the knee in prayer, and seeking God in Christ; but do you remember going to such-and-such a house, and what you said there!" "No," said the minister, "I cannot." "Well, then, I can tell you, and mark you! through what you said that night my soul is damned, and as true as I am a living man I will meet you at God's bar and lay it to your charge." The man then shut his eyes and died. I think you can scarcely imagine what must have been the feeling of that preacher as he retired from the bedside. He must carry with him always that horrid, that terrible incubus, that there was a soul in hell who laid his blood to his charge.

I am afraid there are some in the ranks of the church who have much guilt at their doors on this account. Many a young man has been driven from a solemn consideration of the truth by the harsh and censorious remarks of Scribes and Pharisees. Many a careful seeker has been prejudiced against sound doctrine by the evil lives of its professors. Ah! ye Scribes and Pharisees, ye enter not in yourselves, and them that would enter in ye hinder. Ye take the key of knowledge, lock up the door by your inconsistencies, and drive men away by your unholy living.

Again, they are "the enemies of the cross of Christ," because *they give the devil more theme for laughter*, and the enemy more cause for joy, than any other class of Christians. I do not care what all the infidel lecturers in the world like to say. They are very clever fellows, no doubt, and good need they have to be so, to prove an absurdity, and "make the worse appear the better reason;" but we care little what they say; they may say what they like against us that is false, but it is when they can say anything that is true about us that we do not like it. It is when they can find a real inconsistency in us, and then bring it to our charge, that they have got stuff to make lectures of. If a man be an upright Christian, he never need fear what others say of him; they will get but little fun out of him if he

leads a holy, blameless life; but let him be sometimes godly, and at other times ungodly, then he may grieve, for he has given the enemy cause to blaspheme by his unholy living. The devil gets much advantage over the church by the inconsistency of professors. It is when Satan makes hypocrites that he brings the great battering ram against the wall. "Your lives are not consistent"—ah! that is the greatest battering ram that Satan can use against the cause of Christ. Be particular, my dear friends, be very particular that you do not dishonour the cause you profess to love, by living in sin and walking in iniquity. And let me say a word to those of you who, like myself, are strong Calvinists. No class of persons is more maligned than we. It is commonly said that our doctrine is licentious; we are called Antinomians; we are cried down as *hypers*; we are reckoned the scum of creation; scarcely a minister looks on us or speaks favourably of us, because we hold strong views upon the divine sovereignty of God, and his divine electings and special love towards his own people. In many towns the legal ministers will tell you that there is a nasty nest of people there, who they say are Antinomians—such a queer set of creatures. Very likely, if a good minister enters the pulpit, when he has done his sermon, up comes some man and grasps his hand, and says, "Ah! brother, I am glad to see you down here; sixteen ounces to the pound to-day; our minister gives us nothing but milk and water." "Where do you go?" he asks. "Oh, I attend a little room where we labour to exalt free grace alone." "Ah! then you belong to that nasty set of Antinomians your minister was telling me of just now." Then you begin to talk with him, and you find that if he is an Antinomian you should very much like to be one yourself. Very possibly he is one of the most spiritual men in the village; he knows so much of God that he really cannot sit down under a legal ministry; he understands so much of free-grace that he is obliged to turn out or else he would be starved to death. It is common to cry down those who love God, or rather, who not only love God, but love all that God has said, and who hold the truth firmly. Let *us* then, not as Christians only, but as being a peculiar class of Christians, take care that we give no handle to the enemy, but that our lives are so consistent, that we do nothing to disgrace that cause which is dear to us as our lives, and which we hope to maintain faithfully unto death.

III. Lastly, Paul wept, **BECAUSE HE KNEW THEIR DOOM**: "Their end is destruction." Mark you, the end of a professing man who has been a hypocrite will be *emphatically destruction*. If there be chains in hell more heavy than others—if there be dungeons in hell more dark than others—if there be racks that shall more fearfully torment the frame—if there be fires that shall more tremendously scorch the body—if there be pangs that shall more effectually twist the soul in agonies, professing Christians must have them if they be found rotten at last, I had rather die a profligate than die a lying professor. I think I had rather die the veriest sweeping of the street than die a hypocrite. Oh, to have had a name to live, and yet to have proved insincere. The higher the soar, the greater the fall. This man has soared high; how low must he tumble when he finds himself mistaken! He who thought to put to his mouth the nectared cup of heaven, finds when he quaffs the bowl, that is the very draught of hell. He who hoped to enter through the gates into the city finds the gates shut, and he himself bidden to depart as an unknown stranger. Oh! how thrilling is that sentence, "Depart from me, I never knew you!" I think I had rather hear it said to me, "Depart, accursed, among the rest of the wicked," than to be singled out, and to have it said, after exclaiming, "Lord, Lord," "Depart from me; I know you not; though you ate and drank in my courts; though you came to my sanctuary,

you are a stranger to me, and I am a stranger to you." Such a doom, more horrible than hell, more direful than fate, more desperate than despair, must be the inevitable lot of those "whose god is their belly," who have "gloried in their shame," and "minded earthly things."

Now I dare say most of you will say, "Well, he has stirred the churches up to-night; if he has not spoken earnestly, he has spoken harshly, at any rate." "Ah!" says one, "I dare say it is very true; they are all a set of cants and hypocrites; I always thought so; I shall not go amongst them; none of them are genuine." Stop a bit, my friend, I did not say they were all so; I should be very wicked if I did. The very fact that there are hypocrites proves that all are not so. "How is that?" say you. Do you think there would be any bad bank notes in the world if there were no good ones? Do you think anyone would try and circulate bad sovereigns if there were no really good ones? No, I think not. It is the good bank note that makes the bad one, by prompting the wicked man to imitate it and produce a forgery. It is the very fact that there is gold in the world that makes another try to imitate the metal and so to cheat his neighbour. If there were no true Christians, there would be no hypocrites. It is the excellence of the Christian character that makes men seek after it, and because they have not the real heart of oak, they try to grain their lives to look like it. Because they have not the real solid metal, they try to gild themselves to imitate it. You must have a few brains left, and those are enough to tell you that if there be hypocrites, there must be some who are genuine. "Ah!" says another, "quite right; there are many genuine ones, and I can tell you, whatever you may think, I am genuine enough. I never had a doubt or fear. I know I was chosen of God; and though I do not exactly live as I could wish, I know if I do not go to heaven, very few will ever have a chance. Why, sir, I have been a deacon the last ten years, and a member twenty; and I am not to be shaken by anything you say. As for my neighbour there, who sits near me, I do not think he ought to be so sure; but I have never had a doubt for thirty years." Oh my dear friend, can you excuse me? *I will doubt for you.* If you had not doubt yourself, I begin to doubt. If you are quite so sure, I really must suspect you; for I have noticed that true Christians are the most suspicious in the world; they are always afraid of themselves. I never met with a truly good man but he always felt he was not good enough; and as you are so particularly good, you must excuse me if I cannot quite endorse your security. You may be very good, but if you will take a trifle of my advice, I recommend you to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith," lest, being puffed up by your carnal fleshly mind, you fall into the snare of the wicked one. "Not too sure," is a very good motto for the Christian. "Make your calling and election sure," if you like; but do not make your opinion of yourself so sure. Take care of presumption. Many a good man in his own esteem has been a very devil in God's eyes; many a pious soul in the esteem of the church has been nothing but rottenness in the esteem of God. Let us then try ourselves. Let us say, "Search us, O God, and try our hearts; see if there be any wicked way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting." If you shall be sent home with such a thought, I shall bless God that the sermon was not altogether in vain. But there are some here who say that it does not matter whether they are in Christ or no. They intend to go on trifling still, despising God, and laughing at his name. Mark this, sinner: The cry that does for one day won't do for ever; and thou you talk of religion now as if it were a mere trifle, mark ye men, you will want it by-and-bye. You are on board ship, and you laugh at the lifeboat, because there is no storm; you will be glad enough to leap into it if you are able when the storm shall

come. Now you say Christ is nothing, because you do not want him, but when the storm of vengeance comes, and death lays hold upon you, mark me, you will howl after Christ, though you will not pray for him now; you will shriek after him then, though you will not call for him now. "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, O house of Israel." The Lord bring you to himself, and make you his true and genuine children, that you may not know destruction, but that you may be saved now, and saved for ever!

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