

A HOME QUESTION AND A RIGHT ANSWER

"From that time many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will you, also, go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

John 6:66-69

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, we believe that the righteous shall hold on his way and he that has clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger. We also believe that he that believes in Christ "has everlasting life" and, consequently, must live forever. The living water which Christ gives a man shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. Our Lord has said of His sheep that they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of His hands. Yet we know that if any man draws back, the Lord will have no pleasure in him, and we are sure that, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Therefore we very heartily sing the verse in one of our hymns—

*"We have no fear that You should lose
One whom eternal love could choose;
But we would never this Grace abuse,
Let us not fall! Let us not fall!"*

We consider that it would be an abusing of this Grace if we were to grow careless, presumptuous, high-minded and imagine that for ourselves, personally, it would not be possible to become apostates, or even to turn aside a little from the right way. We believe the Truth of God of the Final Perseverance of the Saints concerning the true people of God, but the question comes to our heart, Are we such? Is there in us the incorruptible Seed which lives and abides forever? And how are we to know that we are such but by this very perseverance which, while it is an effect of Grace, is also one of the most certain tokens of it, for there is not the true Grace of God in the heart where there is no perseverance in Grace even unto the end.

"He that endures to the end shall be saved." But what if we should only have the transient gleams of temporary illumination and should relapse into a thick Egyptian night? Here is cause enough for holy fear! Come, then, Brothers and Sisters, trusting in the Immutable Grace and love and power of God, let each man, nevertheless, examine himself and let this be a time of heart-searching. Say not this is out of place when we are just gathering around the table of the Lord, for is it not written, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread"? Let us get ready to come to the festival of our Lord's Supper by putting our Lord's question, each one to His own heart, and trying to answer it by the help of God's own Spirit.

First, the reason for the question—Why did Christ ask of the twelve, "Will you, also, go away?" Then, secondly, the question itself. And, thirdly, the answer which Peter most fitly gave to it, which, I doubt not, he gave in the name and on the behalf of all his Brothers. The same reply we would also give tonight— "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

1. First, then, WHY DID THE SAVIOR ASK THE TWELVE THIS QUESTION? He would not have caused them needless pain. He had a wise reason for trying them with such an enquiry. It was, first, because it was a season of defection. "From that time many went back and walked no more with Him." You will find, I think, that in all Churches there are times of flocking in, when many fly to the Church like doves to their windows. But happy is that Church which never has a time of flying out, when numbers who have been tested, fail, and are no more to be found. Churches have summers, like our gardens, and then all things are full. But then come their winters and, alas, what emptying is seen!

Have we not all seen the flood when the tide has come up far upon the beach? And have we not all marked the ebb when every wave has seemed to fall short of that which preceded it? Such ebbs and floods there are in the history of the Kingdom of Christ. One day, "The kingdom of God suffers violence and every man presses into it." At another time men seem to be ashamed of the Christian faith and they wander off into a thousand delusions—and the Church is diminished and brought low by heresy, by worldliness, by lukewarmness and by all sorts of evils.

Often may the chronicle run thus—"Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled." It is right, then, at times when those that did run well are hindered, that the Master should say to those who, for a while, remain steadfast, "Will you, also, go away?" Ah, dear Friends, some of you are very steadfast now while this Church flourishes—how would you be if the pastor were dead, or his name in ill-repute? How would you be if the attendance on the means of Grace grew slack? How would you be if there was a decline in all the work of the Church? Have you backbone enough in you to be faithful if all others were faithless? Is there the real grit about you? Could you dare to be Daniels and, "dare to stand alone"? Can you fight a losing battle? Can you stand in the gap and be the last of a few heroic men who will defend the pass against all comers?

Alas, what numbers swim with the tide! How few can swim against the current! How readily are men seized with panic and run for it with might and main if they see others hastening from the battle. How few can hold the bridge like Horatius in the brave days of old! Well may the Savior ask the question of us tonight, for we are as frail and fickle as others! Well may He ask it now, for worse times than these may be drawing near—"Will you, also, go away?" It was a time, too, of defection among disciples. I call your attention to the use of that word here. "From that time many of His disciples went back." Disciples? Yes, not merely camp-followers! Not the mob that hung upon His skirts for the sake of the loaves and fishes, but some of His disciples went back—those of nobler spirit, who had listened to His words and, for a while had professed to call Him, "Master and Lord"

Even some of these deserted the standard. Their name remains—they are called "disciples," still, though they have gone back! And this sets forth the grievous guilt of such men and women as enter into the Church and then, after a while, turn aside to false doctrine or to sin. They depart with their Prince's uniform upon their backs and carry the livery of Christ into the service of Satan! The stamp of a disciple is upon each of them, still, though they are renegades and perverts! They will be judged as having been what they professed to be—and heavy will be their sentence as apostates. We read of "Simon, the leper." He is called, "the leper" after He had been healed. Here, on the other hand, are some who bear their good name even after their villainy has been discovered—and this helps to make their treachery the more glaring.

Just as the name, "harlot," stuck to Rahab after she had become an honest woman and a Believer, so does a good name stick to one after it has ceased to be true—and it remains as a reminder of their fearful folly. Go and live down Turncoat Lane. Hide yourself away as much as you can, but whenever you come into the street, if they do not say it to your face, the neighbors will whisper behind your back, "There goes one who was a disciple. There is one who professed to be a follower of Christ, but he has turned his back upon his Lord." The memory of your profession will stick to you through life! It will stick to you throughout eternity! If you are a wolf in sheep's clothing, some flecks of the wool will hang about you long after you have dragged the fleece over your head. Damnable apostate shall be your brand, even when you are cast away from the face of God forever! Oh, that none of us might ever earn such a title, by being reckoned among the disciples

that went back and walked no more with Jesus! Yet, when disciples fall away, it is time to ask other disciples, “Will you, also, go away?”

The defection in this case was on account of doctrine. Our Savior had done nothing that could vex His followers; He had not even spoken sharply to His disciples. Far from it. He had simply preached the glorious Truth of God that He is the Food of the new-born life. But this they did not understand and so they would listen no further and would not stay to ask an explanation. They went back at once, as if horrified at what they heard. The Truth was too hard for them; it was not to be borne with. “It is a hard saying. Who can bear it?” A true disciple sits at the feet of his Master and believes what he is told even when he cannot quite comprehend the meaning, or see the reasons for what his Master utters. But these men had not the essential spirit of a disciple and, consequently, when their Instructor began to unfold the innermost parts of the roll of Truth, they would not listen to His reading of it.

They would believe as far as they could understand, but when they could not comprehend, they turned on their heels and left the school of the Great Teacher. Besides, the Lord Jesus Christ had taught the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God and of the need of the Spirit of God, that men should be led to Him, “for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him. And He said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto Him of my Father.” Here our Lord uttered a bit of the old-fashioned doctrine of Free Grace, such as people nowadays do not like. They call it, “Calvinism,” and put it aside among the old exploded tenets which this enlightened age knows nothing of!

What right they have to ascribe to the Genevan reformer a doctrine old as the hills I do not know! But our Lord Jesus never hesitated to fling that Truth of God into the face of His enemies! He told them, “You believe not, because you are not of My sheep, as I said unto you.” No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw Him.” Here He tells them plainly that they could not come unto Him unless the Father gave them the Grace to come! This humbling doctrine they could not receive and so they went aside. Now, when the Truth of God, itself, becomes a stumbling block—when the Gospel, itself, which ought to draw men to Heaven becomes the reason why they go back—it is time for us to suspect ourselves and to—

*“Think we hear the Savior say,
Will you forsake Me too?”*

“Will not you, also, be staggered? Will not some Truth stumble you? Will not some mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven make you, also, to be scandalized?” Blessed is the man that is not offended in Christ! Happy is he who lays aside his own wisdom to be taught of the Lord!

Further, it is worthy of notice that this question was put because many were not only going away from Christ, but they were going back. Read the words. They, “went back and walked no more with Him.” They did not go off to the right or to the left, making some slight departure from the straight road, but they turned deliberately around and went back, reversing their course and retracing their steps. Of course, in consequence of this, they were very soon what they used to be! The reclaimed drunk went back to his cups—the cups were soon full, again, and he was soon wallowing in drink, like a sow in the mire. The man who had lived a lascivious life and, for a time, had cast it off to put on the garb of morality, went back. And you saw him once again in the house of the strange woman. “The dog has returned to his vomit.”

The reformed liar was again false. The thief was again pilfering. The swearer was again profane. They went back, like Pliable, who quit the Pilgrim Road and returned to the City of Destruction. Now, it is really a dreadful thing, when men have seen the folly of their lives and have come out of it, for them to go back to their former habits. Well said the Prophet, “Let them not turn, again, to folly.” But, alas, these burned children ran to the fire, again! The silly moths made another dash at the candle! They were well-nigh escaped, but they plunged, again, into the flood of iniquity! What is to become of them? Is not this the fear—that their last end shall be terrible because of the violence done to conscience and to the Word of the Lord?

The evil spirit went out of them and took his walks abroad. But soon he went back, again, and found the house empty, swept and garnished! He, therefore, takes unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself and the last end of that man will be worse than the first! I should not have believed it, though a man had declared it to me, that such a one could go back, for he seemed so sick of sin, so wearied with its bondage! I could imagine that he might step aside under a strong temptation, but to go back—how can that be? Why, this is the man who was converted from drunkenness and delivered temperance lectures! Is he a drunk, again? This is the man that had clean escaped from his former filthiness and warned others! Is he wallowing in lust, again? What fools!

What a multitude of fools in one is such a man! If his course was wise, why did he leave it? And if it were wise to leave it, why has he gone back to it? If it is right to go back to it, why did he not always continue in it? For this unmitigated folly, his blood will be upon his own head! But when we see rational men act thus, even men of whom we hoped better things, we need not be surprised that we, also, are put to a stand with the personal question, “Will you, also, go away?” In the case before us, the defection from Christ was open defection, for we read, “They went back, and walked no more with Him.” They once walked with Jesus in the public streets, but now they will have no more to do with Christ.

When Jesus preached—these constant hearers—where were they? When He worked a miracle—these admiring lookers-on—where were they? They had ministered to Him of their substance—no more supplies come from them. They had often asked Him to explain the Word when He had spoken in public—they desire no more secret interviews. They had asked Him, also, to teach them how to pray. But they no longer care to be found upon their knees. They are not hypocrites enough to keep step with Him when their hearts are not with Him. They are, at least, decent enough to walk no more with Him, now that they have gone back to their sins!

Alas, we know some that used to walk with Christ who, at this time, walk no more with His people, for their hearts have gone away from Christ. The Sabbath is ignored. The House of God is forsaken. The Bible is put away; prayer is a thing neglected and, perhaps, despised! They walk no more with Christ, for they prefer a broader or a smoother road. If anybody mentions to them what they used to be, they slink away and seem to say, “Never mention it again! We wish it to be ignored.” I remember a household where the sons and daughters all professed to be converted to Christ, but some of the young people were fond of amusements that were not consistent with the profession of religion and, when they were found in such engagements, what did they do? Why, they blushed a little, but, by-and-by, they boldly declared that they had never been converted—that they were forced into it by persuasion and hurried on by excitement to do that which their better sense led them to regret!

Their excuse was as false as their former profession! They knew that they acted of their own accord and that they willingly professed Christ. Alas, just as willingly, when they came in the way of temptation, they forsook Him! Ah, Apostate, it is all very well to say that you were persuaded and all that—but you know that you did deliberately confess your faith, or you would never have been baptized by us! You did deliberately seek membership with the Church of God, or you would not have been received! And on yourself must be the responsibility of it! If you have gone back from Christ, you must bear the shame in time and eternity!

But when any do thus openly sever themselves from the companionship of the Crucified One, well may the question pass from heart to heart, “Will you, also, go away?” Thus have I introduced the question by giving the reason for it.

II. Now, THE QUESTION ITSELF. The Master pressed it upon the disciples—“Will you, also, go away?” He might well press the question, for one of them would certainly do so. He said, “I have chosen you twelve!” Not many—just twelve. “I have chosen you.” A very prudent Chooser—much better able to judge than any of His ministers. “I have chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil.” Are our pastors and elders likely to make a better selection? Is it likely that the percentage of deceit is less among us than in the Apostolic college?

I would not like to say—it would be wrong to say—that one out of every 12 of Church members is a Judas. What right have I to say it? But if I were called upon to depose that I am certain that they are not, I dare not make so bold an assertion! I fear that the average of mankind in any place would, in all probability, be much the same as in our Lord's day—and possibly there may be a worse state of things in London than in Judea and Galilee. Still, if we conceive our case to be improved, yet a measure of danger exists. Is it true in the case of only one member of this Church that he will betray Christ? If it is, then let the question begin at the pulpit and go round to the youngest member, "Lord, is it I?"—a question suitable for this Table, for at this Table of fellowship it was asked by every one of the 12, "Lord, is it I?"

Certainly, some among us—some one among us—will deny or sell his Master. God grant it be not I! Let each one breathe that prayer! Besides, the Master knew that all of them might do so. All of them might go away from Him—apart from His Grace, indeed, all of them would! There stood Peter, this very Peter who gave such a bold answer to the question—and the Master knew that there was enough in Peter to have made him as faithless as Judas if it had not been for His upholding Grace! Ah, Brothers and Sisters, when we see others fall, today, let us say, "It may be my case tomorrow!" Is there not the same heart, the same nature, the same tendency to sin? Have we not the same weakness? Are we not exposed to the same temptations?

Is there not the same devil craftily searching out our infirmities, that he may work upon them? Are we not all in danger? I fear that he is especially in jeopardy who will say, tonight, "I am a man of experience. I am out of harm's way." If there is a Brother among us who says, "These warnings are not meant for me," he is probably the man who will disgrace that holy name by which he is named. If there is a deacon, an elder, a gray-headed Christian man, a venerable, believing woman, who shall be saying, "I have nothing to fear from temptation. I have passed out of the realm of caution and watchfulness," I stand in doubt of such! Confident Friend, I fear that you are the man! This carnal confidence, this proud presumption as to yourself should be a caution to you, for these things are the smoke which denote a smoldering fire!

"Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." The Master put the question because He knew that it ought to come home to every heart among the twelve. Moreover, He put the question to them because if they turned aside it would be especially sad. I do not read that Jesus said anything about those that had already gone back. He alludes to them by the use of the word, "also," but He does not seem to have ran after them to beg them to return. He knew what they were and knew that they were best apart from Him. When the chaff was blown away, it was only the fulfillment of John the Baptist's words, "His fan is in His hand and He shall thoroughly purge His floor," so He suffered the chaff to go to its own place. But when the Master looked at the 12, then He said with holy care and anxiety, "Will you? Will you, also, go away?" As much as to say, "If you go away, who have been with Me from the beginning, who have been chosen by me to be eyewitnesses of My life. If you that have been near My inmost heart and shared My trials and My joys—if you go away it will be sin, indeed."

Friends, if any of us turn aside, what excuse shall be made for us? I say deliberately that if I go away from my Master I can expect nothing but the hottest wrath of God forever! Unhappy, unhappy wretch, to have preached to such multitudes, if I deny my Lord! Condemned out of my own mouth a thousand times over! I shall be a mark for all the arrows of vengeance. And what shall I say of my Brothers behind me, the deacons and elders of this Church? If they go away from Christ and forsake Him after their brave professions, who shall apologize for them? Many here are marked men and women! Your experience of Christ has been long, sweet, deep, remarkable—and you have spoken of it to others with much confidence and delight. If you go away, you will deserve to be hung up like Haman, on the gallows, fifty cubits high—an exhibition of direct treachery and a monument of the awful wrath of God against such as trample on the blood of Christ!

You will be sinners above all the sinners of yours time! Oh, may it never be, for if one of the 12 shall do it, it will be the greatest sin of all! It will grieve the heart of the Master! It will open the mouths of blasphemers. It will afflict the saints. It will disgrace the apostates and bring down upon them infinite condemnation! And yet, do you know, when others are turning aside, the question has to be asked, for apostasy is very contagious. We are called sheep and it is of the

nature of sheep that if one goes right, the next will follow. But if they meet with a gap in the hedge and one leaps through it, they will all follow the same road! When backsliding and apostasy become fashionable, you may ask, even the 12, "Will you, also, go away?"

As I have seen, in my short experience, minister after minister turning aside to novelties of doctrine and especially into the deep pit of "modern thought"—into which the abhorred of the Lord fall—I have thought of one and of another, "Will you, also, go away?" As men that I have spoken with, prayed with and trusted in have, one by one, apostatized from the faith of God's elect, I have been staggered and astounded! Surely this fashionable sin has a fascinating influence over many minds and would delude, if it were possible, the very elect! How few stand to the landmarks in this age of wandering! How few are found approved in the day of trial! The question is one that must of necessity be pressed home, "Will you, also, go away?"

And, to conclude this part of our subject, our Savior, I think, asks the question because He wishes His following to be always perfectly voluntary. We sometimes speak of "the sweet compulsions of Grace." But let it be always understood that this is by way of metaphor and figure, for none can truly walk with Jesus unwillingly. The lack of will would be fatal! There is an influence which the Grace of God exerts upon the will, by which the unrenewed will is led captive, and yet as soon as it is renewed, will it becomes emphatically free. It ceases to be a will if it has no determining power—the Grace of God gives it that power to a high degree.

Those who truly follow Christ do not follow Him because they are forced to do so. Grace has no slaves. It rules a Kingdom to which the Son has given true liberty! Christians are not dragged after Christ. They yield most sweetly to the charms of His love, to the force of the Truths of God which He teaches and the love which He manifests. They gladly serve their Lord and Master. Jesus seems to say, "If you do not serve Me so, you may go." Will you go? Christ does not need anybody to profess to be a Christian who does not wish to be a Christian. He does not need one to come to this Table because he thinks it to be a Light of God or a custom, by which he is bound! He wants you to come because you delight to do so.

He does not desire any minister to preach the Gospel because he is paid for it, or because he would lose face among godly people if he did not. He needs no slaves to grace His Throne. The very charm of obedience is that it is rendered cheerfully. The very bliss of Christ's service is that we voluntarily, with all our heart and soul, take up his Cross and follow Him. I am not denying the compulsions of Grace. I am only saying that they are perfectly consistent with the absolute freedom of the gracious will! God treats men as men and not as heaps of brick and mortar. His Grace displays itself in converting and changing them as men that have wills—not as logs of wood which Solomon may cut and plane in the mountains without their consent.

No, no! If you will to go, go! But if your will is to cling to Him, then will He give you Grace to follow Him, even to the end. I do not know whether I impress my congregation with a sense of the importance of the Truths of God I am trying to press home, but I feel them myself. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, it is a very easy thing to gather a crowd of people—the difficulty is to hold together, year after year, those that profess to be converted! There is a constant winnowing going on in all Churches and this drives away the light and chaffy ones. There is a fan at work upon this floor! Some stay, year after year, and yet turn out to be of no account. The Lord goes on sifting, but certain of the chaff do not blow off at first because, perhaps, the wheat is lying on top of it—there is a good wife or holy mother or a godly husband that keeps the doubtful ones right. When these are taken away, the next blast of the winnowing fan sweeps that bit of chaff away.

Oh, be not as the chaff, which is covered up and so hidden among the wheat! Turn not aside, I pray you! The Lord keep you. I shall reckon it to be a privilege to bury you rather than have to erase your name from our Church roll for conduct inconsistent with your profession! May you gather around my corpse, when God pleases to let me go Home, and may you say, "He lived an honorable life and died faithful to His Lord." Yes, let that gathering be before another Sabbath dawns, if God so wills, rather than that I should live to dishonor the precious Truths of God which I have preached, and turn aside from the Master whom I profess to love!

What I say to myself I think I hear each one of you say to himself or herself, "Better far that we die than that we deny our Lord."

III. I shall close with my third head and consider THE ANSWER WHICH QUICK-VOICED PETER GAVE—the answer which I hope we are prepared to give to our Divine Leader, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is threefold. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" This is the first answer. Observe that Peter does not appear to think it possible, or think it less than abominable, for a man to go back—for the natural answer to Peter's question, "To whom shall we go?" is, "Go back?" No, but Peter does not tolerate the idea of going back.

I ask you, my beloved Brother in Christ, can you tolerate it? Can you? Can you? I might address myself to a Brother who was once among the profane and the drunken, who is now among the most earnest of us. And I might ask him—Brother, would you go back? I am sure that the thought of the rack would be more pleasant than the idea of returning to his old haunts! I might address myself to another who was fond of every form of gaiety, spending his money for that which was not bread, and his labor for that which did not satisfy him—he will be found among us tonight, happiest among the happy in the service of his Master, and I enquire of him—Brother, will you go back? Would you like to enjoy all your gay life again? It would be death to you.

Suppose that any of us who know the joy of being Christ's could have it proposed to us to go back—suppose we were not immoral, but were everything that could be desired in our outward conduct—would we like to go back to that dead morality which had no life of faith nor light of hope about it? No! No! When Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress thought about going back, he remembered that he had no armor for his back. He had a breastplate. He was covered from head to foot by his shield—but there was nothing to protect his back and, therefore, if he retreated, the adversary could split him with a javelin in a moment! So he thought that, bad as it was to go forward, it would be worse to go backward and, therefore, he bravely cut a path for himself straight onward for Glory!

Look at that fact whenever you are tempted! Do not endure the idea of turning tail in the day of battle! May retreat be impossible to you. God make it impossible by His Grace! But then to whom should we go? I was ruminating in my mind the other day—

*"Could I so false, so faithless prove
To quit Your service and Your love,
Where, Lord, could I, Your Presence shun,
Or from Your dreadful Glory run?"*

Where could I retire if I would avoid my lifework and cease witnessing for Jesus? If I were on board ship and a storm came, the sailors would say, "He is the Jonah." I know they would! If I forsook my God and His cause, the lowest and meanest would point at me as a turncoat. If I were to cross the western continent and hide away in the back settlements, it is 10 to one that if I went into the most remote log cabin, somebody would spy me out, and say, "Why, you are the man whose sermons I read in our newspapers. Why are you here?"

In the loneliest spots on earth, where men speak the English tongue, my own sermons would serve as a hue and cry, if not as a writ of arrest. I should be sure to hear the question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" and how could I answer? Where could I go? No hiding place remains for me! I must serve God forever. So is it with you in a degree, dear Friends. You cannot get away from Jesus. You that are disciples have committed yourselves to Christ. There is nowhere for you to go. Suppose you were to try infidelity. You know too much. You have felt too much. Unbelief would not ease you, whatever it may do with others. Be a free-thinker? Well, you are made of the wrong stuff for that—your conscience would trouble you. Suppose you became a Romanist? Would forms and ceremonies content you? No! Of all the people in the world that cannot be Romanists, commend me to Baptists!

A few have joined the church of Rome—so few that I never knew but one. You cannot convert these dreadful Anabaptists! They are too positive and too much accustomed to prefer their own judgment to the directions of a ghostly father in Rome! My Brothers and Sisters, I do not know where you could go if you leave Jesus and the Truth of God. You can go down to the bottomless pit, if you will, but you will have no rest there, for the lost ones will cry, “Have you come here? Why, you were at the Lord’s Table, were you not? You are the people that used to give away tracts. Did we not hear you preach at the corner of the streets?” It will be an uneasy thing for you to be lost, I tell you, Sirs, 10 times worse than for others, for the hiss of those who never professed religion will follow you throughout eternity—and their words will burn like coals of juniper when they cry, “Hypocrite! Apostate! You knew the Truth and did it not!”

There is nowhere else for us to go. If we are weary of our Master, we cannot get another—where can we find another so good as He is? Shall we go back, or shall we get right with Him? Let us go at once and tell Him how foolish we have been. Let us beg Him to keep us in His House. “Dismiss me not from Your service, Lord.” I am not worthy, even, to unloose the laces of Your shoes, but let me be Your servant, for whom else can I serve? How else can I live? What other joy remains for me but to do something for Your blessed name?

But then Peter gave a second answer. He said to our Lord, “You have the words of eternal life,” as much as to say, “We cannot go away from You, good Master, when we think of eternity.” Oh, eternity! Eternity! Those who, for a little wealth, or to escape a foolish laugh, shall turn aside from Christ—what will they do in eternity? Those who, to be thought respectable, or to be considered clever, shall renounce the simple Gospel of Christ—what will they do in eternity? Christ, alone, can give eternal life, or life for eternity! Apart from Him we are cast out as dead. The unbelievers shall be banished forever from the Presence of God and the Glory of His power, for, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Brothers and Sisters, we believe that there is salvation in Christ and nowhere else. How can we leave Him, then?

We know and are sure that His Word has already put the immortal life into us, for we feel it pulsing within our being! We sometimes see glimmerings of the eternal day into which the Light of God we have is sure to develop—and we are certain that the Lord has given us eternal life by His Word. How, then, can we forsake Him? Bind us, Savior—bind us to Yourself! Come, brand us with the Cross! Let us bear in our body Your mark! Some of us wear the watermark upon our whole body. Our seal of the Covenant is not on some one portion of our frame, but we have been immersed into Your name and from head to foot we are Yours. We cannot undo the fact that we were buried with You by Baptism unto death. Yours by that outward sign, but yet much more Yours by the inward Grace which You have given, by which You have made us dead to the world, dead to self and quickened us unto eternal life in Yourself.

There are two ties, then, to hold us. The one is that we have nowhere else to go. And the second is that we have no life apart from Christ. The third holdfast is this—“We believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you. “Have you learned, dear Brothers and Sisters, that Christ is truly the Messiah, the Son of the Father? Do you believe it? And, more than that, do you both believe and know that Christ is also the Son of the Highest? How can we leave Him? Has God sent Him and shall we forsake Him? Is He God and shall we desert Him? No, good Master, at Your feet we fall and to those feet we cling! We humbly resolve, by Your good Spirit’s power to abide in You. Savior, we will be Yours forever!

You may speak this very boldly if you speak it in the confidence of Grace, for, Brothers and Sisters, “Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” What torments the saints have endured from their persecutors and how ineffectual have been the assaults of their foes to separate them from Christ! If we are really one with Christ, Satan can no more tear us away from Jesus than he could tear away Paul or John! These saints had no more power of their own than we have—they derived everything from Christ—and we do the same. Think of how the martyrs have been scourged and even flayed alive—and yet have cried out—“None but Christ!” They have been tied to the tails of horses and dragged to death, but never a thought of apostatizing has occurred to them.

In those early days men, women and children crowded the tribunals till the judges grew weary of their bloody task. The persecutors devised all kinds of tortures, such as I scarcely dare mention, but the saints of God triumphed over all their torments! Fierce was the duel between the infernal cruelty of Roman paganism and the splendor of God within the souls of faithful men and women! Look even later down at our own Marian persecutions—when Smithfield was all aglow with the death of the saints—how gloriously Believers defeated their adversaries!

We read of a holy woman, bearing a child in prison, crying out in labor and her tormentors exultingly demanded, “If you cannot bear these pangs, how will you bear to be burnt alive in a few days' time?” She replied, “You see in me, who am a woman, the feebleness of nature. But wait till the day comes and you shall see in me, who am a member of the body of Christ, the strength of Grace, for I shall never start or cry when I am burning for Christ!” And they took note that she never flinched, or winced, or cried, or stirred, but quick to the death she burned in her confession of her Lord! Oh, it was amazing! It was amazing! Christ laughed at His mightiest enemies, but His Spirit rested upon His poor, feeble saints and strengthened them so that they were more than conquerors!

Think of Ann Askew, whom I often quote—our own Ann Askew—sitting up after they had racked her till every bone was dragged from its fellow and still defending the faith against the Romish shavelings! O that we had the same Grace! We shall have it when the trial comes, for “the Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” If Jesus is, indeed, the Anointed of the Lord, He will anoint us in the hour of need! And because we believe and are sure that it is even so, we are bold to say in His strength, “No, Lord, we will never leave You! Though all men shall forsake You, yet we will not.” By Your faithfulness, O Lord, keep us faithful! Amen.