

MISTAKES INTO WHICH INQUIRERS ARE APT TO FALL

John Angell James

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IN an affair of such tremendous consequence as the salvation of the soul, it is important that every error of any moment into which inquirers are in danger of falling should be clearly pointed out to them. Satan is called the father of lies, and when his delusive influence is added to the natural deceitfulness of the human heart, the danger of mistake is great indeed. Our caution against errors should of course be in proportion to the importance of the consequences they draw after them. Oh how awful is the idea of committing a fundamental error in religious matters, and persevering in that error till death; we shall then have eternity to deplore it, but never a moment to correct. Oh how dreadful to die and find ourselves mistaken as to our character and destiny. But even where the error is not of so serious a nature, it may still be the source of much disquietude.

1. The first error, and it is both a very common and a very dreadful one, which inquirers are in danger of committing, is, **to mistake knowledge, impression, and partial reformation, for genuine conversion.** In this day of prevailing evangelical preaching and religious instruction, where there is no persecution to try men's sincerity, and even much credit attaching to a profession of religion, there is most imminent danger of self-delusion. The preaching of the present day is of an exciting and impressive character, which, added to the tendency of a religious education to give knowledge, is very likely to produce a state of feeling that may be mistaken for conversion. Ignorant friends, anxious parents, and even injudicious ministers, who are too eager to swell the number of their communicants, upon perceiving a little impression of mind and a little alteration of conduct in young people, or in others, may express a favorable opinion of their conversion, flatter them into a belief that they are safe, engage them too hastily to make a public profession of religion, and receive the Lord's supper, while at the same time, perhaps, the great change has never been wrought; and thus the soul is in all probability sealed up in delusion to eternal perdition. Nothing can now awaken them; for although their impressions die away, and they become almost as careless and as worldly as ever, and live under the dominion of sin; yet they have made a profession of religion, have been led to believe they are Christians, and therefore repress every rising fear, and stifle every incipient alarm. Fatal case, and it is the case of multitudes.

It may be worth while to set before you how far persons may go, and not be really converted. They may have many and deep impressions, many and strong convictions; they may have much knowledge of their sinful state, and a heavy and burdensome sense of their guilt; they may look back upon their past life and conduct with much remorse; they may be sorry for their sins, and may desire to be saved from the consequences of them, being much alarmed at the prospect of the torments of Hell. Was not Judas convinced of sin, and did he not weep bitterly and confess his sin, and was he not filled with remorse? Was not Cain convinced of sin? I have known many persons who at one time appeared to be more deeply impressed with a sense of sin, and to have stronger convictions and remorse than those who were truly converted, and yet they went back again to the world and sin.

Nor is a **detestation of sin** always a true sign of conversion. Hazeel, before he was king of Syria, detested those very crimes which he afterwards perpetrated in the fulness of his pride and power. Unconverted persons may even wish to be delivered from the fetters of those corrupt lusts which have long held them fast. There are few notorious sinners who do not frequently hate their sins, and wish and purpose to reform. Yea, persons may sometimes desire to be delivered from all sin; at least, they may desire it in a certain way, because they think that it is necessary in order to be saved from Hell.

And as conviction of sin may exist without conversion, **so may religious joy**. The stony ground hearers heard the word, and with joy received it; and yet they had no root in themselves, and endured only for a while. Matt.13:20,21. The Galatians had great blessedness at one time, which the apostle was afraid had come to nothing, Gal.4:15. Multitudes rejoiced in Christ when He made His entrance into Jerusalem, who afterwards became His enemies. A person may admire the people of God, and covet to be of their number, as Balaam did, and yet not really belong to them. Many take great pleasure in hearing sermons, and going to prayer-meetings, and singing hymns, and frequenting missionary and other public meetings, who are not truly born of the Spirit.

So also do many persons **leave off sinful actions**, and give up many wicked practices, and seem to be quite altered for a time, who yet, by their subsequent history, show that they are not converted. There may be considerable zeal for the outward concerns of religion, as we see in Jehu, without any right state of mind towards God. Many have had great confidence of the reality of their conversion – they have had dreams, impressions, and an inward witness, as they suppose – who too plainly proved by their after conduct that they were under an awful delusion. But it would be almost endless to point out the various ways in which men deceive themselves as to their state. Millions who have been somewhat, yea, much concerned about religion, have never been born again of the Spirit. Perhaps more are lost by self-deception than by any other means. Hell resounds with the groans and lamentations of souls that perished through the power of a deceived heart.

Do, do examine yourself. Exercise godly jealousy over your own state. Never forget that nothing short of the new birth will save you. *"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven,"* John 3:5. *"If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new,"* II Cor.5:17. The **heart must be changed**, entirely changed. We must be renewed in the spirit of our mind. There must be a superhuman, a divine, a total alteration of disposition. Our views and tastes, our pains and pleasures, hopes and fears, desires and pursuits, must be changed. We must be brought to love God supremely for His holiness and justice, as well as for His mercy and love in Christ – to delight in Him for His transcendent glory, as well as for His rich grace; we must have a perception of the beauties of holiness, and love divine things for their own excellence; we must mourn for sin, and hate it for its own evil nature, as well as its dreadful punishment; we must feel delight in the salvation of Christ, not only because it delivers us from Hell, but makes us like God, and all this in a way that honors and glorifies Jehovah; we must be made partakers of true humility and universal love, and feel ourselves brought to be of one mind with God in willing and delighting in the happiness of others; we must be brought to feel an identity of heart with God's cause, and to regard it as our honor and happiness to do any thing to promote the glory of Christ in the salvation of sinners; we must

feel a longing desire, a hungering and thirsting after holiness, as well as a disposition to put away all sin, however gainful or pleasant; we must have a tender conscience that shrinks from, and watches against little sins, secret faults, and sins of neglect and omission, as well as great and scandalous offences; we must love the people of God for God's sake, because they belong to Him and are like Him; we must practise the self-denying duty of mortification of sin, as well as engage in the pleasing exercises of religion. This is to be born again; **it is no mere transient impression upon the imagination, but it is a permanent renewal of the disposition; it is not an occasional impulse, but an abiding character:** the subject of it may not be violently agitated, but he is lastingly altered; his passions may not be powerfully moved, but his principles, tastes, and pursuits are engaged on the side of true holiness. He is now a spiritual man, whereas he was a carnal one, and all things are by him spiritually discerned. Nothing short of this entire change of heart, this complete renovation, must satisfy you; for nothing less than such a view of Christ in His glorious mediatorial character, and such a dependence by faith upon His blood and righteousness for salvation, as changes the whole heart and temper and conduct, and throws the world as it were into the background, and makes glory hereafter, and holiness now, the supreme concern, is religion.

2. Inquirers are often in error on the subject of their immediate obligation to believe, and go to Christ; and are **waiting**, as they say, **for a day of power** at the pool of ordinances. They are seeking and praying, but they have no idea that it is their present duty, without waiting another hour, to give themselves to Christ. They are expecting some sensible impression or impulse upon their mind to make known to them when it is their duty to believe, and also enable them to believe. They suppose it will be made clear to them, as it was to the cripples by the troubling of the waters, that they are no longer to wait, but then to descend into the pool of salvation.

Now this is a most grievous and injurious error, and keeps many minds for a long period in great distress, and actually **prevents some from coming to Christ at all**. I must first tell you, that it is an unwarrantable use of Scripture to consider the pool of Bethesda as an emblem of the healing of sinners by the work of Christ, and the situation of the diseased persons waiting for the healing visit of the angel, as descriptive of the duty of sinners to wait for some impulse or power from above, before they believe. The fact was related to show the power and glory of Christ in working a miraculous cure. **Where in all he New Testament are sinners told to wait till some future time before they believe?** Where is it said, Believe, but not now; hope, but not now; wait for some power or impulse to enable you to believe? On the contrary, is it not said, *"To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts: now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation?"* Is not God willing to pardon you this moment; Christ willing to save you this moment; the Spirit waiting to renew and sanctify you this moment? Are not all the promises true now, all the blessings of salvation ready and waiting for your acceptance now? What then are you waiting for, or why should you wait at all? Could a voice from Heaven, or any impulse in your own heart, make it more certain than the word of God makes it, that Christ is willing to save you? Look steadily at this promise, *"Come unto me, all ye that labor, and I will give you rest."* Is that the language of Christ? Yes. Is it true? Yes. Does it say any thing about waiting for impulse? No. What then are you hesitating about? It is as true this moment as it ever will or can be, and if you wait for any thing else but the word of Christ, you will spend all your time in waiting, and die

deceived at last. True, you need the influence of the Spirit to assist you to believe; but the Spirit is as ready to sanctify, as Christ is to receive you.

But say others, "We are waiting to be **more deeply convinced of sin.**" Are you convinced that you are under the condemnation of the law; such a sinner as to be totally depraved in your nature, as well as guilty of innumerable actual sins, and deserving of Hell? Is this clear to your judgment, and really felt by your conscience; then what are you waiting for? If you say, For more sorrow of heart, more pungent convictions, I would ask again, How deep do you suppose your convictions must be, before you believe in Christ and hope for mercy? Can you fix on any standard on this subject? Besides, do you suppose that if your convictions were ten times as deep as they now are, these feelings of yours would be your warrant to go to Christ, or render you more welcome to Him, or be in any measure your ground of hope? Are you not wishing for deep convictions, to take comfort in them instead of Christ? **Has Christ anywhere said He will not receive you till your convictions have attained to a certain depth?** The question is, are you really convinced? not how deeply are you convinced. And then, as to godly sorrow, this will be promoted by faith. "*They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and mourn,*" says the Lord Jesus concerning the Jews, Zech.12:10. The belief of God's love to us in Christ, the sweet hope of his mercy, will melt the heart to tenderness. I wish you to dwell upon this. It is the hope, the sense of God's love, that warms and thaws the cold and frozen heart of man. As you gaze upon a crucified Redeemer by faith; as you hear God say, "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy sins by the blood of my Son; I will forgive thee all, notwithstanding thy rebellion and thy too great lukewarmness," your soul will dissolve in ingenuous grief and love. In keeping back from Christ, in waiting for deeper emotions before you come to Him, you are defeating your own purpose. The more and sooner you trust in Christ, the more and the sooner will you mourn for sin. Every fresh view you take of His cross, trusting in His mercy, will deepen your emotions of sorrow, and your convictions of the evil of sin. All the sensibilities of your heart will be moved by the amazing spectacle; and that very scene which conveys to your soul the sense of pardon, will convey also a sense of the bitterness of transgression. Wait no longer then; believe, **believe now**; commit your soul at once to the Saviour, and rejoice in hope of salvation.

Others are **waiting for more holiness, for some preparatory process**, before they rest upon Christ for eternal life. A preparatory process indeed there is, and must be carried on in the heart, before the sinner will go to Christ. But what is that process? Nothing which is to prevent his soul for a moment, when he is anxious about salvation, from depending upon Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit giving him a sense of his sin, and a desire to flee from the wrath to come. With such a sense of sin and coming wrath, what further preparatory work is necessary in order to believe in Christ?

But what is meant by those who talk thus is, **that there must be a long course of conviction**, a production and growth of holy affections, a series of holy actions, an expansion of religious knowledge; and that then, and not till then, sinners are encouraged to trust in Christ and hope for salvation. Now it is very true that every sinner, in coming to Christ by faith, must be prepared and ready to give up every sin; he must be willing to sacrifice sins that may be pleasant as a right eye, and dear as a right hand; he must be willing to take up his

cross and follow Christ to bonds, imprisonment, and death; he must consider himself as "called unto holiness:" and what more in the way of preparation for pardon does he need? Is not a man prepared to trust in Christ as soon as he is convinced of his transgression? If a father promise pardon to an offending child as soon as he confesses his fault, has that child any need to say, "I will prepare myself for pardon by a long course of future good conduct?" His father is ready to forgive him, and he of course is ready to be forgiven, upon the very first moment of true penitence. If God had said He would not pardon us till months or years of good conduct had taken place, it would have been only mocking us; for what good conduct can we perform till He has received us into His favor, and bestowed upon us His Spirit? The first concern of a sinner should be to receive Christ as his righteousness by faith. It is a radical error to suppose that sanctification goes before justification. We must be justified, or we never can be sanctified. Mark this well. I repeat it, that you may notice and weigh its import: **We must be justified, or we cannot be sanctified.** We are justified by faith, and without faith we cannot please God; consequently, till we believe, we can perform no good works; and when we believe, we are accepted of God. Faith, then, is immediately our duty, without waiting for any preparatory process. But perhaps this will be made still more plain by a reference to examples. Take then the conversions, or at least some of them, recorded in Scripture.

- Take the case of the **penitent thief**. Luke 23:40-43. What preparatory process went on in this man's mind and heart and conduct, beyond the work of the Spirit, in convincing him of sin? He appears to have thought of his sin, and repented for the first time, when he was crucified; and almost the same moment believed in Christ, and entertained a hope of mercy.
- Read the account of the **three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost**. Acts 2. Up to the time when they heard Peter's sermon they were the murderers of Christ; by that sermon they were convinced of sin, and they were immediately found rejoicing in the assurance of pardon. Now what preparatory process was carried on in their hearts, beyond the work of the Spirit in convincing them of sin?
- Consider the conversion of the **Apostle Paul**, Acts 9, who was a bloody persecutor; and a day or two after, not only a pardoned sinner, a baptized believer, a rejoicing Christian, but a consecrated apostle. What preparatory process in the way of long cherished convictions, or holy actions, was there in him?
- Consult the narrative of the **Philippian jailer**. Acts 16:25-34. In the same night he was convinced of sin; he believed in Christ; he was filled with peace, and was baptized. When in agony of soul he cried out, "*What shall I do to be saved?*" his heaven-inspired teacher replied, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" The apostle did not speak to him of any preparatory process, any long course of prescribed duties, any training for his reception by Christ, but simply said, "Believe;" and he meant, of course, believe now; and so the trembling penitent understood him, for he believed at once, and entered into peace.

I bring forward these instances – and almost all the other cases of conversion spoken of in the New Testament are of a similar nature – not to prove that all conversions are equally striking and remarkable, but to prove this one point, that no other preparation in the sinner's mind is

necessary, in order that he should believe and be justified, but a real conviction of sin. **As soon as a man knows he is a lost sinner, that is, is truly convinced of his state of condemnation, he is to believe in Christ,** and to hope for pardon; he is then in a state, a fit state to receive it; and moreover, he would not be, and could not be, more fit by waiting ten years in the most agonizing convictions, or the most sacred performance of duty. The sinner is condemned, and is any moment after conviction in a state to be reprieved; and he can never begin to perform the acts of a good citizen till he is justified. The acceptance of Christ by faith, accompanied by the renunciation of all righteousness of our own in true repentance for sin, is the very beginning of all evangelical obedience which any one can render to God. We never can be holy till we believe in Christ; and therefore all ideas of preparation for coming to Christ by making ourselves better are erroneous, arise from mistaken views of the way of a sinner's acceptance with God, and are generally to be traced to a principle of self-righteousness. This, perhaps, is the case with many who will read these pages: they want to be more prepared, either by convictions or by holiness, for coming to Christ; that is, they want something of their own in which to glory; something to give them courage and confidence in approaching the Saviour; something to render them less dependent on free, sovereign grace; something to entitle them, if not to salvation, at least to the righteousness of Christ as the meritorious cause of it. Anxious inquirer, you know not the secret workings of pride and self-righteousness in your soul; you are not yet acquainted with the deceitfulness of the human heart; you are ignorant of the artifices of Satan, or you would detect in those longings after some preparatory process, **a scheme of the enemy of souls to keep you from Christ** – yes, it is a veil to hide from your view the glory of His cross, and a stumbling-block to hinder you from approaching the fountain of life. Wait no longer; *"If you tarry till you're better, You will never come at all,"* It is of infinite consequence for you to remember that you are received, not as worthy, but as unworthy; not as favorites, but as those who have been enemies; not as deserving life by your convictions, but as sentenced to death for your transgressions. *"To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,"* Rom. 4:5. Mark that expression, there is a vast comprehension of subject in it; it is the key to a correct knowledge of justification – *"believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly."* We are justified, so far as we are concerned, under the character of "ungodly." If then we seek to make ourselves godly before we come to Christ, and wish to come under that character, we are shutting ourselves out from the blessing of justification; for this is granted only to them who consider themselves ungodly.

3. Another mistake into which inquirers fall, is to indulge a **misplaced solicitude** about the evidences of personal religion. I know that the sacred writers speak much and often on the subject of evidences of personal religion. But a person must have religion before he can possess the evidences of it; and at present your solicitude should be rather to be a Christian, than to know you are such. It is, however, a very common case for persons, as soon as they begin to be anxious about religion, to begin also to be anxious to find out the marks of salvation in themselves. Hence they are ever microscopically analyzing all their feelings, watching their motives, reviewing their conduct; sometimes hoping when they see, or think they see, a good mark; but more generally desponding, as the result of seeing so much that is positively wrong, or really defective in the state of their hearts. I wish you to attend to this remark, that "inquirers after salvation should be **much more occupied in looking to Christ, than in looking into their own hearts;** and that when they do look into themselves, it

should be for conviction, and not for consolation." Consider the case of the Israelites when bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness, Num.21:7-9. Moses, you know, was ordered to make a brazen serpent and elevate it upon a pole, and whosoever looked upon the brazen figure lived. "Look and live," was the mandate and promise: Now cannot you fancy you see the poor poisoned creatures straining their very eyes in gazing upon the object appointed for their healing? Do you think they spent all their time, or much of their time, or any of it, in examining the wounds to see if they were healing? Were they so foolish as to look off from the means of cure, to ascertain their progress in recovery? No. They would not have taken their eye from the brazen serpent to look at a second sun, if it had been at that time kindled in the firmament. Their eye was fixed; and as they looked, they felt their pain assuaged, their fever cooled, their health returning: if they looked off, they felt in danger of relapse; and in this way they recovered. Thus should it be with the sinner; he should look to Jesus: healing is there; and is obtained, not by looking to see if it is come, or is coming.

The more the mind is fixed on Christ, the more clear its views are of His mediatorial work; the more steady and fixed the eye of faith is on the cross of Him who was *"lifted up, that whosoever believeth should not perish, but have eternal life,"* the firmer will be the consciousness of the soul that it does believe, and the more abundant will be all the fruits and evidences of faith. The Israelite had no doubt of his healing as long as he looked to the brazen serpent, for he felt it going on; nor will the soul doubt of its acceptance with God, so long as it looks to Christ. *"He that believeth hath the witness in himself,"* not only of the truth of Christianity, but of his own personal religion. **The way to have evidences increased, is to have faith increased;** and the way to have faith increased, is not by looking into ourselves, who are the subjects of faith, but out of ourselves to Christ, who is the object of faith. Faith is the main-spring and regulator of all the graces: our joy, our love, our hope will all be in proportion to our faith; and our faith can never be strengthened by an anxious and constant poring over the feelings of our hearts. Nor can our faith be strengthened merely by determining to be strong in faith, but by an intelligent and increasingly clear view of the person and work of Christ. *"How long,"* said David, *"shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?"* He tells us almost immediately after how he got rid of his grief, even by looking away from himself to God: *"I have trusted in thy mercy, my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation,"* Psa.13:2,5. The peace of mind that true faith brings into the soul, the relief which it affords from the burden of sin, and the fruits of holiness in a godly life, are evidences that faith is genuine; but there can be neither peace nor holiness without faith. Many, I apprehend, are greatly deceived in their supposed object in seeking for marks of conversion: it is not evidences of faith they are seeking after, but matter of faith – not evidences that they have received the righteousness of Christ, but evidences out of which they make a righteousness of their own; they want comfort, and instead of looking for it in Christ, they are looking for it in themselves. Hence, when they have found, or think they have found a good mark in themselves, they rejoice in it as those that have found great spoil.

Doubting, dejected, and anxious sinner, thou hast been reading, thinking, hearing, praying, striving, examining, consulting books of evidences and lists of marks of salvation, inquiring of others how they feel and what they conclude to be evidence of a work of grace, and yet thou art as far from any satisfactory conclusion as to thy state as ever; like the beast in the mire, all thy striving serves but to sink thee deeper and deeper. Now then **take another**

plan, since thine own has failed, and instead of a constant search for evidences, look to Christ; **keep thine eye fixed on Him**; meditate upon the divinity of His person, the sufficiency of His atonement, the perfection of His righteousness, the riches of His grace, the universality of His invitations. Look at the object of faith, the grounds of faith, the warrant of faith: the more thou doest this, **the stronger thy faith will become**; and the stronger thy faith is, the greater thy peace will be. Instead of laboring to love Christ, and becoming dejected that thou dost not love him more, take another course, and **dwel upon the love of Christ to thee**. Meditate on His amazing grace, His most wonderful compassion, not only to the world in general, but to thee, as part of the world; labor and pray to be able to comprehend, with all saints, *"what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."* **This, this is the way to grow in love to Him**; for if we love Him, it is because He first loved us, I John 4:19. It is a great principle, which I am anxious to impress upon you that religion in us, is produced and sustained by fixing the mind on objective religion, or the facts and doctrines of the word of God. Neither evidences nor comfort should be sought directly, or on their own account, or as separate things, but as the result of faith. Take this as an important sentiment, that the subject of evidences belongs more to the believer than to the inquirer – to the Christian who professes to be already in the way, and not to the anxious seeker after the way.

4. But there is another mistake which inquirers are apt to make, which, though nearly allied to what I have already stated, is sufficiently distinct to justify a separate consideration, and that is, **confounding faith and assurance**. Faith is such a cordial belief that Christ died for sinners, as leads to a dependence upon Him for salvation; assurance, as the word is usually understood in religious discourse, means a persuasion that I do so believe and am in a state of salvation: faith means a belief that Christ is willing to receive me; assurance means conviction that He has received me, that, in short, I am a Christian. Now it is manifest that these two are different from each other; one of them, that is, faith, signifying the performance of an action or coming into a certain state; and the other the consciousness that I have come into that state. It is also equally evident that **faith must precede assurance**. We must first believe that Christ died for sinners, and trust in Him, before we can know that we have believed. The first simple act of faith is a belief that Christ died for all sinners, for the whole world; the next, as arising out of it, if it be not indeed included in it, is, that he died for us as a part of the world. I believe, says the sinner who is coming with confidence to Christ, that *"God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life:"* then, as I am a part of the world, I believe he loved me and is willing to save me; I trust in Him as my atoning sacrifice and my all: this is faith. The soul then feels joy and peace in believing, love to God, gratitude to Christ, hatred of sin, subjugation of the world, fellowship with the righteous; now says the person, *"I know I believe, I am conscious both of the act of believing and also of its gracious effects:"* this is assurance.

I may illustrate this by referring again to the rebellious subjects and their gracious sovereign. A ringleader of the revolt can scarcely persuade himself that he can be included in the act of amnesty; he reads the proclamation again, which runs thus: "The king, pitying his deluded subjects, and filled with clemency, will grant a gracious pardon to all, whosoever they be, who will lay down their arms by such a day." Having examined the proofs of the

authenticity of the act, and being satisfied on that point, he says, "It is really true, and I believe that the king is willing to pardon all that submit; and as he has made no exception against any, but says, whosoever will lay down his arms shall be forgiven, I believe that there is mercy for me." Thus far faith goes; and even before he reaches the scene of pardon, or takes a step towards it, his mind is at rest; the proclamation itself, as soon as it is understood and believed, gives him comfort; he has no doubt of his being accepted. He goes and lays down his arms, and now he is assured he is safe; he is conscious he has done what the monarch required, and he feels he has what the monarch promised. In his case, however, you perceive that there would not be much solicitude about assurance. Faith and compliance with the monarch's demand would be all that he would concern himself about. Assurance would follow upon faith and action. So should it be with anxious inquirers after salvation: their business is to believe – what? that they are Christians? no; for **a belief that I am a Christian, is not faith**, but assurance – but to believe the gospel, which is God's proclamation of mercy and pardon to his rebel subjects. They are to feel persuaded that God has loved them in common with other sinners, has invited them, has promised to receive them; and availing themselves of this revelation of mercy, to commit themselves and their eternal all to Him. Then, from the peace-giving effect of this upon their conscience, and the purifying effect of it upon their hearts, they may be assured they have believed, and have passed from death unto life. Faith then is not assurance, but the cause of it.

Now, inquirer, are you not aware you have confounded these two; and have been consequently walking in great perplexity? You are dejected, and find no peace. Why? "Oh," you say, "my faith is so weak; indeed I am afraid I have no faith." Now, what do you mean by having no faith? "I am afraid I am not a Christian. I fear I do not believe. I am full of unbelief." And let me tell you that you never can be delivered from distress in this way, for **you are wanting to know you are a Christian before you are one**; you are striving to know you are a believer before you believe; **you wish to be assured you are accepted of Christ, in order that you may go to him for acceptance**. Faith is not believing that you are a Christian, but believing that Christ died for sinners, and trusting in Him; and unbelief is not doubting that you are a Christian, but doubting Christ's willingness to save you, and thus rejecting Him. My advice to you then is, to leave assurance, as a first matter, out of consideration. Your business at present is with faith: **you are to believe**; you are to commit your soul to the atonement of Christ; you are to be persuaded that He died for sinners, died for you, and is willing to save you. This is the assurance you are to seek; and this is what the apostle means by the full assurance of faith: an unhesitating confidence that the Lord Jesus is able and willing to save to the uttermost; and therefore able and willing to save you. Get your mind full of conviction of the truth of this; let your soul be thrown, as it were, wide open to admit this delightful persuasion, that Christ is mighty to save, delighted to save, waiting to save all – you among the rest, you as willingly as any of the rest – and cast your soul upon Him; then will this truth give you such peace, and exert such a power over your heart, as to prove to you the existence and reality of your faith, and you shall have the blessed assurance at once of God's love in Christ, and of your acceptance in him.