

A Basket of Fragments

Part VII

[Robert Murray M'Cheyne](#)

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843), the pastor of St Peter's, Dundee, died in his thirtieth year, and in the seventh of his ministry. His epitaph describes him as a man who "walked with God," and who was "honoured by his Lord to draw many wanderers out of darkness into the path of life."

A Basket of Fragments is a selection of sermons first published five years after M'Cheyne's death. The sermons were put together from the notes taken down by hearers during his ministry "without the least view to publication." One advantage of this is that, as the editor of the first edition wrote, "they bring before us those extemporaneous pleadings with sinner in which few so greatly excelled." The sermons are indeed stamped with eternity; they are the expression of one upon whose heart the weight of perishing sinners pressed; they are the yearnings of one who was "deein" to the folks converted.

Taken from the 1975 edition of *A Basket of Fragments*, published by *Christian Focus Publications*, Inverness, Scotland.

"The Salvation of God"

Isaiah 55:7 "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. 8 For my thoughts [are] not your thoughts, neither [are] your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9 For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

This is one of the sweetest portions of the Word of God, and yet it strikes me that it is seldom understood. I observe that it is very frequently one of the devil's plans to prevent a proper understanding of these passages of the Word of God that are the sweetest and plainest, and thus to turn the honey into gall. Now, this passage is often understood in this way, Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and then God will have mercy on him. But you will notice, first of all, that this puts sanctification before justification; now we are justified and then sanctified. Those that are justified are then brought into the image of God's Son, and then those who are sanctified are glorified — this is the Scripture plan. Now, if we were to change our lives, and God on that account to have mercy, and abundantly pardon us, then there is no need of Christ. If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

I desire, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to show you the right meaning of this passage. I will have only time to open it up without dwelling upon it; but you can do so yourselves.

Let us notice:

1. What is to be forsaken.
2. What you are to return to.
3. What you will get by returning.
4. The time when you are to return.

I. Let us see what is to be forsaken, verse 7: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Compare this with the eighth verse: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." Observe then, dear brethren, what it is that all unregenerate men are called upon to forsake. You are called upon to forsake your way — your way of pardon — your way of peace with God, and the reason given is that God's way is not as your way, neither his thoughts as yours. Now, observe first that every carnal man has got some plan by which he thinks to get to heaven. This is what God thinks of here. The wickedest man here has got some kind of a way of pardon of his own. You will not find a man on the earth but hopes that at death, or at the judgment day, he will get free. Ah, brethren, if it were not for this, you would not rest as you do. If you had no thoughts of pardon, you could not laugh as you do. And, therefore, you may lay it down as an axiom that every natural man has a way by which he hopes to be saved. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

The plans of all worldly men may be resolved into this one — self-righteousness. There is one man who says he hopes to be saved, for God is merciful. God will not destroy the souls that he has made. Another man thinks God will save him for his sincere endeavours. He is a kind God, and he will save me for my best endeavours. I dare say, the hearts of many agree to that. This is the answer I get in most houses I go to, when I ask, Are you willing to be saved? You say, I am trying to do the best I can. Another man not so ignorant of the Bible, hopes to be saved by faith as a work. He reads, "Abraham was justified by faith." Now, he says, If I could get this faith I would be saved. You think that God would save you if you had faith. No such thing, God will not save you for your faith. I believe this is one of the commonest ways by which many deceive themselves. These are some of the ways that men look to for salvation. You will see that their aim is self-righteousness. This is the way you are commanded to forsake this day. O brethren, what is your way? Sinner, you are commanded to forsake your way.

Observe, farther, that this way is different from God's way — "For my ways are not as your ways, neither my thoughts as your thoughts." God's way of justifying a sinner is by the death and obedience of his Son. It is not by washing away your sins yourself, but it is by casting yourself under the doing and dying of his Son. I say, then, it is not your way; I say farther, it is higher than your way. You are groping in the dark, but God's way

is in the light. And then it is a more glorious way; just as there is a greater glory spread over the bespangled heaven than there is over this poor earth, so is there over God's way. God's is high up — a perfect, righteous way. Your sins may be covered by this way as completely as the waters of the flood covered the earth.

Now, brethren, your way must be forsaken. This is a hard saying. Self-righteousness is engraved in your nature. Every natural man here is determined to be saved by his own righteousness. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." I often observe that when you drive a man out of one way, he goes to another; when you drive him out of his past life, he flies to his future life. But, brethren, if you would be saved, you must forsake your own way. You must forsake the tops of the houses. You must not be like the spider who, as soon as it is driven from the web it was weaving, begins to weave another. You must put self away as a corrupt thing. An unconverted man is like one in a burning ship; he will cling to the ship till it is burned to the water's edge, and sinks. Now, if a lifeboat comes, he must let go his hold of the burning ship, and drop into it, if he would be saved. Now, observe, the first thing is, to let go, and then drop into the lifeboat. Now, you must let go your own way, if you would be saved.

II. I come now to the second thing — What must you return to? "Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The "Lord" here spoken of is the Lord Jesus Christ, the same that is spoken of in the fourth verse; "I have given him (that is, Christ), for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people." This is the Lord you must seek; this is the Lord you must return to. You will observe he is called "our God"; this expression is the same as Emmanuel — God with us — God in our nature. This is the being you are to seek. You will observe, dear friends, first of all, it is not enough to forsake your own thoughts — your own way. Just as in the case of the burning ship, it was not enough for the man to let go his hold, but he must drop into the boat, so you must not only leave your own way, but you must return to God. And notice, farther, it is not getting some new view, some new opinion — it is not such things; conversion is something real. Ah, that is no true conversion that does not come from God! There are many that get new views; but if you would be saved, you must come to God.

Oh! I would here plead with those of you who seem to have forsaken your own mercies. Once you thought you could stand in the judgment; now you have found out the reverse; you say, "Enter not into judgment with me, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified," You have forsaken your own way; well now, sinner, return unto the Lord, return unto God manifest in flesh. "Let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten." Why will you stay back? Are you thinking God will not receive you, but does he not promise that if you come he will in no wise cast out; but ah! you say, perhaps, I must wait till I am somewhat better, and then I will come. Ah! then, you have not forsaken your own way. I thought you had forsaken your own way. He is the Lord our righteousness. Oh! then, return unto him.

III. I come now, thirdly, to show you what you will get. "He will abundantly pardon," or, as the meaning is, he will multiply pardon. Verse 3: "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." etc. So he here says, "Return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon you, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." There is a stress to be laid on the word "will," he will abundantly pardon. My dear friends, the mercy that is laid up in Christ is sure mercy, none yet have been disappointed that came. The greatest sinner that comes finds his mercy the sweeter. Mary Magdalene came, the woman that was a sinner came, Manasseh came, a persecuting Saul came, and they all found mercy — they all forsook their own way. He has mercy, and it is sure mercy. All that ever came found mercy. And then, "He will abundantly pardon," or he will multiply pardon. The meaning is twofold — it is either, he will pardon great sinners or he will pardon pardoned ones. Those of you who are unregenerate men, he will pardon you. Then the other meaning is, he will pardon upon pardon. When you go away and sin and come back again, he will pardon you, if only you will give over your own way and follow God's way of righteousness. If only you will give over that way and return to Christ, then God swears by himself that he will receive you, and will multiply pardon unto you.

I would here plead with those of you who have sinned against much light, and for that reason keep away from Christ. Dear fellow-backslider, why do you stay away? You say, he has pardoned me before, will he pardon again? Ah, he will multiply pardon. Sin is a darkening thing; when we have sinned and been pardoned we often go back to our sin and dread to return; but ah! if we would be pardoned we must return to him.

IV. Now, there is just a fourth thing remaining, and that is the time. Verse 6: "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near." My dear brethren, you will observe that this controversy is not between you and me, but between God and you. You will not always hear about this way, it is only for a time. Ordinarily, I believe that the whole period of life is given to man to seek Christ. I believe your lifetime is the boundary God has set for you to find Christ. O seek him, sinner, while he may be found! Some of you may say, If my lifetime is the period, then I will wait till death. But observe it is said, "while he is near." There are times when Christ is nearer than others. A faithful ministry is a time when Christ is near. When the Spirit is poured out, that also is a time when he is near. You know when a man is breathing on you, you say, he is near. So when the Spirit is breathing on you, then he is near. O seek him now while he may be found, call upon him while he is near! My dear brethren, if you will not call upon Christ when he is near, the time will come when you will call but he will not hear. I think I have seen some calling, and he did not hear. If you will not call on him while he is near, perhaps, brethren, there may come a time when you may knock at Christ's door, and he will not hear. If you have as many silent Sabbaths as you have had preaching ones, will it not be righteously done? "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Amen.

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