

False Comfort for Sinners

Lecture 17 of Charles G. Finney's *Lectures on Revival*

"How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?"
Job 21:34

Jobs' three friends insisted that the afflictions which he suffered were sent as a punishment for his sins, and were evidence conclusive that he was a hypocrite, and not a good man, as he professed to be. A lengthy argument ensued, in which Job referred to all past experience, to prove that men are not dealt with in this way according to their character; that the distinction is not observed in the allotments of Providence. His friends maintained the opposite, and intimated that this world is also a place of rewards and punishments, in which men receive good or evil, according to their deeds.

In this chapter, Job urges, by appealing to common sense and common observation and experience, that this cannot be true, because it is a matter of fact that the wicked are often prosperous in this world and throughout life, and hence he infers that their judgment and punishment must be reserved for a future state. "The wicked is reserved to the day of destruction," and "they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath" (v. 30).

And inasmuch as the friends who came to comfort him, being in the dark on this fundamental point, had not been able to understand his case, and so could not afford him any comfort, but rather aggravated his grief, Job insisted upon it that he would still look to a future state for consolation.

He rebuked them by exclaiming, in the bitterness of his soul:

"How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood?"

My present purpose is to make some remarks upon the various methods employed in comforting anxious sinners; and I design:

- I. To notice briefly the necessity and design of instructing anxious sinners.
- II. To show that anxious sinners are always seeking comfort. Their supreme object, indeed, is to get comfort in their distress.
- III. To notice some of the false comforts often administered.

I. Instructing Anxious Sinners

The very idea of anxiety implies some instruction. A sinner will not be anxious at all about his future state, unless he has light enough to know that he is a sinner, and that he is in danger of punishment and needs forgiveness. But men are to be converted, not by physical force, nor by a change wrought in their nature or constitution by creative power, but by the truth, made effectual by the Holy Spirit. Conversion is yielding to the truth. Therefore, the more the truth can be brought to bear on the mind, other things being equal, so much the more probable is it that the individual will be converted. Unless the truth is brought to bear upon him, it is certain he will not be converted. If it be brought to bear, it is not absolutely certain that it will be effectual, but the probability is in proportion to the extent to which the truth is brought to bear.

The great design of dealing with an anxious sinner is to clear up all his difficulties and darkness, do away with all his errors, sap the foundation of his self-righteous hopes, and sweep away every vestige of comfort that he can find in himself. There is often much difficulty in all this, and much instruction is required. Sinners often cling with a death-grasp to their false dependencies. The last place to which a sinner ever betakes himself for relief is to Jesus Christ. Sinners had rather be saved in any other way in the world. They had rather make any sacrifice, go to any expense, or endure any suffering, than just throw themselves as guilty and lost rebels upon Christ alone for salvation. This is the very last way in which they are ever willing to be saved. It cuts up all their self-righteousness, and annihilates their pride and self-satisfaction so completely that they are exceedingly unwilling to adopt it. But it is as true in philosophy as it is in fact, that this is, after all, the only way in which a sinner could find relief. If God should attempt to relieve sinners and save them without humbling their pride and turning them from their sins, He could not do it.

Now, the object of instructing an anxious sinner should be to bring his mind, by the shortest route, to the practical conclusion that there is, in fact, no other way in which he can be relieved and saved, but to renounce himself, and rest in Christ alone. To do this with effect requires great skill.

It requires a thorough knowledge of the human heart, a clear understanding of the plan of salvation, and a precise and definite idea of the very thing that a sinner **MUST DO** in order to be saved. The ability to impart such instruction effectually is one of the rarest qualifications in the ministry. It is distressing to see how few ministers and how few professors of religion there are who have in their own mind so distinct an idea of the thing to be done, that they can go to an anxious sinner and tell him exactly what he has to do, and how to do it, and can show him clearly that there is no possible way for him to be saved, but by doing that very thing which they tell him, and can make him feel the certainty that he must do it, and that unless he does that very thing he will be lost.

II. Anxious Sinners Are Always Seeking Comfort

Sinners often imagine they are seeking Jesus Christ, and seeking religion, but this is a mistake. No person ever sought religion, and yet remained irreligious. What is religion? It is obeying God. Seeking religion is seeking to obey God. The soul that hungers and thirsts after righteousness is the soul of a Christian. To say that a person can seek to obey God, and yet not obey Him, is absurd; for, if he is seeking religion, he is not an impenitent sinner. To seek religion implies a willingness to obey God, and a willingness to obey God is religion. It is a contradiction to say that an impenitent sinner is seeking religion. It is the same as to say that he seeks and actually longs to obey God, and God will not let him; or that he longs to embrace Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ will not let him come. The fact is, the anxious sinner is seeking a hope, he is seeking pardon, and comfort, and deliverance from hell. He is anxiously looking for some one to comfort him and make him feel better, without being obliged to conform to such humiliating conditions as those of the Gospel. And his anxiety and distress continue, only because he will not yield to these terms. Unfortunately, anxious sinners find comforters enough to their liking. Miserable comforters they are, too, "seeing in their answers there remaineth falsehood." No doubt, millions and millions are now in hell, because there were those around them who gave them false comfort, who had so much false pity, or were themselves so much in the dark, that they would not let sinners remain in anxiety till they had submitted their hearts to God, but administered falsehood.

III. Ways in Which False Comfort is Given

There is an endless variety of ways in which false comfort is given to anxious sinners. The more I observe the ways in which even good people deal with anxious sinners, the more I feel grieved at the endless falsehoods with which they attempt to comfort their anxious friends, and thus, in fact, deceive them and beguile them out of their salvation. It often reminds me of the manner in which people act when any one is ill. Let any one of you be ill, with almost any disease in the world, and you will find that every person you meet with has a remedy for that disorder, a certain cure, a specific, a panacea; and you will find such a world of quackery all around you that if you do not take care and SHUT IT ALL OUT, you will certainly lose your life. A man must exercise his own judgment, for he will find as many remedies as he has friends, and each one is tenacious of his own medicine, and perhaps will think it hard if it is not taken. And no doubt this miserable system of quackery kills a great many people.

This is true to no greater extent respecting the diseases of the body than respecting the diseases of the mind. People have their specifics and their panaceas, to comfort distressed souls; and whenever they begin to talk with an anxious sinner, they will bring in their false comforts - so much that if he does not TAKE CARE, and mind the Word of God, he will infallibly be deceived to his own destruction. I propose to mention a few of the falsehoods that are often brought forward in attempting to comfort anxious sinners. Time would fail me even to name them all.

The direct object of many persons is to comfort sinners; and they are often so intent upon this that when they see their friends distressed, they pity them, they feel very compassionate: "Oh, oh, I cannot bear to see them so distressed, I must comfort them somehow"; and so they try one way, and another, and all to comfort them! Now, God desires they should be comforted. He is benevolent, and has kind feelings, and His heart yearns over them, when He sees them so distressed. But He sees that there is only one way to give a sinner real comfort. He has more benevolence and compassion than all men, and wishes to comfort them. But He has fixed the terms, as unyielding as His Throne, on which He will give a sinner relief. He will not alter. He knows that nothing else will do the sinner effectual good, for nothing can make him happy, until he repents of his sins and forsakes them, and turns to God. And therefore God will not yield. Our object should be the same as that of God. We should feel compassion and benevolence just as He does, and be as ready to give comfort, but we should also be sure that it is of the right kind.

Our prime object should be to induce the sinner to obey God. His comfort ought to be, both with us and with himself, only a secondary object; and while we are more anxious to relieve his distress than to have him cease to abuse and dishonor God, we are not likely, by our instructions, to do him any real good. This is a fundamental distinction in dealing with anxious sinners, but it is evidently overlooked by many, who seem to have no higher motives than sympathy or compassion for the sinner. If in preaching the Gospel or instructing the anxious, we are not actuated by a high regard to the honor of God, and rise no higher than to desire to relieve the distressed; this is going no farther than a constitutional sympathy, or compassion, would carry us. The overlooking of this principle has often misled professors of religion, and when they have heard others dealing faithfully with anxious sinners, they have accused them of cruelty. I have often had professors bring anxious sinners to me, and beg me to comfort them; and then, when I have probed the conscience of the sinner to the quick, they have shuddered, and sometimes taken his part. It is sometimes impossible to deal effectually with young people who are anxious, in the presence of their parents, because the parents have so much more compassion for their children than regard to the honor of God. This is a position which is all wrong; and with such views and feelings you had better hold your tongue than say anything to the anxious.

1. One of the ways in which people give false comfort to distressed sinners is by asking them: "What have you done? You are not so bad!"

They see them distressed and cry out: "Why, what have you done?" as if they had never done anything wicked, and had in reality no occasion to feel distressed at all. A fashionable lady was spiritually awakened, and she was going to see a minister, to converse with him, when she was met by a friend, who turned her back, and drove off her anxiety by the cry: "What have you done to make you feel so? I am sure you have never committed any sin that need make you feel so!"

I have often met with cases of this kind. A mother will tell her son, who is anxious, what an obedient child he has always been, how good and how kind, and she begs him "not to take on so." So a husband will tell his wife, or a wife her husband: "How good you are!" and say: "Why, you are not so bad. You have been to hear that frightful minister, who frightens people, and you have got excited. Be comforted, for I am sure you have not been bad enough to justify such distress." When the truth is, they have been a great deal worse than they think they have. No sinner ever has an idea of his sins greater than they really are. No sinner ever has an adequate idea of how great a sinner he is. It is not probable that any man could live under a full sight of his sins. God has, in mercy, spared all His creatures on earth that worst of sights, a naked human heart. The sinner's guilt is much more deep and damning than he thinks, and his danger is much greater than he thinks it is; and if he should see his sins as they are, probably he would not live one moment. True, a sinner may have false notions on the subject, which may create distress, but which have no foundation. He may think he has committed the unpardonable sin, or that he has grieved away the Spirit, or sinned away his day of grace. But to tell the most moral and naturally amiable person in the world that he is good enough, or that he is not so bad as he thinks he is, is not giving him rational comfort, but is deceiving him and ruining his soul. Let those who do it, beware.

2. Others tell awakened sinners that "conversion is a progressive work," and in this way ease their anxiety. When a man is distressed, because he sees himself to be such a sinner, and that unless he turns to God he will be lost, it is a great relief to have some friend hold out the idea that he can get better by degrees, and that he is now "coming on," little by little. They tell him: "You cannot expect to get along all at once; I do not believe in these sudden conversions, you must wait and let it work; you have begun well, and, by and by, you will get comfort." All this is false as the bottomless pit. The truth is, regeneration, or conversion, is not a progressive work.

What is regeneration? What is it but the beginning of obedience to God?

And is the beginning of a thing progressive? It is the first act of genuine obedience to God - the first voluntary action of the mind, that is what God approves, or that can be regarded as obedience to God. That is conversion. When persons talk about conversion as a progressive work, it is absurd. They show that they know just as much about regeneration or conversion as Nicodemus did. They know nothing about it as they ought to know, and are no more fit to conduct an anxious meeting, or to advise or instruct anxious sinners, than Nicodemus was.

3. Another way in which anxious sinners are deceived with false comfort is by being advised to "dismiss the subject for the present." Men who are supposed to be wise and good have assumed to be so much wiser than God, that when God is dealing with a sinner, by His Spirit, and is endeavoring to bring him to an immediate decision, they think God is crowding too hard, and that it is necessary for them to interfere. They will advise the person to take a ride, or to go into company, or engage in business or do something that will relieve his mind a little, at least for the present. They might just as well say to God in plain words: "O God, Thou art too hard, Thou

goest too fast, Thou wilt make him crazy, or kill him; he cannot stand it, poor creature; if he be so pressed he will die." Just so they take sides against God, and practically tell the sinner himself: "God will make you crazy if you do not dismiss the subject, and resist the Spirit, and drive Him away from your mind."

Such advice, if it be truly conviction of sin that distresses the sinner, is, in no case, either safe or lawful. The strivings of the Spirit, to bring the sinner to Christ, will never hurt him, nor drive him crazy. He may make himself deranged by resisting; but it is blasphemous to think that the blessed, wise, and benevolent Spirit of God would ever act with so little care, as to derange and destroy the soul which He came to sanctify and save. The proper course to take with a sinner, when the striving of the Spirit throws him into distress, is, to instruct him, clear up his views, correct his mistakes, and make the way of salvation so plain, that he may see it right before him. Not to dismiss the subject, but to fall in with the Spirit, and thus hush all those dreadful agonies which are produced by resisting the Holy Ghost. REMEMBER, if an awakened sinner should voluntarily dismiss the subject once, probably he will never take it up again.

4. Sometimes an awakened sinner is comforted by being told that "religion does not consist in feeling bad." I once heard of a Doctor of Divinity giving an anxious sinner such counsel, when he was actually writhing under the arrows of the Almighty. Said he: "Religion is cheerful, religion is not gloomy; do not be distressed, but dismiss your fears; be comforted, you should not feel so bad," and such like miserable comforts, when, in fact, the man had infinite reason to be distressed, for he was resisting the Holy Ghost, and was in danger of grieving Him away for ever.

It is true, religion does not consist in "feeling bad"; but the sinner has reason to be distressed, because he has no religion. If he had religion, he would not feel so. Were he a Christian, he would rejoice. But to tell an impenitent sinner to be cheerful! Why, you might as well preach this doctrine in hell, and tell them there: "Cheer up here, cheer up: do not feel so bad!"

The sinner is on the very verge of hell, he is in rebellion against God, and his danger is infinitely greater than he imagines. Oh, what a doctrine of devils it is to tell a rebel against Heaven not to be distressed! What is all his distress but rebellion itself? He is not comforted, because he refuses to be comforted. God is ready to comfort him. You need not think to be more compassionate than God. He will fill the sinner with comfort, in an instant, on submission. There stands the sinner, struggling against God, and against the Holy Ghost, and against conscience, until he is distressed almost to death, but still he will not yield; and now some one comes in, saying: "Oh, I hate to see you feel so bad, do not be so distressed; cheer up, cheer up; religion does not consist in being gloomy; be comforted."

Horrid!

5. Whatever involves the subject of religion in mystery is calculated to give a sinner false comfort. When a sinner is anxious on the subject of religion, very likely, if you becloud it in mystery, he will feel relieved. The sinner's distress arises from the pressure of present obligation. Enlighten him on this point, and clear it up, and if he will not yield, it will only increase his distress. But tell him that regeneration is all a mystery, something he cannot understand, and, by leaving him all in a fog, you relieve his anxiety.

It is his clear view of the nature and duty of repentance, that produces his distress. It is the light that brings agony to his mind, while he refuses to obey. It is that which makes up the pains of hell. And it will almost make hell in the sinner's breast here, if only made clear enough. Only cover up

this light, and his anxiety will immediately become far less acute and thrilling, but if you take up a clear light, and flash it broadly upon his soul, then, if he will not yield, you kindle up the tortures of hell in his bosom.

6. Whatever relieves the sinner from a sense of blame is calculated to give him false comfort. The more a man feels himself to blame, the deeper is his distress; so, anything that lessens his sense of blame, of course lessens his distress - but it is a comfort full of death. If anything will help him to divide the blame, and throw a part of it upon God, it will afford him comfort, but it is a relief that will destroy his soul.

7. To tell him of his inability is false comfort. Suppose you say to an anxious sinner: "What can you do? You are a poor feeble creature, you can do nothing." You will thereby make him feel a kind of despondency, but it is not that keen agony of remorse with which God wrings the soul when He is laboring to bring the sinner to repentance.

If you tell him he is unable to comply with the Gospel, he naturally falls in with that relief. He says to himself: "Yes, I am unable, I am a poor, feeble creature, I cannot do this, and certainly God cannot send me to hell for not doing what I cannot do." Why, if I believed that a sinner was unable, I would tell him plainly: "Do not be afraid, you are not to blame for not complying with the call of the Gospel: for you are unable, and God will not send you to hell for not doing what you have no strength to do - 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?'" I know it is not common for those who talk about the sinner being "unable," to be so consistent, and carry out their theory. But the sinner infers all this, and so he feels relieved. It is all false, and all the comfort derived from it is only treasuring up wrath against the Day of Wrath.

8. Whatever makes the impression on a sinner's mind that he is to be passive in religion is calculated to give him false comfort. Give him the idea that he has nothing to do but to wait God's time; tell him conversion is the work of God, and he ought to leave it to Him; and that he must be careful not to try to take the work out of God's hand; and he will infer as before, that he is not to blame, and will feel relieved. If he has only to stand still, and let God do the work, just as a man holds still to have his arm amputated, he feels relieved. But such instruction as this, is all wrong. If the sinner is thus to stand still, and let God do it, he instantly infers that he is not to blame for not doing it himself; and the inference is not only natural but legitimate.

It is true that there is a sense in which conversion is the work of God. But it is false, as it is often represented. It is also true that there is a sense in which conversion is the sinner's own act. It is ridiculous, therefore, to say that a sinner is passive in regeneration, or passive in being converted, for conversion is his own act. The thing to be done is that which cannot be done for him. It is something which he must do, or it will never be done.

9. Telling a sinner to wait God's time. Some years ago, in Philadelphia, I met a woman who was anxious about her soul, and had been a long time in that state. I conversed with her, and endeavored to learn her state. She told me a good many things, and finally said she knew she ought to be willing to wait on God as long as He had waited upon her. She said that God had waited on her a great many years before she would give any attention to His call, and now she believed it was her duty to wait God's time to show mercy to her and convert her soul. And she said this was the instruction she had received. She must be patient, she thought, and wait God's time, and, by and by, He would give her relief. Oh, amazing folly!

Here is the sinner in rebellion. God comes with pardon in one hand and a sword in the other, and tells the sinner to repent and receive pardon, or refuse and perish. And now here comes a minister of the Gospel and tells the sinner to "wait God's time." Virtually he says that God is not ready to have him repent now, and is not ready to pardon him now, and thus, in fact, throws off the blame of his impenitence upon God. Instead of pointing out the sinner's guilt, in not submitting at once to God, he points out God's "insincerity" - in making an offer, when, in fact, He was not ready to grant the blessing!

I have often thought such teachers needed the rebuke of Elijah, when he met the priests of Baal. "Cry aloud: for he is a God; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked" (1 Kings 18:27). The minister who ventures to intimate that God is not ready, and tells the sinner to wait God's time, might almost as well tell him that God is asleep, or gone on a journey, and cannot attend to him at present. Miserable comforters, indeed! It is little less than outrageous blasphemy of God. How many have gone to the judgment, red all over with the blood of souls that they have deceived and destroyed - by telling them God was not ready to save them, and that they must wait God's time. No doubt such a doctrine is exceedingly calculated to afford present relief to an anxious sinner. It warrants him to say: "God is not ready, I must wait God's time, and so I can live in sin a while longer, till He gets ready to attend to me, and then I will get religion."

10. It is false comfort to tell an anxious sinner to do anything for relief, which he can do, and not submit his heart to God. An anxious sinner is often willing to do anything else, but the very thing which God requires him to do. He is willing to go to the ends of the earth, or to pay his money, or to endure suffering, or do anything but make full and instantaneous submission to God. Now, if you will compromise the matter with him, and tell him of something else that he may do, and yet evade that point, he will be very much comforted. He likes that instruction. He says: "Oh, yes, I will do that; I like that minister, he is not so severe as others, he seems to understand my particular case, and knows how to make allowances."

It often reminds me of the conduct of a patient who is very sick, but has a great dislike for a certain physician and a particular medicine, but that is the very physician who alone understands treating his disease, and that the only remedy for it. Now, the patient is willing to do anything else, and call in any other physician. He is anxious and in distress, is asking all his friends if they cannot tell him what he shall do. He will take all the nostrums and quack medicines in the country - before he will submit to the only course that can bring him relief. By and by, after he has tried everything without receiving any benefit, if he survives the experiment he gives up this unreasonable opposition, calls in the physician, takes the proper medicine, and is cured. Just so it is with sinners. They will eagerly do anything, if you will only let them off from this intolerable pressure of present obligation to submit to God.

I will mention a few of the things the telling of which to sinners distracts their attention from the point of immediate submission.

(a) Telling a sinner he must use the means - attend meetings and pray.

Tell an anxious sinner this: "You must use the means"; and he is relieved.

"Oh, yes, I will do that, if that be all. I thought that God required me to repent and submit to Him now. But if 'using the means' will answer, I will do that with all my heart." He was distressed before, because he was cornered, and did not know which way to turn. Conscience had beset him,

like a wall of fire, and urged him to repent NOW. But this relieves him at once; he feels better, and is very thankful that he has found such a good adviser in his distress! But he may "use the means," as he says, till the Day of Judgment, and not be a particle the better for it, but only hasten his way to death. What is the sinner's use of means, but rebellion against God? God uses means - the Church uses means, to convert and save sinners, to impress them, and bring them to submission. But what has the sinner to do with such means? It is just telling him: "You need not submit to God now, but just use the means awhile, and see if you cannot melt God's heart down to you, so that He will yield this point of unconditional submission." It is a mere cavil to evade the duty of immediate submission to God. It is true that sinners, actuated by a regard to their own happiness, often give attention to the subject of religion, attend meetings, and pray, and read, and many such things. But in all this they have no regard to the honor of God, nor do they so much as intend to obey Him. Their design is not obedience, for if it were, they would not be impenitent sinners. They are not, therefore, using means to be Christians, but to obtain pardon, and a hope. It is absurd to say that an impenitent sinner is using means to repent, for this is the same as to say he is willing to repent; or, in other words, that he does repent, and so is not an impenitent sinner. So, to say that an unconverted sinner uses means with the design to become a Christian, is a contradiction; for it is saying that he is willing to be a Christian, which is the same as to say he is a Christian already.

(b) Telling a sinner to pray for a new heart. I once heard a celebrated Sunday-school teacher do this. He was almost the father of Sunday Schools in America. He called a little girl up to him, and began to talk to her. "My little girl, are you a Christian?" "No, sir." "Well, you cannot be a Christian yourself, can you?" "No, sir." "No, you cannot be a Christian yourself, you cannot change your heart yourself, but you must pray for a new heart, that is all you can do; pray to God, God will give you a new heart." He was an aged and venerable man, but I almost felt disposed to rebuke him in the name of the Lord; I could not bear to hear him deceive that child, telling her, practically, she could not be a Christian. Does God say: "Pray for a new heart"? Never. He says: "Make you a new heart"

(Ezekiel 18:31). The sinner is not to be told to pray to God to do his duty for him, but to go and do it himself. I know the Psalmist prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). He had faith, and prayed in faith. But that is a very different thing from setting an obstinate rebel to pray for a new heart. An anxious sinner will be delighted with such instruction, saying: "I knew I needed a new heart, and that I ought to repent, but I thought I must do it myself. I am very willing to ask God to do it; I hated to do it myself, but have no objection that God should do it, if He will, and I will pray for it, if that is all that is required."

Telling the sinner to persevere. And suppose he does persevere? He is as certain to be lost as if he had been in hell ever since the foundation of the world. His anxiety arises only from his resistance; and if he would submit, it would cease; and will you tell him to persevere in the very thing that causes his distress? Suppose my child should, in a fit of passion, throw a book or something on the floor. I tell him: "Take it up," but instead of minding what I say, he runs off and plays. "Take it up!" He sees I am in earnest, and begins to look serious. "Take it up, or I shall get a rod." And I put up my arm to get the rod. He stands still. "Take it up, or you must be whipped." He comes slowly along to the place, and begins to weep. "Take it up, my child, or you will certainly be punished." Now he is in distress, and sobs and sighs as if his bosom would burst; but he still remains as stubborn as if he knew I could not punish him. Now I begin to press him with motives to submit and obey, but there he stands, in agony, and at length bursts out: "Oh, father, I do feel so bad, I think I am growing better." And now, suppose a neighbor to come in and see the child standing there, in all his agony and stubbornness. The neighbor asks him what he is standing there

for, and what is he doing. "Oh, I am using means to pick up that book." If this neighbor should tell the child: "Persevere, persevere, my boy, you will get it by and by," what should I do? Why, I would ask him to leave the house; what does he mean by encouraging my child in rebellion?

Now, God calls the sinner to repent, He threatens him, He draws the glittering sword, He persuades him, He uses motives, and the sinner is distressed to agony, for he sees himself driven to the dreadful alternative of giving up his sins or going to hell. He ought instantly to lay down his weapons, and break his heart at once. But he resists, and struggles against conviction, and that creates his distress. Now, will you tell him to persevere? Persevere in what? In struggling against God! That is just the direction the devil would give. All the devil wants is, to see him persevere just in the way he is going on, and his destruction is sure.

(d) Telling a sinner to press forward. That is, to say to him: "You are in a good way, only press forward, and you will get to heaven." This is on the supposition that his face is toward heaven, when in fact his face is toward hell, and he is pressing forward, and never more rapidly than now, while he is resisting the Holy Ghost. Often have I heard this direction given, when the sinner was in as bad a way as he could be. What you ought to tell him is: "STOP, sinner, stop, do not take another step that way, it leads to hell." God tells him to stop, and because he does not wish to stop, he is distressed. Now, why should you attempt to comfort him in this way?

(e) Telling a sinner that he must "try" to repent and give his heart to God.

"Oh, yes," says the sinner, "I am willing to try, I have often tried to do it, and I will try again." Does God tell you to "try" to repent?

All the world would be willing to "try" to repent, in their way. Giving this direction implies that it is very difficult to repent, and perhaps impossible, and that the best thing a sinner can do is, to try and see whether he can do it or not. What is this, but substituting your own commandment in the place of God's. God requires nothing short of repentance and a holy heart; anything short of that is comforting the sinner in vain, "seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood."

(f) Telling him to pray for repentance. "Oh, yes, I will pray for repentance, if that is all. I was distressed because I thought God required me to repent; but I can wait." And so he feels relieved, and is quite comfortable.

(g) Telling a sinner to pray for conviction, or pray for the Holy Ghost to show him his sins, or to labor to get more light on the subject of his guilt, in order to increase his conviction.

All this is just what the sinner wants, because it lets him off from the pressure of present obligation. He wants just a little more time. Anything that will defer that present pressure of obligation to repent immediately, is a relief. What does he want more conviction for? Does God give any such direction to an impenitent sinner? God takes it for granted that he has conviction enough already. And so he has. Do you say he cannot realize all his sins? If he can realize only one of them, let him repent of that one, and he is a Christian. Suppose he could see them all, what reason is there to think he would repent of them all, any more than he would repent of that one that he does see? All this is comforting the sinner by setting him to do that which he can do, and yet not submit his heart to God.

11. Another way in which false comfort is given to anxious sinners is, to tell them God is trying their faith by keeping them in the furnace, and they must wait patiently upon the Lord. Just as if

God were in fault, or stood in the way of a sinner becoming a Christian. Or as if an impenitent sinner had faith! What an abomination! Suppose somebody should tell my child, while he was standing by the book as I have described: "Wait patiently, my boy, your father is trying your faith." No. The sinner is trying the patience and forbearance of God. God is not setting Himself to torture a sinner, and teach him a lesson of patience. But He is waiting upon him, and laboring to bring him at once into such a state of mind as will render it consistent to fill his soul with the peace of heaven. And shall the sinner be encouraged to resist, by the idea that God is bantering? TAKE CARE!

God has said His Spirit shall not always strive.

12. Another false comfort is, saying to the sinner: "Do your duty, and leave your conversion with God." I once heard an elder of a Church say to an anxious sinner: "Do your duty, and leave your conversion to God; He will do it in His own time and way." That was just the same as telling him, that it was not his duty to be converted NOW. He did not say: "Do your duty, and leave your salvation with God." That would have been proper enough, for it would have been simply telling him to submit to God, and would have included conversion as the first duty of all. But he told him to leave his conversion to God. And this elder, that gave such advice, was a man of liberal education too. How absurd! As if the sinner could do his duty and not be converted! God has required him: "Make you a new heart" (Ezekiel 18:31); and do you beware how you comfort him with an answer of falsehood.

13. Sometimes professors of religion will try to comfort a sinner, by telling him: "Do not be discouraged; I was a long time in this way before I found comfort." They will tell him: "I was under conviction so many weeks - or perhaps so many months, or sometimes years - and have gone through all this, and know just how you feel; your experience is the same as mine precisely. After so long a time I found relief; and I doubt not you will find it by and by. Do not despair, God will comfort you soon." Tell a sinner to take courage in his rebellion! Oh, horrible! Such professors ought to be ashamed. Suppose you were under conviction so many weeks, and afterwards found relief, it is the very last thing you ought to tell an anxious sinner.

What is it but encouraging him to hold out, when his business is to submit? Did you hold out so many weeks while the Spirit was striving with you? You only deserved so much the more to be lost, for your obstinacy and stupidity.

Sinner! it is no sign that God will spare you so long, or that His Spirit will remain with you to be resisted. And remember, if the Spirit is taken away, you will be sent to hell.

14. Another false comfort is to say: "I have faith to believe you will be converted." You have faith to believe? On what does your faith rest? On the promise of God? On the influences of the Holy Ghost? Then you are counteracting your own faith. The very design and object of the Spirit of God is to tear away from the sinner his last vestige of a hope while remaining in sin; to annihilate every crag and twig he may cling to. And the object of your instruction should be the same. You should fall in with the plan of God. It is only in this way that you can ever do any good - by urging him to submit at once, and leave his soul in the hands of God. But when one that he thinks is a Christian, tells him: "I have faith to believe you will be converted," it upholds him in a false expectation. Instead of tearing him away from his false hopes, and throwing him upon Christ, you just turn him aside to depend upon your faith, and to find comfort because you have faith for him. This is all false comfort, that worketh death.

15. Sometimes professors of religion try to comfort an anxious sinner by telling him: "I will pray for you." This is false comfort, for it leads the sinner to trust in those prayers, instead of trusting in Christ. The sinner says "He is a good man, and God hears the prayers of good men; no doubt his prayers will prevail, some time, and I shall be converted: I do not think I shall be lost." And his anxiety, his agony, is all gone. A woman said to a minister: "I have no hope now, but I have faith in your prayers." Just such faith is this as the devil wants them to have - faith in prayers instead of faith in Christ.

16. It is equally false comfort to say: "I rejoice to see you in this way, and I hope you will be faithful, and hold out." What is this but rejoicing to see him in rebellion against God? For that is precisely the ground on which he stands. He is resisting conviction, and resisting conscience, and resisting the Holy Ghost, and yet you rejoice to see him in this way, and hope he will be faithful, and hold out! There is a sense, indeed, in which it may be said that his situation is more hopeful than when he was in stupidity. For God has convinced him, and may succeed in turning and subduing him. But that is not the sense in which the sinner himself will understand it. He will suppose that you think him in a hopeful way, because he is doing better than formerly; when, in fact, his guilt and danger are greater than they ever were before. Instead of rejoicing, you ought to be distressed and in agony, to see him thus resisting the Holy Ghost, for every moment he does this, he is in danger of being left of God, and given up to hardness of heart and to despair.

17. Again, it is said: "You will have your pay for this, by-and-by: God will reward you." I once heard a sinner say: "I feel very bad, I have strong hopes that I shall get my reward." But that individual afterwards said: "Nowhere can there be found so black a sinner as I am, and no sin of my life seems so black as that expression." He was overwhelmed with contrition, that he should ever have had such an idea, as to think that God should reward him for suffering so much distress, when he had brought it all upon himself, needlessly, by his wicked resistance to the truth. The truth is, what such "instructors" are seeking is, to comfort the sinner; being all in the dark themselves on the subject of religion, they, of course, give him false comfort.

18. Another false comfort is, to tell the sinner he has not repented enough.

The truth is, he has not really repented at all. As soon as the sinner repents, God always comforts him. This direction implies that his feelings are right as far as they go. To tell him that he has any repentance, is to tell him a lie, and cheat him out of his soul.

19. People sometimes comfort a sinner by telling him: "If you are elected, you will be brought in." I once heard of a case where a person under great distress of mind was sent to converse with a neighboring minister. They talked for a long time. As the person went away, the minister said to him: "I should like to send a line by you to your father." His father was a pious man. The minister wrote the letter, and forgot to seal it. As the sinner was going home, he saw that the letter was not sealed, and he thought to himself, that probably the minister had written about him, and his curiosity at length led him to open and read it. And there he found it written to this purport: "Dear Sir, - I found your son under conviction, and in great distress, and it seems not easy to say anything to give him relief. But, if he is one of the elect, he is sure to be brought in." He had wanted to say something to comfort the father; but now, mark: that letter had well-nigh ruined the son's soul; for he settled down on the doctrine of Election, saying: "If I am elected, I shall be brought in;" and his conviction was gone. Years afterwards he was awakened and converted, but only after a great struggle, and never until that false impression had been obliterated from his mind, and he had been made to see that he had nothing at all to do with the doctrine of Election, but that if he did not repent he would be lost.

20. It is very common for some people to tell an awakened sinner: "You are in a very prosperous way. I am glad to see you so, and feel encouraged about you." It sometimes seems as if the Church were in league with the devil to help sinners to resist the Holy Ghost. The thing that the Holy Ghost wants to make the sinner feel is, that all his ways are wrong, and that they lead to hell. And everybody is conspiring to make the opposite impression! The Spirit is trying to discourage him, and they are trying to encourage him; the Spirit to distress him by showing him that he is all wrong, and they to comfort him by saying he is doing well. Has it come to this, that the worst counteraction to the truth and the greatest obstacle to the Spirit, shall spring from the Church. Sinner, do not believe them! You are not in a hopeful way. You are not doing well, but ill - as ill as you can, while resisting the Holy Ghost.

21. Another fatal way in which false comfort is given to sinners, is by applying to them certain Scripture promises which were designed only for saints. This is a grand device of the devil. It is much practiced by the Universalists. But Christians often do it. For example:

(a) "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). How often has this passage been applied to anxious sinners, who were in distress because they would not submit to God. "Blessed are they that mourn." That is true, where they mourn with godly sorrow. But what is this sinner mourning about? He is mourning because God's law is holy, and the terms of salvation so fixed that he cannot bring them down to his mind. Will you tell such a rebel: "Blessed are they that mourn"? You might just as well apply it to those that are in hell! There is mourning there, too.

The sinner is mourning because there is no other way of salvation, because God is so holy that He requires him to give up all his sins, and he feels that the time has come, that he must either give them up, or be lost. Shall we tell him, he shall be comforted? Shall we tell the devil: "You mourn now; but the Bible says, you are blessed if you mourn; and you shall be comforted by and by!"

(b) "Seek, and ye shall find" (Matthew 7:7). This is said to sinners in such a way as to imply that the anxious sinner is seeking religion. This promise was made in reference to Christians, who ask in faith, and seek to do the will of God, and it is not applicable to those who are seeking hope or comfort; but to holy seeking. To apply it to an impenitent sinner is only to deceive him, for his seeking is not of this character. To tell him: "You are seeking, are you? Well, seek, and you shall find," is to cherish a fatal delusion. While he remains impenitent, he has not a desire which the devil might not have, and yet remain a devil still.

If the sinner had a desire to do his duty, if he were seeking to do the will of God, and give up his sins, he would be a Christian. But to comfort an impenitent sinner with such a promise - you might just as well comfort Satan!

"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). To apply this for a sinner's comfort, is absurd.

As if he were doing something to please God! He has never done well, and never has done more ill than now. Suppose my neighbor, who came in while I was trying to subdue my child, should say to the child, "In due season you shall reap, if you faint not," what should I say? "Reap? Yes, you shall reap; if you do not give up your obstinacy, you shall reap indeed, for I will apply the rod." So the struggling sinner shall reap the damnation of hell, if he does not give up his sins.

22. Some professors of religion, when they attempt to converse with awakened sinners, are very fond of saying: "I will tell you my experience."

This is a dangerous snare, and often gives the devil a handle to lead the sinner to hell, by getting him to copy your experience. If you tell it to the sinner, and he thinks it is a Christian experience, he will almost infallibly be trying to imitate it, so that, instead of following the Gospel, or the leadings of the Spirit in his own soul, he is following your example. This is absurd as well as dangerous. No two were ever exercised just alike. Men's experiences are as much unlike as are their countenances. Such a course is likely to mislead him. The design is, often, to encourage him at the very point where he ought not to be encouraged, before he has submitted to God. And it is calculated to impede the work of God in his soul.

23. How many times will people tell an awakened sinner that God has begun a good work in him, and will carry it on. I have known parents talk so with their children, and, as soon as they have seen their children awakened, give up all anxiety about them, and settle down at ease, thinking that now God had begun a work in their children He would carry it on. It would be just as rational for a farmer to say about his grain, as soon as it comes up out of the ground: "Well, God has begun a good work in my field, and He will carry it on." What would be thought of a farmer who should neglect to put up his fence, because God has begun the work of giving him a crop of grain? If you tell a sinner so, and he believes you, it will certainly be his destruction, for it will prevent his doing that which is absolutely indispensable to his being saved. If, as soon as the sinner is awakened, he is taught that, God having begun a good work, that only needs to be carried on, He will surely carry it on, he sees that there is no further occasion to be anxious, for, in fact, he has nothing more to do. And so he will be relieved from that intolerable pressure of present obligation to repent and submit to God. And if he is relieved from his sense of obligation to do it, he will never do it.

24. Some will tell the sinner: "Well, you have broken off your sins, have you?" "Oh, yes," says the sinner; when it is all false; he has never forsaken his sins for a moment, he has only exchanged one form of sin for another; only placed himself in a new attitude of resistance. And to tell him that he has broken them off is to give him false comfort.

25. Sometimes this direction is given for the purpose of relieving the agony of an anxious sinner: "Do what you can, and God will do the rest"; or: "Do what you can, and God will help you." This is the same as telling a sinner: "You cannot do what God requires you to do, but if you do what you can, God will help you as to the rest." Now, sinners often get the idea that they have done all they can, when, in fact, they have done nothing at all, except that they have resisted God with all their might. I have often heard them say: "I have done all I can, and I get no relief, what can I do more?" Now, you can see how comforting it must be to such a one to have a professor of religion come in and say: "If you will do what you can, God will help you." It relieves all his keen distress at once. He may be uneasy, and unhappy, but his agony is gone.

26. Again, they say: "You should be thankful for what you have, and hope for more." If the sinner is convicted, they tell him he should be thankful for conviction, and hope for conversion. If he has any feeling, he should be thankful for what feeling he has, just as if his feeling were religious feeling, when he has no more religion than Satan. He has reason to be thankful, indeed: thankful that he is out of hell, and thankful that God is yet waiting on him. But it is ridiculous to tell him that he should be thankful in regard to the state of his mind, when he is all the while resisting his Maker with all his might.

IV. Errors Made in Praying for Sinners

I will here mention a few errors that are made in praying for sinners, by which an unhappy impression is made on their minds, in consequence of which they often obtain false comfort in their distress.

1. People sometimes pray for sinners as if they deserved TO BE PITIED more than BLAMED. They pray for them as "MOURNERS": "Lord, help these pensive mourners"! As if they were just mourners, like one that had lost a friend, or met with some other calamity, which he could not help, and so were greatly to be pitied, sitting there, sad, pensive, and sighing. The Bible never talks so. It pities sinners, but it pities them as mad and guilty rebels, deserving to go to hell; not as poor pensive mourners, who want to be relieved, but can do nothing but sit and mourn.

2. Praying for them as "poor sinners." Does the Bible ever use such language as this? The Bible never speaks of them as "poor sinners," as if they deserved to be pitied more than blamed. Christ pities sinners in His heart. And so does God pity them. He feels in His heart all the gushings of compassion for them, when He sees them going on, obstinate and willful in gratifying their own lusts, at the peril of His eternal wrath. But He never lets an impression escape from Him, as if the sinner were just a "poor creature" - to be pitied, as if he could not help his position. The idea that he is poor, rather than wicked; unfortunate, rather than guilty, relieves the sinner greatly. I have seen the sinner writhe with agony under the truth, in a meeting, until somebody began to pray for him as a "poor" creature. And then he would gush out into tears, and weep profusely, and think he was greatly benefitted by such a prayer, saying: "Oh, what a good prayer that was!" If you go now and converse with that sinner, you will probably find that he is still pitying himself as a poor unfortunate creature - perhaps even weeping over his unhappy condition; but his conviction of sin, his deep impressions of awful guilt, are all gone.

3. Praying that God would "help the sinner to repent." "O Lord, enable this poor sinner to repent now." This conveys the idea to the sinner's mind, that he is now trying with all his might to repent, and that he cannot do it, and therefore Christians are calling on God to help him, and enable him to do it. Most professors of religion pray for sinners, not that God would make them willing to repent, but that He would enable them, or make them able. No wonder their prayers are not heard. They relieve the sinner of his sense of responsibility, and that relieves his distress. But it is an insult to God, as if God had commanded a sinner to do what He could not do.

4. People sometimes pray: "Lord, these sinners are seeking Thee, sorrowing." This language is an allusion to what took place at the time when Jesus was a little boy, and went into the Temple to talk with the rabbis and doctors. His parents, you recollect, went a day's journey towards home before they missed him; then they turned back, and, after looking all around, they found the little Jesus standing in the Temple disputing with the learned men. Then "His mother said unto Him, Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing" (Luke 2:48). And so this prayer represents sinners as seeking Jesus, but He hides Himself from them, and they look all around, and hunt, and try to find Him, and wonder where He is, and say: "Lord, we have sought Jesus these three days sorrowing." It is a LIE! No sinner ever sought Jesus with all his heart three days, or three minutes, and could not find Him. Jesus "stands at the door, and knocks" (Revelation 3:20).

He is right before the sinner, pleading with him, and facing him with all his false pretenses. Seeking Jesus! The sinner may cry: "Oh, how I am sorrowing, and seeking Jesus," but it is no such thing; Jesus is seeking him.

And yet how many oppressed consciences are relieved and comforted by hearing one of these prayers.

5. "Lord, have mercy on these sinners, who are seeking Thy love to know." This is a favorite expression with many; as if sinners were seeking to know the love of Christ, and could not. No such thing. They are not seeking the love of Christ, but seeking to get to heaven without Jesus Christ. As if they were seeking it, and He was so hard-hearted that He would not let them have it!

6. "Lord, have mercy on these penitent souls"; calling anxious sinners "penitent souls"! If they are truly penitent, they are Christians. To make the impression on an unconverted sinner that he is penitent, is to make him believe a lie. But it is very comforting to the sinner, and he likes to take it up, and pray it over again: "O Lord, I am a poor penitent soul, I am very penitent, I am so distressed, Lord, have mercy on a poor penitent."

Dreadful delusion, to lead an impenitent sinner to pray as a penitent!

7. Sometimes people pray for anxious sinners as "humble souls." "O Lord, these sinners have humbled themselves." But that is not true, they have not humbled themselves; if they had, the Lord would have raised them up and comforted them, as He has promised. There is a hymn of this character that has done much mischief. It begins:

Come, HUMBLE sinner, in whose breast
A thousand thoughts revolve.

This hymn was once given by a minister to an awakened sinner, as one applicable to his case. He began to read: "Come, humble sinner." He stopped: "Humble sinner: that is not applicable to me, I am not a humble sinner." Ah, how well was it for him that the Holy Ghost had taught him better than the hymn! If the hymn had said: "Come, anxious sinner," or "guilty sinner," or "trembling sinner," it would have been well enough, but to call him a "humble" sinner would not do. There are vast numbers of hymns of the same character. It is very common to find sinners quoting the false sentiments of some hymn, to excuse themselves in rebellion against God.

A minister told me he heard a prayer, quite lately, in these words: "O Lord, these sinners have humbled themselves, and come to Thee as well as they know how; if they knew any better, they would do better; but, O Lord, as they have come to Thee in the best manner they can, we pray Thee to accept them and show mercy." Horrible!

8. Many pray: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This is the prayer which Christ made for His murderers; and, in their case, it was true; they did not know what they were doing, for they did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. But it cannot be said of sinners under the Gospel that they do not know what they are doing. They do know what they are doing. They do not see the full extent of it; but they do know that they are sinning against God, and rejecting Christ; and the difficulty is that they are unwilling to submit to God. But such a prayer is calculated to make the sinner feel relieved, and make him say: "Lord, how canst Thou blame me so? I am a poor ignorant creature, I do not know how to do what is required of me; if I knew how, I would do it."

9. Another expression is: "Lord, direct these sinners, who are inquiring the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." But this language is only applicable to Christians. Sinners have not their faces

towards Zion; their faces are set towards hell! And how can a sinner be said to be "inquiring the way" to Zion, when he has no disposition to go there? The real difficulty is that he is unwilling to WALK in the way in which he knows he ought to go.

10. People pray that sinners "may have more conviction." Or, they pray that sinners may "go home solemn and tender, and take the subject into consideration," instead of praying that they may repent now. Or, they pray as if they supposed the sinner to be willing to do what is required.

All such prayers are just such prayers as the devil wants; he wishes to have such prayers, and I dare say he does not care how many such are offered.

Sometimes, in an anxious meeting, or when sinners have been called to the anxious seats, after the minister has made plain the way of salvation, and taken away all stumbling blocks out of the path, just when the sinners are ready to YIELD some one will be called on to pray, and instead of praying that they may repent now, he begins: "O' Lord, we pray that these sinners may be solemn, that they may have a deep sense of their sinfulness, that they may go home impressed with their lost condition, that they may attempt nothing in their own strength, that they may not lose their convictions, and that, in Thine own time and way, they may be brought into the glorious light and liberty of the sons of God."

Instead of bringing them right up to the point of immediate submission, on the spot, it gives them time to breathe, it lessens the pressure of conviction, so that a sinner breathes freely again, and feels relieved, and sits down at his ease. Thus, when the sinner is brought up, as it were, and stands at the gate of the Kingdom, such a prayer, instead of pushing him in, sets him back again: "There, poor thing, sit there till God helps you."

11. Christians sometimes pray in such a manner as to make the impression that CHRIST IS THE SINNER'S FRIEND in a different sense from that in which God the Father is his Friend. They pray to Christ: "O Thou Friend of sinners," as if God were full of vengeance, just going to crush the poor wretch, till Jesus Christ comes in and takes his part, and delivers him. Now, this is all wrong. The Father and the Son are perfectly agreed, their feelings are all the same, and both are equally disposed to have sinners saved. And to make such an impression deceives the sinner, and leads to wrong feelings towards God. To represent God the Father as standing over him, with the sword of justice in His hand, eager to strike the blow, till Christ interposes, is not right. The Father is as much the sinner's Friend as the Son. His compassion is equal. But if the sinner get this unfavorable idea of God the Father, how is he ever to love Him with all his heart, so as to say: "Abba, Father"?

12. The impression is often made, by the manner of praying, that you do not expect sinners to repent now, or that you expect God to fulfill what is their duty, or that you wish to encourage them to trust in your prayers.

And so, sinners are ruined. Never pray so as to make the impression on sinners, that you secretly hope they are Christians already, or that you feel strong confidence they will be, by and by, or that you half believe they are converted now. This is always unhappy. In this way, multitudes are deceived with false comfort, and prevented, just at the critical point, from making the final surrender of themselves to God.

Remarks

1. Many persons who deal in this way with anxious sinners, do so from false pity. They feel so much sympathy and compassion, that they cannot bear to tell sinners the truth which is necessary to save them. As well might a surgeon, when he sees that a man's arm must be amputated, or death must result, indulge this feeling of false pity, and just put on a plaster, and give him an opiate. There is no benevolence in that. True benevolence would lead the surgeon to be cool and calm, and, with a keen knife, cut the limb off, and save the life. It is false tenderness to do anything short of that. I once saw a woman under distress of mind, who for months had been driven well nigh to despair. Her friends had tried all the false comforts without effect, and they brought her to see a minister.

She was emaciated, and worn out with agony. The minister set his eye upon her, and poured in the truth upon her mind, and rebuked her in a most pointed manner. The woman who was with her interfered: she thought it cruel, and said: "Oh, do comfort her, she is so distressed, do not trouble her any more, she cannot bear it." Whereupon the minister turned, and rebuked her, and sent her away, and then poured in the truth upon the anxious sinner like fire, so that in five minutes she was converted, and went home full of joy. The plain truth swept all her false notions away, and in a few moments she was joyful in God.

2. The treatment of anxious sinners, which ministers such false comforts is, in fact, cruelty. It is cruel as the grave, as cruel as hell, for it is calculated to send the sinner down to the burning abyss. Christians feel compassion for the anxious, and so they ought. But the last thing they ought to do is to flinch just at the point where it comes to a crisis. They should feel compassion, but they should show it just as the surgeon does, when he deliberately goes to work, in the right and best way, and cuts off the man's arm, and thus cures him and saves his life. Just so Christians should let the sinner see their compassion and tenderness, but they should take God's part, fully and decidedly. They should lay open to the sinner the worst of his case, expose his guilt and danger, and then lead him right up to the cross, and insist on instant submission. They must have firmness enough to do this work thoroughly; and, if they see the sinner distressed and in agony, still they must press him right on, and not give way in the least till he yields.

To do this often requires nerve. I have often been placed in circumstances where I have realized this. I have found myself surrounded with anxious sinners, in such distress as to make every nerve tremble; some overcome with emotion and lying on the floor; some applying camphor to prevent their fainting; others shrieking out as if they were just going to hell. Now, suppose any one should give false comfort in such a case as this? Suppose he had not nerve enough to bring them right up to the point of instant and absolute submission? How unfit would such a man be, to be trusted in such a case!

3. Sometimes sinners become deranged through despair and anguish of mind. Whenever this is the case, it is almost always because those who deal with them try to encourage them with false comfort, and thus lead them to such a conflict with the Holy Ghost. They try to hold them up, while God is trying to break them down. And, by and by, the sinner's mind gets confused with this contrariety of influences, and he either goes deranged, or is driven to despair.

4. If you are going to deal with sinners, remember that you are soon to meet them in Judgment, therefore be sure to treat them in such a way that if they are lost, it will be their own fault. Do not try to comfort them with false notions now, and have them reproach you with it then. Better to suppress your false sympathy, and let the naked truth "pierce even to the dividing asunder of soul

and spirit, and of the joints and marrow" (Hebrews 4:12), than to soothe them with false comfort, and beguile them away from God!

5. Sinner, if you converse with any Christians, and they tell you to do anything, first ask: "If I do that, shall I be saved?" You may be anxious, and not be saved. You may pray, and not be saved. You may read your Bible, and not be saved. You may use means, in your own way, and not be saved. Whatever they tell you to do, if you can do it and not be saved, do not attend to such instructions. They are calculated to give you false comfort, and divert your attention from the main thing to be done, and beguile you down to hell. Do not follow any such directions, lest you should die while doing so, for then there is no retrieval.

Finally; let a Christian never tell a sinner anything, or give him any direction, that will lead him to stop short of, or that does not include, submission to God. To let him stop at any point short of this, is infinitely dangerous. Suppose you are at an anxious meeting, or a prayer meeting, and you tell a sinner to pray, or to read, or to do anything that comes short of saving repentance, and he should fall and break his neck that night, of whom would his blood be required? A youth in New England once met a minister in the street, and asked him "what he should do to be saved?"

The minister told him to go home, and go into his room, and kneel down and give his heart to God. "Sir," said the boy, "I feel so bad, I am afraid I shall not live to get home." The minister saw his error, felt the rebuke thus unconsciously given by a youth, and then told him: "Well, then, give your heart to God here, and then go home to your room and tell Him of it."

It is enough to make one's heart bleed to see so many miserable comforters for anxious sinners "in whose answers there remaineth falsehood." What a vast amount of spiritual quackery there is in the world, and how many "forgers of lies" there are, "physicians of no value" (Job 13:4) who know no better than to comfort sinners with false hopes, and delude them with their "old wives' fables" (1 Timothy 4:7) and nonsense, or who give way to false tenderness and sympathy, till they have not firmness enough to see the sword of the Spirit applied, cutting men to the soul, and laying open the sinner's naked heart. Alas, that so many are ever put into the ministry, who have not skill enough to stand by and see the Spirit of God to do His work, in breaking up the old foundations, and crushing all the rotten hopes of a sinner, and breaking him down at the feet of Jesus.