

The Trial & Triumph of Faith

SERMON 14

By **Rev. Samuel Rutherford**

“LOST sheep.” Lost, is either understood of the common condition of all men, and so, because all are the heirs of wrath, (Eph. 2). “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” (Rom. 3:23,) and so are lost. But the Scripture entitleth men by that which they are in their own esteem; as “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,” (Matt. 9:13). This may seem to hold forth, that there be some sinners, and some not sinners, but righteous; whereas none are righteous that sinneth not, (Rom. 3:10). But God giveth to men the title which they give themselves, and so, lost here, is such as are lost in their own esteem; for Christ’s intention in coming in the flesh and dying, is to seek and to save the lost, (Luke 19:10). In this sense, (Matt. 9:13, and 1 Tim. 1:15,) Christ came to save sinners, otherwise all the house of Israel are lost. “My people have been lost sheep,” (Jer. 50:6). “Neither have ye sought that which was lost,” (Ezek. 3:4). Nor is this to be meant of the lost considered, as redemption is purchased, in this notion, Christ died for his enemies, (Rom. 5:10,) the just for the unjust, (1 Peter 3:18,) and so, for the lost: But we are here led to this, that those at whose salvation Christ hath a special aim, and whom he actually converteth, are first sinners, and lost in their own eyes; as is clear, Matt. 9:13, 1 Tim. 1:15, Luke 19:10. It is one thing to be lost, and a sinner, and another thing to be self-lost; as many are loaded who are not weary, and yet none are weary, but they be loaded. (1.) All that Christ converteth are self-sinners too, but Christ converteth not all sinners. Hence, Christ actually calleth and saveth but those who are such and so prepared; now there is a preparation of order, and a preparation of deserving. I cannot say, there are preparations in the converted, by way of deserving. Christ calleth not sinners because, or for, that they are sinners in their own sense, for he hath mercy on whom he will. (2.) Nor are there preparations in the converted, to which conversion is promised as a free reward of grace, which may be called moral preparations—there is no such promise in the word as this: “Whosoever are wearied and lost in their own eyes, they shall be converted.” Yea, (3.) It is hard to affirm, that all who are prepared with these preparations of order, are infallibly converted: it is likely Judas and Cain reputed themselves sinners, and had some law-work in their heart, and yet were never converted. But God’s ordinary way, is to bring men unto Christ, being first self-lost and self-condemned, and that, upon these grounds that proveth God’s way of working to be successive. (1.) Because conversion is a rational work, and the gospel is a moral instrument of conversion, therefore Christ here openeth a vein, ere he give physic; he first cutteth, and then cureth; for though in the moment of formal conversion, men be patients, and can neither prevent Christ, nor cooperate with Christ, yet the whole work about conversion is not done in a moment; for

men are not converted as the lilies grow, which do not labour nor spin. There be some pangs in the new birth. Nor are men converted, as Simon carried Christ's cross, altogether against their will: they do hear and read the word freely. Nor are men converted beside their knowledge, as Caiaphas prophesied; nor are we to think with enthusiasts, that God doth all with one immediate rapt, as the sun in its rise enlighteneth the air. The gospel worketh morally, as doth the law. Reasons work not in a moment, as fire-flaughts in the air: Christ putteth souls to weigh the bargain, to consider the field and the pearl, and then buy it. (2.) Christ's saving and calling the lost, is a new generation as well as a creation. A child is not born in one day; saving grace is not physic that worketh the cure, while the sick man is sleeping: Christ casteth the metal in the fire, ere he form the vessel of mercy; he must cast down the old work, ere he lay the new foundation. (3.) Conversion is a gospel blessing, and so, must be wrought in a way suitable to the scope of the gospel. Now, the special intent of the gospel is to bring men to put a high and rich price upon Christ, and this is one gospel-offer: What thinkest thou of so excellent a one as Christ? What wouldst thou part with? What wouldst thou do or suffer for Christ? Now, men cannot prize Christ, who have not found the terrors of the law: so Paul, finding himself the chief of sinners, and in that case saved, (1 Tim. 1:15,) must hug and embrace Christ, and burst out in a Psalm (5:17,) "Now, to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen." A sight of the gallows, of the axe, raiseth in the condemned man's heart, high thoughts of the grace of a pardoning prince: to be a tenant of free grace, is so sweet a free-holding, that it must put a high rate on free grace. (4.) The clay organs, and faculties of the soul working by them, cannot bear the too great violence of legal terrors; for, in reviving the spirit, "If he should let out all his wrath, the souls should fail that he has made," (Isa. 57:16). Nor can they bear that God let out all his strength of love in one moment. Rough or violent dealing would break crystal glasses; Christ would break the needle when he seweth the heart to himself, if he should put forth all his strength; too swift motion of wheels may break the mill: Christ must drive softly, for a sight of the fourth part of the fire of hell, and a sight of one chamber or one window of heaven, is enough at once.

1. It is not enough to be fitted for the physic, and not for the physician. The weary and laden are fit to be eased; but not fitted for Christ the Physician, except they come to him and believe. Faith is a thing very suitable for Christ: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come, buy and eat," (Isaiah 55:1). It is true, in regard of all good deserving moving God to have mercy on one rather than another: Jerusalem and all converted are lying in their blood, and no eye pitying them (Ezek. 16:6,8); and therefore are none discouraged to come because of their wretched estate, that is to say, we cannot come, we have no money; but Christ invited those who have no money; and though Christ seem to exclude the woman from mercy, yet Christ, in wisdom, holdeth forth the promise here in that latitude of free grace—while as he saith, he came for the lost sheep; that there is room for the woman, and all believing Gentiles, to come in, and lay hold on the covenant. Sense of wretchedness and unbelief representeth Christ as too narrow, and contracteth and abridgeth the promises, as if there were no place for thee, because thou art thus and thus sinful.

Objection. 1. The King putteth forth a general proclamation to all thieves: Oh! saith one, but he may mean others, but not me. Why, he means thieves in general; he excepteth none: why shouldst thou say, Not me? Christ belongeth to sinners as sinners; he receiveth sinners as sinners, yea, he ascended on high, to give gifts to the rebellious; therefore there is no qualification required in men that believe in Christ; no, nor doth unbelief debar a man from Christ; it only excludeth him from the experimental knowledge that Christ is his.

Answer. (1.) It is true, the gospel excepteth no man from pardon, and all that hear the gospel are to be wearied and laden, and to receive Christ by faith, as if God intended to save them. But the promises of the gospel are not simply universal, as if God intended and purposed, that all and every one should be actually redeemed and saved in Christ, as Arminians teach; and so God excepteth in his own hidden decree, not a few, though he reveal not in the gospel who they are, yet he revealeth in the gospel the general, that "many are called, but few are chosen." And I grant, there is no ground for any one man not to believe upon this ground, because some are reprobated from eternity, and it may be I am one of those, for the contrary is a sure logic; many are chosen to life eternal, and it may be that I am one of those. (2.) It is most untrue, that Christ belongeth to sinners as sinners, for then, Christ should belong to all unbelievers, how obstinate soever, even to those that sin against the Holy Ghost. Nay, Christ belongeth only to sinners elected to glory, as elected to glory in regard of God's gracious purpose, and He belongeth only to believing sinners, as believing, in regard of actual union with Christ, (Eph. 3:17, Gal. 2:20). (3.) It is false that sinners, as sinners, do receive Christ, for so, Judas and all sinners should receive Christ: now the Scripture showeth, that believers only receive him, (John 1:12, Gal. 2:20, Eph. 3:17). (4.) It is false, that sinners, as sinners, believe in Christ. This way of libertines is a broad way for sorcerers, thieves, murderers, parricides, idolaters, remaining in that damnable state, to believe; whereas sinners, as such, sinners thus and thus qualified, are to believe; that is, humbled, wearied, and self-condemned sinners only, are to believe, and come to Christ. It is true, all sinners are obliged to believe, but to believe after the order of free grace; that is, that they be first self-lost and sick, and then be saved by the physician.

I cannot but here mention some damnable errors of libertines, contrary to this truth of Christ; as this, That the Spirit acts most in the saints when they endeavour least. (1.) It may be by accident, and through our abuse, who confide in our endeavours and works, that grace and the Spirit will not flatter merits, which are too natural to us;—that God hinder a sweating wrestler who hath spent nights in prayer, and is careful in all means, and abundant in the work of the Lord. See and understand, that free-grace, not our endeavours, leadeth us on to heaven. Better it is I be conscious to myself that I am Christ's debtor, not debtor to myself. (2.) That we see self to be wretched, and that self loveth to share and to divide the glory with free-grace. (3.) That Christ reserveth the flowing of his tide, and the blowing of his wind, to his own free-grace, (John 3:8;) and that grace, in its filling the sails, is not in the seaman's power.

But this error is the daughter of another more damnable; that is, That the activity and efficacy of Christ's death, is to kill all activity of graces in his members, that Christ may

be all in all. This I take to be the marrow of fleshly libertinism, that not only the regenerate cannot sin, but they ought to sin, that grace may abound; and that Christ died for this end, that we should live in sin; the contrary of which is said, "That Christ died that he might destroy the works of the devil, that is, sin." (1 John 3:8.) Now, the not stirring up of the grace of Christ in us, is a grievous sin, (1 Tim. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:10). "Yea, he bare our sins on the tree, that we, being dead to our sins, should live unto righteousness." (1 Peter 2:24.) "That we should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4.) And Gal. 1:4, "Christ gave himself for us, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." And 1 Pet. 1:18, "We are not redeemed from our vain conversation, received by tradition from our fathers, by any corruptible thing." This [their contrary error] maketh good that which is the upshot of all the Antinomian doctrine that Christ is so our sanctification, that there is neither law nor gospel which requireth of us that we be holy. Hence their fifth error,— "Here is a great stir about graces, and looking to hearts, but give me Christ; I seek not for graces, nor promises, nor sanctification; tell me not of meditation and duties, but tell me of Christ." So Christ hath not only suffered for us all that he should suffer, so as it is sacrilege to add to his sufferings our own; and the like sacrilege it is for us to be holy, and to add any of our active holiness to his active obedience. So Mr. Towne saith. "All our obedience, as it is the work of the Spirit, it is passive, and truly called the fruit of the Spirit, (Gal. 5:22;) and so, it is an entire work, and undefiled, every way corresponding to the mind of the efficient and Author, which is the law and rule he worketh by. But as it is actively our obedience, so it is very imperfect and polluted; yea, simply considered, it is a menstruous cloth and dung." And their 36th error is,— "All the activity of a believer is to act to sin; so we can do nothing but sin, and we are to do nothing, nay, not obliged to pray, but when the Spirit moveth us, and that is the work of the Spirit: we are in it mere patients." So in Error 4th, he saith,— "If Christ will let me sin, let him look to it; upon his honour be it." Indeed, it standeth upon the honour of him who hath promised to keep us spotless until the day of Christ, and Christ is so an engaged Advocate to intercede for the saints when they sin, that the redeemed of the Lord fall not away, but be presented spotless before the Lord, in the day of Christ. But what is all this to annul? (1.) All action of grace, and to soothe men up in a lazy dead faith. (2.) To take away all commandments of duties so frequent in the word of grace, which teacheth us to "deny all ungodliness, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." (Tit. 2:12.) (3.) To make an opposition between Christ and his grace, the fountain and the stream, (John 1:16; Tit. 1:14; 1 John 3:8).

Objection. If the actions of grace be all turned upon this axletree of God's gracious will, what can I do, when I am indisposed to do good?

Answer. If this be a rational question, then is no man condemned, because he believeth not in the only-begotten Son of God, contrary to John 3:18, 36; for reprobates are finally indisposed to believe. (2.) Indisposition is our sin that we should be humbled for; and ink-water cannot wash a black cloth, sin excuseth not sin.

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