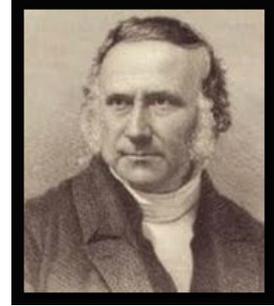


# *Ashamed of Christ*



In the course of my annual pastoral visitation to the families of my congregation, I called upon a married woman, (not a professor of religion,) whom I had seen before, and whom I had aimed to persuade to prepare for the future life. I recollected her former reserve and apparent indifference to religion, and determined, before I entered the house, to exert all my powers to lead her to an immediate attention to her future welfare. As I expected, I found her alone, her husband being engaged in his daily employ, as a mechanic. I stated to her, in few words, the particular reason why I had called on her, that I wished to persuade her to attend to her salvation.

“I have little time for that,” said she.

“Little time!” said I. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” said she, with a very determined air, “that my time is all occupied. I have hardly a moment to spare. I have much to do for my family. I have my husband and three children to care for. We are not rich. And if we are to live comfortably and appear respectably, I must be industrious—at work almost every moment of my time. My husband works hard, and I mean to do my part towards getting a living.”

“I am glad to hear you say that,” said I; “it gives me a higher opinion of you. It convinces me that you know one part of your duty, and intend

to do it. I am sorry that you are overburdened with work, if you are so; I am sorry that you have any hardships. But I am not sorry that you are not rich, as you say. If you were rich, I should have less hope of you; you would have more temptations, and no more time. The gospel is for the poor; for their comfort here, and their salvation hereafter. Jesus Christ was poor. He preached to the poor. He associated with the poor. He sympathized with the poor. He loved the poor. If you had less to do, I am not certain that you would be any more inclined to give attention to religion than—”

“Yes, I should,” said she.

“I have no doubt you think so; but perhaps you are mistaken. How is it with other people? with those who have less to do? Do you see the rich and people of leisure, any more of them Christians, in proportion to the number, than of the poor?”

“No, sir; not so many.”

“Well, are you an exception? Are you not like other people? And if, on the whole, more people are hindered from religion than helped towards it by wealth and time enough to attend to it, is it not probable, that if you were in the very condition you wish to be in, with more wealth, and less to occupy you,—is it not probable, that you would be less likely than you are now, to attend to religion? Think a moment. Many of your friends and neighbors, who have much time, are not pious. Many of them, who have little time to spare from labor, are. Somehow or other they have found time to pray, to seek the Lord, to repent. And now, my dear woman, tell me honestly, have you not as much time as they?”

“I suppose I have,” said she.

“Then, can you not seek the Lord as well as they?”

After a considerable pause, she answered with apparent hesitation:—

“I could, if I knew how.”

“Will you, if I will tell you how?”

“Yes, as well as I can, in the little time I have to spare.”

“Time! woman! Time to spare! What is time given to you for, but to lay up treasures in heaven? You must find time to be sick, and time to die, whether you are prepared or not. And you ought not to treat religion, as if it were a mere secondary matter, to be attended to or not, just according to your convenience.”

“Oh! no, sir; I do not mean that. I have always designed to be a Christian.”

“And you have put it off from time to time, waiting for a more fit opportunity?”

“Yes, I have.”

“Then let me tell you, a more fit opportunity will never come, till the day you die! No, it never will! Your idea about want of time is all a deception. You have had time, and you have lost it! You have it to-day, and you are losing it now. You have done your duty to your family well, and I respect you for it. I honor your feelings of anxiety and affection for your husband and children. I would not, that you should do less for them. But I would, that you should do more for your own soul, and for your God and Saviour. I tell you solemnly, you have time to seek God. It is a deceitful and wicked heart; and not want of time, that keeps you in your irreligion. God knows your situation, and all your cares. He has himself placed you, as you are situated. He will accommodate the aids of

his grace to all the difficulties of your situation. 'He knoweth our frame, and remembereth we are but dust.' He does not require of you anything, which, by his grace, you cannot do. And you have a wrong idea of the merciful God, when you think he has placed you in such a situation, that you have not time to attain salvation."

"I do not mean to say that," said she.

"Then you have time; and have no occasion to talk about the little time you have?"

"Yes; I have time; if I knew how."

"God has told you how. You may find his directions in his word.

For example, in the Fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah; 'Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.' That is one way of seeking him. You must pray. Do you ever pray?"

"Not often!"

"Ought you not to pray, as he bids you?"

"I ought to."

"Then will you? will you begin to-day? will you carefully read that chapter, and pray over it, and beseech God to lead you to salvation?"

"Yes, I will," said she, solemnly.

"Then, good-bye. If you seek the Lord, as that chapter directs; you will not seek in vain."

A few days after this, I called upon her and found her in a very anxious state of mind. She had no more to say about want of time. She seemed deeply impressed with a sense of sin and utter unworthiness, and expressed her gratitude to God, that her mind had been turned to this subject, before her life had come to a close. I conversed with her, as well as I could; and aimed to lead her to Christ. She appeared to me to know her condition as a sinner so well, and to be so deeply impressed with a sense of her need of Christ, and in all respects so solemn and determined, that I hoped she would soon be brought into the peace and security of faith.

I soon called again, and found her in the same state of mind. This surprised me. I had not expected it. I labored to find what could be her hindrance; but I questioned, and reasoned, and talked, in vain. Again and again, I repeated my visits to her. She remained the same. It distressed me. I could not understand it. For months, she had appeared to me to understand all the great truths of the gospel, and to feel them deeply. I could detect no error in her views. I could not find wherein she was unprepared to deny herself. I could discover no reliance upon her own righteousness, and no lack of prayer or love of the world, which might tend to hinder her from coming to Christ. She omitted no outward duty. Daily she studied and prayed in secret. Still she had no hope and no peace. And yet, as months rolled on, her seriousness and solemnity did not appear to diminish, as I expected they would. The Holy Spirit had not forsaken her.

Her case seemed to me a dark mystery. I could not understand it. I had never been acquainted with any such instance before. Ordinarily I had found those of such deep seriousness coming to repentance, or else losing their anxiety, much sooner than this. She appeared to have all confidence in me, and to conceal none of her feelings from me. I knew she was a woman of good mind, and strong and deep feelings. And on that ground, after exhausting all my powers to discover her hindrance or

difficulty, I said to her one day, at a kind of venture; “Mrs. K., I have been very anxious about you for a long time. I love and respect you. I have tried with all my might to do you good. But I have failed! Something, I know not what, keeps you back from repentance and coming to Christ.— Now, what is it?”

“Why,” said she, (with great effort, speaking as if compelling herself to speak;) “I have never been baptized.”

The expression startled me. I could not conceive what she meant. I knew she was a woman of good mind, and well instructed; and how the lack of baptism should keep her from turning to Christ, it was impossible for me to conjecture. Her case was a perfect riddle to me, darker than before. I answered:—

“You have never been baptized? Well, what of that? how does that hinder you from fleeing to Christ?”

“Oh,” said she, “if I was really a Christian, it would be my duty to join the church: and I never could come out at my age, before my husband and my three children, and be baptized.”

I was perfectly amazed at her!

“Why,” said I, “do you mean that you should be ashamed to own Christ, and be baptized, in the presence of your husband and children?”

“Yes, I mean just that.”

“And has that idea hindered you from coming to Christ?”

“Yes, I believe it has. I never could do that; and every time I think of following Christ, that turns me back. I could not endure it. If it was not

for that, I believe I should be willing to follow Christ. There is no other thing that I know of, which I should not be willing to do.”

Still more amazed, I answered:—

“You utterly astonish me! I am amazed beyond measure! Is it possible, that a woman of your sense, of your character and decision, is hindered by such an idea? Are you not ashamed of it?”

“I know it seems foolish,” said she; “and that is the reason why I did not tell you before. I thought you would despise me; but such are my feelings. I never could be baptized!” She wept bitterly.

“Well, I thank you, my dear friend, for telling me now; I thank you much for it, and respect you for it. You shall never regret it. I have no disposition to despise you, or in any way hurt your feelings. But is it not strange that.

“Yes; it is strange and foolish,” said she, interrupting me; “but I cannot help it. I do feel so. Oh! how I wish I had been baptized in my infancy. But my parents were not communicants in the church.”

She still sat weeping immoderately.

“My dear friend,” said I, “you are yielding to a temptation of the devil! Remember, Christ has said, ‘He that is ashamed of me, of him will I be ashamed.’”

“I know it, I know it all; I have thought of it a thousand times. I wish I did not feel so; but I cannot help it.”—As she said this, she lifted her streaming eyes upon me, and hastily brushed away her tears, as if determined to dismiss the subject of religion from her thoughts.

“Hear me!” said I. “You must not yield to this! Your being baptized cannot certainly be a matter of great self-denial to you; and if you were a

believer indeed, you would not feel it to be so. Give yourself to Christ to be saved; and you will not hesitate then, with your heart full of love to him, to be baptized before your husband and children, and all the world, if need be.”—She shook her head at this, in a very determined manner, as if she disbelieved it, or was resolved to dismiss religion from her thoughts.—Said I,—

“Well then, since you feel so, I will remove all that difficulty,—you need not be baptized at all, if you do not wish to be. You need not think of it again. Repentance and fleeing to Christ in faith are your duties now; and the great adversary is keeping you from Christ, by leading you to think of what may be your duty hereafter. Dismiss all that from your thoughts entirely. You need not be baptized. You need not join the church. I never will say a word to you about it, unless you do to me. Only repent. Give God your heart now, before he leaves you to your own way. The Holy Spirit will not always strive with you.”

“Do you mean,” said she, “that I need never be baptized?”

“Yes; I mean exactly that. You need not be baptized, unless you choose to be, after you have come to repentance and faith in the Redeemer. I never will mention the subject to you.—And now will you seek the Lord with all your heart, and let baptism alone?”—Said she,—

“I hope I shall be enabled to do so, if I can be a Christian without being baptized.”

I prayed with her, and left her.—Within a very few days from that time, she found peace with God. She had very comfortable evidences of his acceptance. She appeared to be a peculiarly determined and happy believer. She avowed her hope of eternal life through the atonement made for sinners by Jesus Christ—expressed her astonishment, that she had lived so long in impiety—thanked me very emphatically for “delivering

her out of her snare,” as she called it,—and blessed God, that her “poor heart could now rest.”

After this I saw her often. For months she continued much the same in hope, peace, and gratitude towards God.

I kept my promise to her. I never uttered a word to her about connection with the church. One day she said to me, that she should like to become a member of the church, if I thought she “had any fitness for the Lord’s table.”

“But, Mrs. K.”—said I, “you have never been baptized.”  
“Oh,” says she, “don’t say anything about that. I have got over all that difficulty now. am willing to be baptized; and I want my husband and my children to know, that I love Christ and am willing to own his name.”  
A few days afterwards, she was received, as a member of the church; and I baptized her in the presence of all the congregation.

After she had been at the Lord’s table, and the congregation was dismissed; she waited for me at the door of the church, to tell me, that she “wanted to have her children baptized in the afternoon.” She apologized for asking me to do it on a day, in which I had so many duties; but she said, she could not wait; she did not wish to have her children tormented, as she had been; and she might not live till another Sabbath. She presented them for baptism in the afternoon. The next day she told me, that she considered the covenant of God a very precious privilege, she could now pray for her children, as embraced in the covenant promises; and it relieved her heart to think, that they would not be hindered from religion by such an “obstacle as had troubled her, so foolishly.”

Many convicted sinners are kept from salvation by some mere trifle. It is important to remove the obstacle. They will not be likely to seek God in earnest, till that is done. The stony ground and the thorny ground

need preparing before the seed is sown. The young man in the gospel valued his riches too much to follow Christ. All kinds of rubbish will gather around a wicked heart; and a sinner will yield to an obstacle which he is ashamed to mention. We have gained something, when we have discovered what it is. We can then take aim, and the arrow is more apt to hit it.