

A word to the unsanctified

A sermon by Richard Baxter

Men and Brethren,

THE eternal God, that made you for a life everlasting, and hath redeemed you by his only Son, when you had lost it and yourselves, being mindful of you in your sin and misery, hath indicted the gospel, and sealed it by his spirit, and commanded his ministers to preach it to the world, that pardon being freely offered you, and heaven being set before you, he might call you off from your fleshly pleasures, and from following after this deceitful world, and acquaint you with the life that you were created and redeemed for, before you are dead and past remedy. He sendeth you not prophets or apostles, that receive their message by immediate revelation; but yet he calleth you by his ordinary ministers, who are commissioned by him to preach the same gospel which Christ and his apostles first delivered. The Lord seeth how you forget him and your latter end, and how light you make of everlasting things, as men that understand not what they have to do or suffer. He seeth how bold you are in sin, and how fearless threatening, and how careless of your souls, and how the works of infidels are in your lives, while the belief of Christians is in your mouths. He seeth the dreadful day at hand, when your sorrows will begin, and you must lament all this with fruitless cries in torment and desperation; and then the remembrance of your folly will tear your hearts, if true conversion now prevent it not. In compassion of your sinful miserable souls, the Lord, that better knows your case than you can know it, hath made it our duty to speak to you in his name, *2 Cor. v. 19.* and to tell you plainly of your sin and misery, and what will be your end, and how sad a change you will shortly see, if yet you go on a little longer. Having bought you at so dear a rate as the blood of his son Jesus Christ, and made you so free and general promise of pardon, and grace, and everlasting glory; he commandeth us to tender all this to you, as the gift of God, and to entreat you to consider of the necessity and worth of what he offereth.—He seeth and pitieth you, while you are drowned in worldly cares and pleasures, and eagerly following childish toys, and wasting that short and precious time for a thing of nought, in which you should make ready for an everlasting life; and therefore he high commanded us to call after you, and tell you how you lose your labour, and are about to lose your souls, and to tell you what greater and better things you might certainly have, if you would hearken to his

Call, *Isa.* lv. 1, 2, 3. We believe and obey the voice of God; and come to you on his message, who hath charged us to preach, and be instant with you in season and out of season, and to lift up our voice like a trumpet, and show your transgressions and your sins, *Isa.* lviii. 1. 2 *Tim.* iv. 1, 2. But alas! to the grief of our souls and your own undoing, you stop your ears, you stiffen your necks, you harden your hearts, and send us back to God with groans, to tell him that we have done his message, but can do no good on you, nor scarcely get a sober hearing.—Oh! that our eyes were a fountain of tears, that we might lament our ignorant, careless people, that have Christ before them, and pardon, and life, and heaven before them, and that have not hearts to know or value them! that might have Christ, and grace, and glory, as well as others, if it were not for their wilful negligence and contempt! O that the Lord would fill our hearts with more compassion to these miserable souls, that we might cast ourselves even at their feet, and follow them to their houses, and speak to them with our bitter tears: For, long have we preached to many of them in vain: We study plainness to make them understand, and many of them will not understand us; we study serious, piercing words, to make them feel, but they will not feel. If the greatest matters would work with them, we should awake them; if the sweetest things would work, we should entice them and win their hearts; if the most dreadful things would work, we should at least affright them from their wickedness; if truth and certainty would take with them, we should soon convince them; if the God that made them, and the Christ that bought them, might be heard, the case would soon be altered with them; if scripture might be heard, we should soon prevail; if reason, even the best and strongest reason, might be heard, we should not doubt but we should speedily convince them; if experience might be heard, even their own experience, and the experience of all the world, the matter would be mended; yea, if the conscience within them might be heard, the case would be better with them than it is. But if nothing can be heard, what then shall we do for them? If the dreadful God of heaven be slighted, who then shall be regarded? If the inestimable love and blood of a Redeemer be made light of, what then shall be valued? If heaven have no desirable glory with them, and everlasting joys be nothing worth, if they can jest at hell, and dance about the bottomless pit, and play with the consuming fire, and that when God and man do warn them of it; what shall we do for such souls as these?

Once more, in the name of the God of heaven, I shall do the message to you which he hath commanded us, and leave it in these standing lines to convert you or to condemn you; to

change you, or to rise up in judgment against you, and to be a witness to your faces, that once you had a serious call to turn. Hear, all you that are drudges of the world, and the servants of flesh and Satan! that spend your days in looking after prosperity on earth, and drown your consciences in drinking, and gluttony, and idleness, and foolish sports, and know your sin, and yet will sin, as if you set God at defiance, and bid him do his worst and spare not! Hearken, all you that mind not God, and have no heart to holy things, and feel no favour in the word or worship of the Lord, or in the thoughts or mention of eternal life, that are careless of your immortal souls, and never bestow one hour in inquiring what case they are in, whether sanctified or unsanctified, and whether you are ready to appear before the Lord! Hearken, all you that, by sinning in the light, have dinned yourselves into infidelity, and do not believe the word of God. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear the gracious and yet the dreadful call of God! His eye is all this while upon you. Your sins are registered, and you shall surely hear of them again. God keepeth the book now; and he will write it all upon your consciences with his terrors; and then you also shall keep it yourselves: O sinners, that you knew but what you are doing! and whom you are all this while offending! the sun itself is darkness before that Majesty, which you daily abuse and carelessly provoke. The sinning angels were not able to stand before him, but were cast down to be tormented with devils. And dare such silly worms as you so carelessly offend, and set yourselves against your Maker! O that you did but a little know what case that wretched soul is in, that hath engaged the living God against him! The words of his mouth, that made thee, can unmake thee; the frown of his face will cut thee off and cast thee out into utter darkness. How eager are the devils to be doing with thee that have tempted thee, and do but wait for the word from God to take and use thee as their own! and then in a moment thou wilt be in hell. If God be against thee, all things are against thee: this world is but thy prison, for all thou so ovest it; thou art but reserved in it to the day of wrath, *Job* xxi. 30. the Judge is coming, thy soul is even going. Yet a little while, and thy friend shall say of thee, "He is dead;" and thou shalt see the things that thou now dost despise, and feel that which now thou wilt not believe. Death will bring such an argument as thou canst not answer; an argument that shall effectually confute thy cavils against the words and ways of God, and all thy self-conceited dotages. And then how soon will thy mind be changed? Then be an unbeliever if thou canst; stand then to all thy former words, which thou wast wont to utter against a holy and a heavenly life. Make good that cause then before the Lord, which thou wast wont to plead against thy teachers, and

against the people that feared God. Then stand to thy old opinions and contemptuous thoughts of the diligence of the saints; make ready now thy strongest reasons, and stand up then before the Judge, and plead like a man for thy fleshly, thy worldly, and ungodly life. But know that thou wilt have One to plead with, that will not be outfaced by thee; nor so easily put off as we thy fellow-creatures. O poor soul! there is nothing but a slender veil of flesh between thee and that amazing sight, which will quickly silence thee, and turn thy tone, and make thee of another mind! As soon as death hath drawn this curtain, thou shalt see first which will quickly leave thee speechless. And how quickly will that day and hour come! When thou hast had but a few more merry hours, and but a few more pleasant draughts and morsels, and a little more of the honours and riches of the world, thy portion will be spent, and thy pleasures ended, and all is then gone that thou settest thy heart upon; of all, that thou soldest thy Saviour and salvation for, there is nothing left but the heavy reckoning. As a thief, that sits merrily spending the money in an alehouse which he hath stolen, when men are riding in post-haste to apprehend him, so it is with you. While you are drowned in cares or fleshly pleasures, and making merry with your own shame, death is coming in post-haste to seize upon you, and carry your souls to such a place and state as now you little know or think of. Suppose, when you were bold and busy in your sin, that a messenger were but coming post from London to apprehend you and take away your lives; though you saw him not, yet if you knew that he was coming, it would mar your mirth, and you would be thinking of the haste he makes, and hearkening when he knocked at your door. O that you could but see what haste death makes, tho' yet he hath not overtaken you!

No post so swift! No messenger more sure! As sure as the sun will be with you in the morning, though it hath many thousand and hundred thousand miles to go in the night, so sure will death be quickly with you; and then where is your sport and pleasure? Then will you jest and brave it out? Then will you jeer at them that warned you? Then is it better to be a believing saint or a sensual worldling? "And then whose shall all these things be" that you have gathered? *Luke* xii. 19, 20, 21. Do you not observe that days and weeks are quickly gone, and nights and mornings come apace, and speedily succeed each other? You sleep, "but your damnation slumbereth not," you linger, "but your judgment this long time lingereth not," *2 Pet.* ii. 3, 4, 5. to which "you are reserved for punishment," *2 Pet.* ii. 8, 9.—O that you

were wise to understand this, and that you did consider your latter end," *Deut.* xxxii.29—"He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear the call of God in this day of his salvation."

O careless sinners! that you did but know the love that you unthankfully neglect, and the preciousness of the blood of Christ which you despise! O that you did but know the riches of the gospel! O that you did but know, a little know, the certainty, and the glory, and blessedness, of that everlasting life, which now you will not set your hearts upon, nor be persuaded first and diligently to seek, *Heb.* xi. 6. and xii. 28. *Matt.* vi. 12. Did you but know the endless life with God which you now neglect, how quickly would you cast away your sin, how quickly would you change your mind and life, your course and company, and turn the streams of your affections, and lay your care another way! How resolutely would you scorn to yield to such temptations as now deceive you and carry you away! How zealously would you bestir yourselves for that most blessed life! How earnest would you be with God in prayer! How diligent in hearing, and learning, and inquiring!—How serious in meditating on the laws of God! (*Psal.* i. 2.) How fearful of sinning in thought, word, or deed; and how careful to please God and grow in holiness!—O what a changed people you would be! And why should not the certain word of God be believed by you, and prevail with you, which, openeth to you these glorious and eternal things?

Yea, let me tell you, that even here on earth, ye little know the difference between the life which you refuse, and the life which you would choose. The sanctified are conversing with God, when you dare scarce think of him, and when you are conversing with but earth and flesh.—Their conversation is in heaven, when you are utter strangers to it, and your belly is your God, and you are minding earthly things, *Phil.* iii. 18, 19, 20. They are seeking after the face of God, when you seek for nothing higher than this world.—They are busily laying out for an endless life, where they shall be equal with the angels, *Luke* xx. 36. When you are taken up with a shadow and a transitory thing of naught. How long and base is your earthly, fleshly, sinful life, in comparison of the noble, spiritual life of true believers! Many a time have I looked on such men with grief and pity, to see them trudge about the world, and spend their lives, and care, and labour, for nothing but a little food and raiment, or a little fading pelf, or fleshly pleasures, or empty honours, as if they had no higher things to mind.—What difference is there between the lives of these men and of the beasts that perish, that spend their time in working, and eating, and living, but that they may live? They taste not of the inward heavenly

pleasures which believers taste and live upon.—I had rather have a little of their comfort, which the fore-thoughts of their heavenly inheritance afford them, though I had all their scorns and sufferings with it, than to have all your pleasures and treacherous prosperity. I would not have one of your secret gripes and pangs of conscience, and dark and dreadful thoughts of death and the life to come, for all that ever the world hath done for you, or all that you can reasonably hope that it should do. If I were in your unconverted carnal state, and knew but what I know, and believed but what I now believe, methinks my life would be a fore-taste of hell: How oft should I be thinking of the terrors of the Lord of the dismal day that is hastening on! Sure death and hell would be still before me. I should think of them by day, and dream of them by night; I should lie down in fear, and rise in fear, and live in fear, lest death should come before I were converted. I should have small felicity in anything that I possessed, and little pleasure in any company, and little joy in anything in the world, as long as I knew myself to be under the curse and wrath of God. I should be still afraid of hearing that voice, *Luke* xii. 20. “Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.” And that fearful sentence would be written upon my conscience, *Isa.* xlviii. 22. and lvii. 21. “There is no peace, faith my God, to the wicked.”—O poor sinners! it is a more joyful life than this that you might live, if you were but truly willing, to hearken to Christ, and come home to God. You might then draw near to God, with boldness, and call him your father, and comfortably trust him with your souls and bodies. If you look upon the promises, you may say, they are all mine: If upon the curse, you may say, from this I am delivered! When you read the law, you may see what you are saved from!—When you read the gospel, you may see him that redeemed you, and see the course of his love, and holy life, and sufferings, and trace him in his temptations, tears, and blood, in the work of your salvation. You may see death conquered, and heaven opened, and your resurrection and glorification provided for in the resurrection and glorification of your Lord. If you look on the saints, you may say, “They are my brethren and companions.” If on the unsanctified you may rejoice to think that you are saved from that state. If you look upon the heavens, the sun, and moon, and stars innumerable, you may think and say, “My Father’s face is infinitely more glorious; it is higher matters that he hath prepared for his saints; yonder is but the outward court of heaven: The blessedness that he hath promised us is so much higher that flesh and blood cannot behold it.” If you think of the grave, you may remember that the glorified Spirit, a living Head, and a loving Father, have all so near relation to your dust, that it cannot be forgotten or neglected, but more certainly revive than the

plants and flowers in the spring, because that the soul is still alive, that is the root of the body; and Christ is alive, that is the root of both.—Even death, which is the king of fears, may be remembered and entertained with joy, as being the day of your deliverance from the remnants of sin and sorrow, and the day which you believed, and hoped, and waited for, when you shall see the blessed things which you had heard of, and shall find, by present joyful experience, what it was to choose the better part, and to be a sincere believing saint. What say you, Sir? is not this a more delightful life, to be assured of salvation, and ready to die, than to live as the ungodly, that have their hearts overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and so that day comes upon them unawares? *Luke xxi. 34, 36.* Might you not live a comfortable life, if once you were made the heirs of heaven, and sure to be saved when you leave the world?—O look about you then, and think what you do, and cast not away such hopes as these for very nothing. The flesh and world can give you no such hopes or comforts.

And, besides all the misery that you bring upon yourselves, you are the troublers of others as long as you are unconverted. You trouble magistrates to rule you by their laws; you trouble ministers by resisting the light and guidance which they offer you. Your sin and misery are the greatest grief and trouble to them in the world.—You trouble the commonwealth, and draw the judgments of God upon you. It is you that most disturb the holy peace and order of the churches, and hinder our union and reformation, and are the shame and trouble of the churches where you intrude, and of the places where you are.—Ah! Lord, how heavy and sad a case is this, that even in England, where the gospel doth abound above any other nation in the world, where teaching is so plain and common, and all the help we can desire is at hand; when the sword hath been hewing us, and judgment hath run as a fire through the Land; when deliverances have relieved us, and so many admirable mercies have engaged us to God, and to the gospel, and a holy life; that after all this, our cities, and towns, and countries, shall abound with multitudes of unsanctified men, and swarm with so much sensuality, as everywhere, to our grief, we see! One would have thought, that after all this light, and all this experience, and all these judgments and mercies of God, the people of this nation should have joined together, as one man, to turn to the Lord, and should have come to their godly teacher, and lamented all their former sins, and desired him to join with them in public humiliation, to confess them openly, and beg pardon of them from the Lord, and should have

craved his instruction for the time to come, and be glad to be ruled by the spirit within, and the ministers of Christ without, according to the word of God. One would think that, after such reason and scripture-evidence as they hear, and after all these means and mercies, there should not be an ungodly person left amongst us, nor a wordling, nor a drunkard, nor a hater of reformation, nor an enemy to holiness, to be found in all our towns or countries. If we be not all agreed about some ceremonies or forms of government, one would think that, before this, we should have been all agreed to live a holy and heavenly life, in obedience to God, his word, and ministers, and in love and peace with one another.—But alas! how far are our people from this course! Most of them, in most places, do set their hearts on earthly things, and seek “not first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof,” but look at holiness as a needless thing: Their families are prayerless, or else a few heartless lifeless words must serve instead of hearty, fervent, daily prayers [or perhaps only on the Lord’s-day in the evening]; their children are not taught the knowledge of Christ, and the covenant of grace, nor brought up in the nurture of the Lord, though they firmly promised all this in their baptism.

They instruct not their servants in the matters of salvation, but so their work be done they care not. There are more railing speeches in their families than gracious words that tend to edification. How few are the families that fear the Lord, and inquire at his word and ministers how they should live, and what they should do, and are willing to be taught and ruled, and that heartily look after everlasting life! And those few that God hath made so happy are commonly the by-word of their neighbours; when we see some live in drunkenness, and some in pride and worldliness, and most of them have little care of their salvation, though the cause be gross and past all controversy, yet will they hardly be convinced of their misery, and more hardly recovered and reformed: but when we have done all that we are able to save them from their sins, we leave the most of them as we find them. And if, according to the law of God, we cast them out of the communion of the church, when they have obstinately rejected all our admonitions, they rage at us as if we were their enemies, and their hearts are filled with malice against us, and they will sooner set themselves against the Lord and his laws, and church, and ministers, than against their deadly sins. This is the doleful case of England: We have magistrates that countenance the ways of godliness, and a happy opportunity for unity and reformation is before us, and faithful ministers long to see the right ordering of the church

and of the ordinances of God; but the power of sin in our people doth frustrate almost all. Nowhere can almost a faithful minister set up the unquestionable discipline of Christ, or put back the most scandalous impenitent sinners from the communion of the church and participation of the sacraments, but the most of the people rail at them and revile them; as if these ignorant careless souls were wiser than their teachers, or than God himself. And thus in the day of our visitation, when God calls upon us to reform his church, though magistrates seem willing, and faithful ministers seem willing, yet are the multitude of the people still unwilling, and have so blinded themselves, and hardened their hearts, that, even in these days of light and grace, they are the obstinate enemies of light and grace, and will not be brought by the calls of God to see their folly, and know what is for their good. O that the people of England “knew at least in this their day the things that belong unto their peace, before they are hid from their eyes!” *Luke* xix. 42.

O foolish miserable souls! *Gal.* iii. 1. who hath bewitched your minds into such madness, and your hearts into such deadness, that you should be such mortal enemies to yourselves, and go on so obstinately towards damnation, that neither the word of God, nor the persuasions of men, can change your minds, or hold your hands, or stop you, till you are past remedy! Well, sinners! this life will not last always; this patience will nor wait upon you still. Do not think that you shall abuse your Maker and Redeemer, and serve his enemies, and debase your souls, and trouble the world, and wrong the church, and reproach the godly, and grieve your teachers, and hinder reformation, and all this upon free cost. You know not yet what this must cost you, but you must shortly know, when the righteous God shall take you in hand, who will handle you in another manner than the sharpest magistrates or the plainest-dealing pastors did, unless you prevent the everlasting torments by a sound conversion, and a speedy obeying of the call of God. “He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear,” while mercy hath a voice to call.

One objection I find most common in the mouths of the ungodly, especially of late years: they say, “We can do nothing without God, we cannot have grace if God will not give it us; and, if he will, we shall quickly turn; if he have not predestined us, and will not turn us, how can we turn ourselves or be saved; it is not in him that wills nor in him that runs.” And thus they think they are excused.

I have answered this formerly, and in this book: but let me now say this much.—1. Though you cannot cure yourselves, you can hurt and poison yourselves. It is God that must sanctify

your hearts; but who corrupted them? Will you wilfully take poison, because you cannot cure yourselves? Methinks you should the more forbear it. You should the more take heed of sinning, if you cannot mend what sin doth mar.—2. Though you cannot be converted without the special grace of God, yet you must know that God giveth his grace in the use of his holy means which he hath appointed to that end; and common grace may enable you to forbear your gross sinning (as to the outward act) and to use those means. Can you truly say, that you do as much as you are able to do? Are you not able to go by an alehouse-door, or to forbear the company that hardeneth you in sin? Are you not able to hear the word, and think of what you heard when you come home, and to consider with yourselves of your own condition and of everlasting things? Are you not able to read good books from day to day, at least the Lord's-day, and to converse with those that fear the Lord? You cannot say you have done what you are able.—3. And therefore you must know that you can forfeit the grace and help of God by your wilful sinning or negligence, though you cannot, without grace, turn to God. If you will not do what you can, it is just with God to deny you that grace by which you might do more.

4. And, for God's decrees, you must know that they separate not the end and means, but tie them together. God never decreed to save any but the sanctified, nor to damn any but the unsanctified. God doth as truly decree whether your land, this year, shall be barren or fruitful, and just how long you shall live in the world, as he hath decreed whether you shall be saved or not; and yet you would think that man but a fool that would forbear ploughing and sowing, and say, "If God have decreed that my ground shall bear corn, it will bear, whether I plough and sow or not. If God have decreed that I shall live, I shall live, whether I eat or not; but if he have not, it is not eating that will keep me alive." Do you know how to answer such a man, or do you not? If you do, then you know how to answer yourselves; for the case is alike God's decree is as peremptory about your bodies as your souls: if you do not, then try first, there conclusions upon your bodies, before you venture to try them on your soul: see first whether God will keep you alive without food or raiment, and whether he will give you corn without tillage and labour, and whether he will bring you to your journey's end without a travail or carriage; and, if you speed well in this, then try whether he will bring you to heaven without your diligent use of means, and sit down and say, We cannot sanctify ourselves.