

Zeal for the Salvation of Sinners!

ROMANS x. 1.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

TRUE religion consists chiefly in *love to God*, and *love to man*; and wherever one of these is found, there is the other also. It was love that brought the Saviour down from the throne of glory to this world, that He might "seek and save that which was lost." While He lived on earth, "He went about doing good;" and when He returned to heaven, He commanded His ministers and people to follow His example, and to do good to all men as they should have opportunity. The apostles and first Christians gladly obeyed, and were very active in spreading abroad the knowledge of their gracious Master, and His great salvation. Among these, St. Paul was one of the most zealous. Our text is an expression of his strong desire for the salvation of his countrymen; and the particular reason of his anxiety was, because he knew they were not in the way to obtain salvation. They were seeking salvation by their own works, "for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone." Knowing therefore the danger of their being eternally lost, he expresses his feelings in these words, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." And will you my friends,

who are here present, permit us to say that we trust we are moved by the same desire? If any person should enquire, why we come here to pray, and sing, and read; we reply, For no other reason than this, that we may promote your salvation; that we may stir you up to consider your need of it; that we may shew you, from the Gospel, the only true way of it, and put you upon seeking it immediately. Observe then,

I. That serious Christians plainly see the dangerous state in which many of their neighbours are.

II. That they earnestly desire their deliverance from it.

I. We observe that serious Christians plainly perceive the dangerous state of unconverted sinners around them. We cannot tell what the grace of God may do hereafter for the worst of men; and the condition of some may be doubtful; but in many cases, it is too evident that many are in the "gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." This appears,

1. *From their living in open sin*; for indeed "some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment." St. Paul says, "the works of the flesh are manifest," among which he names "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, wrath, murder, and drunkenness." Gal. v. 19. Our Saviour has directed us to judge of men by their fruits—"for every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit;" and He adds (observe His solemn words), "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." Matt. vii. 17. We are forced to conclude, therefore, that "if men live after the flesh, they must die:" that if they proceed in the broad road, it must be to destruction; and that "the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Some men are evidently "men of the world," "servants of sin," and "captives of

Satan;" such, to whom our Lord said, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do."

2. *Carelessness about religion* is another alarming symptom of a graceless, and therefore dangerous, state. There are many who have no concern about their souls or salvation. Like Gallio, they "care for none of these things." But this carelessness is as strong a proof of being in a state of nature and of wrath as living in open sin is; for it is written, Heb. ii. 3. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" To neglect this salvation is to omit all those duties which are necessary to a profitable hearing and keeping of the word preached. How many are there who every Sabbath turn their backs on the house of God, and spend the day in idleness and sinful pleasure! How many are there who never look into the Bible that they may become wise to salvation! How many who never lift up their hearts to God in prayer! Now, how shall such escape? Those who despised the law of Moses died without mercy; but to despise the gospel is a greater crime, and deserves a greater punishment. Those who seek not mercy now, according to the gospel, shall never have it. "This is the acceptable time; this is the day of salvation:" if this be neglected, let poor sinners expect no more to hear of mercy through all eternity.

3. *Formality in religion* is another evidence of being in a dangerous condition. There are some who dare not omit all religious duties, public and private, but they are like the Pharisees, "who drew nigh to God with their mouth, and honoured Him with their lips, but with their heart was far from Him;" by many religious ceremonies "they washed the outside of the cup and platter, but within they were full of extortion and excess." See Matt. xv. and xxiii. How many say their prayers like parrots, without knowing

their meaning! How many go to church only to see and be seen; and when they come away, are full of mirth and folly; thinking no more of what has passed, and spending the rest of the day in worldly conversation or amusement! Others think, that because they belong to a good church, and have been baptized, and say their prayers, and take the sacrament, all is well with them; while they are strangers to *heart-work* in religion; were never alarmed on account of their sins; never humbled for their sins; never fled to Jesus for refuge from their sins; and never knew any thing of that great change of heart, called in Scripture, regeneration, or new-birth. Now, when we see our neighbours content with this poor empty form of godliness, and denying the power thereof, we cannot but be deeply concerned on account of their danger.

4. There is another thing which alarms us on their behalf; that is; *when we see them receive for truth, great and fundamental errors as to the doctrines of religion.* We know it is commonly said, that it does not signify what a man believes, if he does but live a good life. But we testify against this opinion, as destructive to the souls of men. Did not the great Redeemer come into the world to enlighten it! Is He not the great Teacher, who, by His Word and Spirit, reveals the will of God for our salvation? Has He not promised His people that they shall "know the truth, and that the truth shall make them free!" And has He not said that His sheep hear and know His voice, but will not follow the voice of a stranger! How then can error be harmless? The Scripture speaks of "damnable heresies," as well as damnable vices. Surely it is of great importance that we have right views of the blessed God, as to His holiness, justice, and mercy; that we have right views of ourselves, as fallen, guilty, helpless sinners; and espec-

ially that we have right views of Jesus Christ, and of the nature and way of salvation through Him by faith. It was the want of these that made St. Paul use the words of our text. And this leads us to observe, in the next place,

II. *That serious Christians earnestly and sincerely desire the salvation of their neighbours, whom they thus perceive to be in a dangerous state.*

If love to our neighbour requires that we should pity and help him in the time of sickness, poverty, or any other kind of temporal distress; how much more that we should care for his soul, and labour to prevent his eternal ruin! All the love and politeness that worldly men show to their neighbour, is for the perishing body; while they care not for the soul, but perhaps contribute much to its eternal destruction. But if the love of God be shed abroad in our heart, the salvation of souls will be the first object we have in view; for,

1. We tremble to think of their future misery. We know assuredly that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Rom. i. 18. We certainly know that all men are born in sin, and are children of wrath; and that without an interest in Christ by faith, and a heart changed by grace, no man shall see the Lord; that "the wrath of God abideth on every unbeliever," and that "He will render indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every man who dies in his sins," impenitent, unpardoned, unrenewed. Now, can we think of our relations, our friends, our neighbours being in this state, without pitying them, praying for them, and exhorting them to "fly from the wrath to come?" It is impossible! If any man can, how dwelleth the love of God in him? When our compassionate Saviour paid His last visit to Jerusalem, and from a hill beheld that great and wicked city, which

on account of unbelief, was to be destroyed in about forty years, He wept over it; though then surrounded with a multitude, crying, "Hosanna," He lamented over it with tears, saying, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." Luke xix. 42. And may not we be permitted, with some small portion of the same love and compassion to our perishing neighbours, to say, O how happy it would be for you now to know those things which are necessary to your present peace and everlasting salvation; lest, ere long, God should deprive you of the means of grace, and give you up to the blindness of your minds and the hardness of your hearts! It would shock us beyond measure to see one of you burning in a great fire, were it but for a few minutes; but who can think without horror of everlasting burnings? We therefore would, as St. Jude speaks, "save you with fear, pulling you out of the fire."

2. As we wish to prevent your future destruction, so likewise we earnestly desire that you may share with us in the joys and glories of the heavenly world. We believe "there is a reward for the righteous;" that "the pure in heart shall see God:" that "in His presence is fulness of joy, and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore." We believe that Christ is gone to heaven to prepare mansions for His people; and that, in due time, they shall be with Him, to behold His glory, to enter into His rest, to sit down with Him on His throne, and to wear a crown of glory. We humbly hope, through Jesus, to partake of these blessings, and we would gladly take all the world along with us. We are grieved to think that any should despise the good land, slight the invitations of Heaven, or expect it on false grounds. We are grieved to think that so many cleave to the

dust, and for the sake of the short-lived pleasures of sin, and a portion in this world, are in danger of losing eternal joys. This therefore puts us upon urging you to seek first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, that you may also be admitted into the kingdom of glory.

3. We wish you to know and enjoy the present pleasures of true religion. Let strangers to godliness say what they please, we maintain that the ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and her paths are peace. Some of us have tried both, the pleasures of sin and the pleasures of religion; and we are bold to say, there is more satisfaction in one hour's communion with God, than in days and months of sinful indulgence. We can say, with David, "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand; I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness." A good hope through grace, a knowledge of the pardon of our sins, a persuasion of the favour of God towards us, a belief that all things are working together for our good, and that we shall go to heaven when we die; together with the actual delight we find in prayer, praise, hearing, reading, and conversation with the people of God—these are joys that satisfy and sanctify the mind, and compared to which, all the frothy mirth and carnal pleasures of the wicked are mean as the toys of children, and hurtful as the sports of madmen. We wish you therefore, brethren, to be partakers of the grace of God, and we say to you, as Moses to Hobab, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Numb. x. 29.

4. We wish the salvation of others *on account of the glory of God*, for which we feel ourselves concerned, and which will be promoted thereby. We are taught to pray, "Hallowed be Thy name." Let

God be glorified! And surely, when a poor sinner ceases to be a rebel to His Maker, throws himself at the feet of mercy, and swears allegiance to the God of his salvation, the Lord is glorified. Satan loses another subject, and one is added to the kingdom of Jesus. The love of Christ constraineth us, and our loyalty to the King of heaven makes us long to see His kingdom flourish. We cannot tell of how great importance may be the value of one converted soul; a wife, a husband, the children of the family, the servants, the connexions, may all be the better for it; the gospel may be spread; more souls may derive benefit from it. We would therefore compass sea and land to make one proselyte, not to our party, or any particular sect, but that Jesus may be exalted: "for blessed be His glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with His glory! Amen and Amen." Psalm lxxii. 19.

5. To say the truth, we are not without a little selfishness in this matter: for beside all the reasons before mentioned, we have some view to our own peace and happiness. We do find that, "the meanest service of Christ has refreshment in it." Our good Master sends not His servants on a warfare at their own charge. He that watereth the souls of others, shall himself be watered. We think the conversion of a soul to God is the greatest honour and happiness, next to our own salvation, that we can enjoy; and though we know that no man has any claim upon God for what he does, all being unprofitable servants—that the best action of man has no merit in it—yet we believe that there is a reward of grace for the faithful servants of Christ, who has promised that so small a gift as a cup of cold water given to any one, because he belongs to Christ, shall not be forgotten; and as to those whom He employs in His work, "they that be wise shall shine as the

brightness of the firmament; and they shall turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." Dan. xii. 3.

Let us now show in what manner a desire for the salvation of sinners ought to be expressed; for this desire, when true, will not be idle, but active; and will put persons on earnest endeavours to accomplish it; and,

1. *By prayer.* The conversion of a soul, like the creation of the world, is the work of God alone. A real Christian is a new creature, "born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John i. 13. St. Paul, therefore, in our text, mentions not only his "heart's desire," but "his prayer to God" also. Those who truly pray for themselves will pray for others too. If a husband or a wife has a partner who knows not the Lord, prayer will be immediately offered. If a parent has an ungodly child, like Abraham he will cry, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" or like the poor man, Matt. xvii. 15. "Lord, have mercy upon my son!" Thus Job rose early in the morning, and offered up ten offerings for his ten children; because he feared they had sinned against God in their feasting with each other.

2. *We should urge our friends to come and hear the gospel.* Do not be ashamed to invite them to hear that word which God has made His power to your salvation. When Christ called Andrew to be His disciple, Andrew soon invited his brother Peter; and the day after, when Christ called Philip, Philip presently findeth Nathaniel, and invites him to come and hear Jesus. So when the Lord sent Peter to preach to Cornelius, a Roman officer, he found Cornelius had called together his kinsmen and friends; and they were all gathered together in a private house, as you may be here, to hear all things which God had commanded Peter to preach. O how many

have had reason to bless God for ever, that some kind friend first invited them to go and hear a gospel sermon! Practise this, my friends; all you who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, say to others, "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" Sinners, as you all know, are very active to bring others into sin, and to invite them to plays and merry-meetings; why should not we be more active to save souls, than sinners are to destroy them?

3. There is another way in which we should show our desire for the salvation of our fellow-creatures, and that is, *by the Christian education of children*, our own and our neighbours'. Abraham was commended of God for this—"I know him, said the Lord, that he will command his children and his household after him;" and parents were ordered, by the law, Deut. vi. 7, "to teach their children the words of God diligently; to talk of them when they sat down in the house, when they walked by the way, when they lay down, and when they rose up." If parents wish well to the souls of their children, they will try to inform their minds, bring them under the Word, and restrain them as much as possible from Sabbath-breaking and other sins. And as there are some parents who will not, or cannot, instruct their own children, let us do what we can for them. Why should one of these little ones perish, while Sunday Schools may be kept up? The Lord prosper this good work more and more! And to this we may add, constant regard to *family worship*, by those who are at the head of families. Surely they have little regard to the souls of children and servants, who do not daily read the Scriptures, and pray with their families.

4. *Personal exhortation* is a great means of good to the souls of men. "Exhort one another daily, while

it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." How often has God blessed one sentence, spoken in His fear and love! A "word spoken in season, how good is it!" O let us try, whenever we can, mildly to reprove sin; and give a hint, on all proper occasions, in companies, on journeys, at work, whereby we may prove, if the Lord bless it, the instruments of our neighbour's conversion.

5. To all this, one thing more must necessarily be added, and that is, a *holy life*. Actions speak louder than words. "Let our light shine before men, that they, seeing our *good works*," as well as hearing our good words, "may glorify God." There is a testimony for God in the life of a holy man, that the wicked may despise, but cannot resist. Thus let all Christians "hold forth the word of life," that so, even the prejudiced, "who will not hear the word, may, without the word, be won by our conversation."

APPLICATION

Men and brethren: Is it the duty and practice of all real Christians to be thus affectionately concerned for the salvation of others?—Should you not be much more concerned for your own salvation; you, who have hitherto totally neglected it? O consider the value of your souls! Are you not sinners? And must you not soon receive the wages of your sins, unless they are pardoned for Christ's sake? And can you expect pardon without seeking it? O then be wise. Rouse yourselves from your dreadful stupidity. Cry to God for His mercy and grace, lest you perish. This is the day of salvation. To you is the word of salvation sent. O that it may not be sent in vain! Jesus Christ is a great and gracious Saviour; He was never known to reject one perishing sinner who came

to Him for life. Let this be an encouragement to you to apply to Him, and you will find Him able and willing to save to the uttermost.

From what has been said, we may learn the nature of true grace, how it opens the heart, and shows itself in love to God and man. This may afford some comfort to those who fear they are destitute of it. Ask your hearts whether they do not long for the salvation of your fellow-men?—and whether you do not, with Christ, angels, and all good men, rejoice in their conversion? If so, it is a good evidence of grace. On the contrary, those selfish souls who can be content to go to heaven alone, while they care not if all around them perish; while they make no one effort to rescue them from destruction; such persons have reasons to fear; for, if we love not our neighbour whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?

Finally, let every serious hearer suffer the word of exhortation. See, in St. Paul, a pattern of holy zeal, and imitate it. Like him, let it be your heart's desire and prayer to God, that Israel may be saved. Look around you, and see who there is to whom you may be useful. Consider by what means you may best advance the glory of the great Redeemer, by bringing souls to Him. Remember that life is short, and all opportunities of usefulness will cease. Work, then, while it is day, for the night of death is coming, when no man can work. "Serve your generation according to the will of God," and then enter into the promised rest; where, with all the redeemed, you shall glorify the riches of free grace to all eternity.