

CHRISTIAN FOOLS

Arthur W. Pink

“Then He said unto them, O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.”

Luke 24:25

Those of you who read the religious announcements in the newspapers of yesterday would see the subject for my sermon this evening is “Christian Fools.” Possibly some of you thought there was a printer’s error and that what I really meant to announce was “Professing Christian fools.” The paper gave it quite correctly. My subject tonight is “Christian Fools.” Probably some of you think that this is a most unsuitable title for a servant of God to give to his sermon, and yet I make no apology whatever for it. It fits exactly my subject for tonight: it expresses accurately what I am going to speak about: and—“what is far more to the point—it epitomizes our text: “Then He said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.”

Those words were spoken by Christ on the day of His resurrection: spoken not to worldlings but to Christians. That which occasioned them was this. The disciples to whom He was speaking were lopsided in their theology: they believed a certain part of God’s truth and they refused to believe another part of the truth that did not suit them; they believed some Scriptures but they did not believe all that the prophets had spoken, and the reason they did not was because they were unable to harmonize the two different parts of God’s truth. They were like some people today: when it comes to their theology; they walk by reason and by logic rather than by faith.

In the Old Testament there were many prophecies concerning the coming Messiah that spoke of His glory. If there was one thing the Old Testament prediction made plain, it was that the Messiah of Israel should be glorious. It spoke of His power, His honor, His majesty, His dominion, His triumphs. But on the other hand, there were many prophecies in the Old Testament that spoke of a suffering Messiah, that portrayed His humiliation, His degradation, His rejection, His death at the hands of wicked men. And these disciples of Christ believed the former set of prophecies, but they would not believe in the second: they could not see how it was possible to harmonize the two. If the coming Messiah was to be a glorious Messiah, possessing power and majesty and dominion: if He would be triumphant, then how could He, at the same time, be a suffering Messiah, despised, humiliated, rejected of men? And because the disciples could not fit the two together, because they were unable to harmonize them, they refused to believe both, and Christ told them to their faces that they were fools. He says, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.”

I suppose some of us have wondered how it was possible for these disciples, these followers of Christ, who had been privileged to be with Him during His public ministry and those who had been so intimate with Him, had been instructed by Him, had

witnessed His wonderful miracles; how it was possible for such men to err so grievously and to act so foolishly. And yet we need not be surprised; the same thing is happening all around us today. Christendom tonight is full of men and women who believe portions of God's truth, but who do not believe all that the prophets have spoken. In other words, my friends, Christendom tonight is full of men and women that the Son of God says are "fools" because of their slowness of heart to believe.

Now very likely, the sermon tonight will make some of my hearers angry: probably they are the ones who most need the rebuke of the text. When a servant of God wields the sword of the Spirit, if he does his work faithfully and effectively, then some of his hearers are bound to get cut and wounded: and, my friends, that is always God's way. God always wounds before He heals. And I want to remind you at the outset that this text is no invention of mine. These are the words of One who never wounded unnecessarily, but they are also the words of the True and Faithful Witness who never hesitated to preach the whole truth of God, whether men would receive it or whether they would reject it. I know it is not a pleasant thing to be called a fool, especially if we have a high regard for ourselves and rate our own wisdom and orthodoxy very highly—it wounds our pride. But we need to be wounded, all of us. We need to be humbled; we need to be rebuked; we need to have that word from the lips of Christ which is as a two-edged sword.

Now notice, dear friends, that Christ did not upbraid these disciples because they did not understand, but because of their lack of faith. The trouble with them was they reasoned too much. Very likely they prided themselves on their logical minds and said, Well, surely we are not asked to believe impossibilities and absurdities: both of these cannot be true; one is true and the other cannot be. Either the Messiah of Israel is going to be a glorious and a triumphant Messiah, or else He is going to be a rejected and a humiliated one: they cannot both be true. That is why Christ said to them—not because of their failure to understand, but because of their lack of faith—"O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

I am afraid that today there are many who only believe what they can understand, and if there is something else that they cannot understand, they do not believe it. If they have devised to themselves a systematized theology (or more probably they have adopted someone else's system of theology), and they hear a sermon (no matter how much Scripture there may be in it) which they cannot fit into their little system of theology, they won't have it. They place a higher value on consistency than they do on fidelity. That is just what was the matter with these disciples: they could not see the consistency of the two things and therefore they were only prepared to believe the one.

The same thing, my friends, is true today with many preachers. There are multitudes of preachers in Australia tonight whose theology is narrower than the teaching of this Book. Then away to the winds with theology! —I mean human systems of theology which are narrower than Scripture. For example, there are men today who read God's Word, and they see that the gospel is to be preached to every creature, and that God commands all who hear that gospel to believe in Christ; then they come across some texts on election, predestination:—"Many are called but few are chosen," and they say, Well, I cannot harmonize this, I cannot see how it is possible to preach, unhampered, a gospel to every creature, and yet for election to be true. And because they cannot harmonize the two

things, they neither believe the two nor will they preach both. They cannot harmonize election with a gospel that is to be preached to every creature, and so the Arminians preach the gospel but they leave out election.

Yes, but there are many Calvinists who equally come under the rebuke of our text. They believe in the sovereignty of God, but they refuse to believe in the responsibility of man. I read a book by a hyper-Calvinist only a few weeks ago, by a man whose shoe-latchet the present speaker in many things is not fit to stoop down and unloose—a man of God, a faithful servant of His, one from whom I have learned not a little—and yet he had the effrontery to say, that responsibility is the most awful word in the English language, and then went on to tirade against human responsibility. They cannot understand how that it is possible for God to fix the smallest and the greatest events, and yet not to infringe upon man's accountability—men themselves choosing the evil and rejecting the good—and therefore because they cannot see both they will only believe in one.

Listen! If man were nothing more than clay in the hands of the Potter there would be no difficulty. Scripture affirms in Romans 9 that man is clay in the hands of the Potter, but that only gives you one aspect of the truth. That emphasizes the absoluteness of God's control over all the works and creatures of His hands; but from other Scriptures we learn that man is something more than lifeless clay. Man has been endowed with understanding; man has been given a will. Yes, I freely admit that his understanding is darkened; I fully allow that his will is in bondage; but they are still there; they have not been destroyed. If man was nothing more than a block of wood or a block of stone, it would be easy to understand how that God could fix the place that he was to occupy and the purpose that he was to fulfil; but, my friends, it is very far from easy to understand how that God can shape and direct all history and yet leave man fully responsible and not infringe upon his accountability.

Now there are some who have devised a very simple but a most unsatisfactory method of getting rid of the difficulty, and that is to deny its existence. There are Arminians who have presented the "free-will" of man in such a way as to virtually dethrone God, and I have no sympathy whatever with their system. On the other hand, there have been some Calvinists who have presented a kind of fatalism (I know not what else to term it) reducing man to nothing more than a block of wood, exonerating him of all blame and excusing him for his unbelief. But they are both equally wrong, and I scarcely know which is the more mischievous of the two. When the Calvinist says, All things happen according to the predestination of God. I heartily say Amen, and I am willing to be called a Calvinist; but if the Arminian says that when a man sins the sin is his own, and that if he continues sinning he will surely perish, and that if he perishes his blood is on his own head, then I believe the Arminian speaks according to God's truth; though I am not willing to be called an Arminian. The trouble is when we tie ourselves down to a theological system.

Now listen a little more closely still. When the Calvinist says that faith is the gift of God and that no sinner ever does or can believe until God gives him that faith, I heartily say Amen; but when the Arminian says that the gospel commands all who hear it to believe, and that it is the duty of every sinner to believe, I also say Amen. What? you say, You are going to stand up and preach faith-duty-duty-faith? I know that is jolting to some of you.

Now bear with me patiently for a moment and I will try and not shock you too badly. Whose is the gospel? It is God's. Whose voice is it that is heard speaking in the gospel? It is God's. To whom has God commanded the gospel to be preached? To every creature. What does the gospel say to every creature? It says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." It says, "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." It says, "The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." God commands, not invites. God commands every man, woman and child that hears that gospel to believe it, for the gospel is true; therefore it is the duty of every man to believe what God has said. Let me give you the alternative. If it is not the duty of every sinner to believe the gospel, then it is his duty not to believe it—one or the other. Do you mean to tell me it is the duty of an unconverted sinner to reject the gospel? I am not talking now about his ability to believe it.

Some of you say, Well how can it be his duty to believe it, when he cannot do so? Is it his duty to do an impossibility? Well, listen! Is my duty, is my responsibility measured by my ability, by my power to perform? Here is a man who has ordered a hundred pounds' worth of furniture; he receives it, and he is given thirty days' credit in which to pay for it; but during the next thirty days he squanders his money, and at the end of the month he is practically bankrupt. When the firm presents their bill to him, he says, "I am sorry but I am unable to pay you." He is speaking the truth. "I am unable, it does not lie within my power to pay you." Would the head of that business house say, "All right, that ends the matter then: sorry to hear that you do not have the power, but evidently we cannot do anything." No, my friend, ability does not measure our responsibility. Man is responsible to do many things that he is not able to do. You that are Christians are responsible to live a sinless life, for God says to you, "Awake to righteousness and sin not," and in the first Epistle of John we read, "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not." God sets before you and me a standard of holy perfection. There is not one of us that is capable of measuring up to it, but that is our responsibility, and that is what we are going to be measured by when we stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.

Now then there are many Arminian preachers who are afraid to preach sermons on certain texts of the Bible. They would be afraid to stand up and preach from John 6:44—"No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." They would be afraid to stand up and preach from Romans 9:18—"Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth." Yes, and it is also true that there are many Calvinist preachers who are equally afraid to preach from certain texts of the Scriptures lest their orthodoxy be challenged and lest they be called Freewillers. They are afraid to stand up and preach, for example, on the words of the Lord Jesus:—"How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Or on such a verse as this:—"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force;" or "Strive (agonize) to enter in at the Strait Gate." And to show you that I am not imagining things, I am just going to read you three lines. Listen! "At the meeting at . . . [I will leave out the name] on January 15th last, the question was asked to the effect: Had not some of our ministers for the sake of orthodoxy abstained from preaching from certain texts, and the answer was in the affirmative." I am reading now from a Strict Baptist magazine! That was a meeting of Strict Baptist preachers and they were honest enough to admit, themselves, that because

they were afraid of their orthodoxy being challenged, they were silent on certain texts of Scripture. O may God remove from all of us the fear of man.

Some of you perhaps are thinking right now in your own minds, Well, Brother Pink, I do not see how you are consistent with yourself. My friends, that does not trouble me one iota, and it won't cause one hair in my head to go gray if I am inconsistent with any Calvinistic creed: the only thing that concerns me is to be consistent with the Holy Spirit, and to teach as the Holy Spirit shall enable, the whole counsel of God; to leave out nothing, to withhold nothing, and to give a proportionate presentation of God's truth. Do you know, I believe that most of the theological errors of the past have grown out of, not so much a denial of God's truth, as a disproportionate emphasis of it. Let me give you a simple illustration. The most comely countenance with the most beautiful features would soon become ugly if one feature were to grow while the others remained undeveloped. You can take the most beautiful baby there is in the world tonight and if that baby's nose were to grow while its eyes and its cheeks and its mouth and its ears remained undeveloped, it would soon become unsightly. The same is true with every other member of its face.

Beauty is mainly a matter of proportion and this is true of God's Word. It is only as truth is presented in its proper proportions that the beauty and blessedness to it are maintained in the hearts and lives of God's people. The sad thing is that almost everywhere today there is just one feature of truth being disproportionately emphasized.

And listen again! If God's truth is to be presented proportionately and effectively then each truth of God's Word must be presented separately. If I am speaking upon the humanity of Christ, if I am seeking to emphasize the reality of His manhood, how that He was made like unto His brethren in all things, how that He was tempted in all points as they were—sin excepted—I would not bring into my sermon a reference to His Godhood; and if you were to hear me preach the next twelve Sunday nights on the manhood of Christ and never refer to His Deity in those sermons, I hope none of you brethren would be so foolish as to draw the conclusion, Oh dear me, Brother Pink no longer believes in the Godhood of our Savior.

Again, if I am preaching on the wrath of God, the holy hatred of God for sin and His vengeance upon it, I would be weakening my sermon to bring in at the close a reference to His tenderness, mercy and love, for in my judgment that would be to blunt the point of the special truth I was seeking to press on the unconverted. And, in the same way, if I am pressing on the unconverted their need, their duty and importance of seeking the Lord, calling upon, coming to and believing on Him for themselves, I would not bring in or explain the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

Each truth needs to be presented separately that it may have its clear outline presented to the heart and to the mind. And after all, my friends, we are not saved by believing in the Spirit, we are saved by believing in Christ. We are not saved by believing in the work of the Spirit within us (no man was ever saved by believing that); we are saved by trusting in the work of Christ outside of us. O may God help us to maintain the balance of truth. There is something more in this Book, brethren and sisters, beside election, particular redemption and the new birth. They are there, and I would not say one word to weaken or

to repudiate them, but that is not all that is in this Book. There is a human side. There is man's responsibility. There is the sinner's repentance. There is the sinner's believing in Christ. There is the pressing of the gospel upon the unsaved; and I want to tell you frankly that if a church does not evangelize it will fossilize: and, if I am not much mistaken, that is what happened to some of the Strict Baptist Churches in Australia. Numbers of them that once had a healthy existence are now no more; and some others are already dead but they are not yet buried; and I believe one of the main reasons for that is this—they failed at the vital point of evangelism. If a church does not evangelize it will fossilize. That is God's method of perpetuating His work and of maintaining His churches. God uses means, and the means that the Holy Spirit uses in His work is the preaching of the gospel to the unconverted, to every creature. True, the preaching will avail nothing without the Spirit's blessing and application. True, no sinner will or can believe until God has quickened him. Yet he ought to, and is commanded to.

Now I meant, if time had allowed me, to come back again to the text and give you a few striking examples of where many have failed in holding the balance of God's truth. Take for example the Unitarians. I have met numbers of Unitarians who believe this Book is God's word, and believe that they can prove their creed from this Book. They appeal to such Scriptures as Deuteronomy 6:4—"The Lord our God is one Lord." Their creed is the unity of God and they argue that if there be three divine persons there must be three Gods; they cannot harmonize them, they cannot reconcile three persons with one God; so what do they do? Well, they hold fast to the one and they let go the other. They say the two won't mix—either God is one or else He is three; He cannot be both. When they come to the Person of Christ they emphasize such passages as—"He grew in wisdom." Well, they say, if He was a divine person, how could He grow in wisdom? They emphasize such passages as "He prayed," and they say it is an absurdity to think of God praying to God. They say, He died—how could God die? No, He cannot be divine: He is a good man; He is a holy man; He is a perfect man; and because they cannot reconcile the two classes of Scriptures they believe the one and reject the other. And Christ says to them, Ye are fools because ye are slow of heart to believe all.

Take the Universalists. I have met numbers of Universalists—several here in Sydney. I was going to say that I have less suspicion of the reality of their own salvation than I have of some of yours. At any rate they seem to give such evidence in their daily walk that they commune with Christ that it really makes one wonder where they are. Well now, the Universalists are staggered by the doctrine of eternal punishment. They say "God is love." "The mercy of God endureth forever." God is good: how can a merciful, loving God send any to eternal suffering? The Universalist say they cannot both be true: if there is such a thing as eternal punishment, then God can't be love: if God is love, there cannot be such a thing as eternal punishment. You see what they are doing? They are reasoning: they are walking by logic: they have drawn up their own scheme and system of theology and that which they cannot fit exactly into that scheme, somewhere, well, away with it!

But the Unitarians and the Universalists and the Arminians are not the only ones who are guilty of that. I am sorry to say that it is equally true, in some respects, of many Calvinists. They are unsound when it comes to the gospel. They are all at sea when it comes to the matter of believing. I am not going to keep you very much longer, but listen

closely now. There are many Calvinists who say, Believing is an evidence of our salvation, but it is not a condition or the cause of salvation. But, my friends, I make so bold as to say that those who so teach take issue with this Book. Now I want you to turn with me to four passages in the New Testament. I am not asking you to take my word for anything. You turn with me now to four passages in God's own word. First of all Romans 1:16-17—"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation." The power of God unto salvation to whom?—"the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Now I have no hesitation whatever in saying to every grown-up person in this room tonight, if you had read that verse just now for the first time in your life, and had never read a page of either Calvinistic or Arminian literature; if you read that verse without any bias one way or the other, it would only mean one thing to you.

Now turn to Romans 13:11—"And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." The salvation that is spoken of there is the salvation of the body, the glorification of the believer, the final consummation of our redemption: but what I want you to notice is where the Holy Spirit Himself puts the starting point. "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." THAT is when it begins, so far as our actual experience is concerned.

Now turn to Hebrews 10:39, and you have one there that is plainer still—that is outside the realm of debate—that has no ambiguity about it: "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." You cannot get around that if you live to be a thousand years old. "Them that believe to the saving of the soul." The sinner's believing does have something to do with his salvation: God says so! If you deny it you are taking issue with God. "Believe to the saving of the soul."

Now turn to Luke 7:50—"And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee." He did not say thy faith is an evidence that you have been saved. "Thy faith hath saved thee." Now in the light of those last two verses I make this assertion, that believing in Christ is the cause of the sinner's salvation. But listen closely to this qualification. It is neither the meritorious cause nor is it the effectual cause! You must put these three things together to get the complete thing. The blood of Christ is the meritorious cause of salvation; the regenerating work of the Spirit is the effective cause of salvation; but the sinner's own believing is the instrumental cause of his salvation. We believe to the saving of the soul. I repeat that. The blood of Christ is the meritorious cause: without that all the believing in the world could not save a soul. The regenerating work of the Spirit is the effectual cause: without this, no sinner would come or will believe with the heart. But the believing of the sinner in Christ is the instrumental cause—that which extends the empty hand to receive the gift that the gospel presents to him—and where there is no personal trust in Christ there is no salvation—"I did not say "quickenings."

Now I want to make this very plain and I am going to weigh my words. If instead of you trusting in the sacrificial blood of Christ, you are trusting in something that you believe the Spirit has done in you, you are building your house upon the sand, which in time of testing will fall to the ground.

"On Christ the solid Rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand."

If you are building your hope for eternity on what you think or feel that the Spirit of God has done in you, instead of putting your trust in what Christ did for sinners, you are building your house on the sand. And that may apply to some church-members here tonight. O my friends, the gospel of God does not invite you to look inside and pin your faith to what you think the Holy Spirit has done in you; the gospel of God commands you to look outside of yourself, away from all your feelings and frames, to what the Lord Jesus Christ did on the cross for sinners as sinners.

Now my last word tonight is directed to the unconverted, for my text also applies directly to them. Last Sunday evening I said a good deal about the necessity of being quiet, of standing still, of waiting upon God; but I want to supplement those remarks in concluding tonight by saying that those are all admonitions that are given to the converted, and that the Holy Scriptures speak in very different terms to those of you who are unconverted. The Bible does not bid you to sit still, to wait and be quiet; the Bible commands you to flee from the wrath to come. It bids you to strive to enter in at the strait gate. I am quoting Scripture now. It bids you seek the Lord. It bids you come unto Him. It bids you believe in Him, and if you do not you will be damned, whoever you are.

I am very much afraid that there are some here tonight who entertain the notion that all they have to do is just to sit still and wait until God comes and saves you. My friends, I do not know of a single promise of God that He will do so. I do not know of a single line in this Book that encourages you to continue in your sinful inactivity. I am going to speak very plainly now. The devil will tell you there is no cause for you to be concerned: there is not a bit of need for you to worry: if your name is in the Lamb's Book of Life you will be saved, whether you believe or no. That is the devil's lie! It is not God's truth. The devil will tell you that if you have been elected to salvation there is not a bit of need for you to be alarmed, disturbed or exercised; no need at all for you to seek and search after the Lord; that when God's good time comes He is going to do it all for you: not a bit of good for you to read the Bible and cry out to Him: and if He has not elected you, well, there is no need for sure, for it's useless.

Yes, the devil will speak in those tones and terms and he will come quoting Scripture to you. But there is no salvation for the sinner apart from his believing in Christ. I close with this quotation—2 Thessalonians 2:13, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through—Through what? "Sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." That is how God saves. That is how God carries out His purpose—by the sanctification of the Spirit and by your belief of the truth.

And my friends, I have not limited God. God could, if He so chose, make the fields to grow crops without the farmer plowing them and sowing the seed, but that is not His way; that is not the method He selects. God could keep us in health and strength without our taking any food at all or wasting time in sleeping if He so chose, but that is not His way. And God could save every sinner on earth tonight without them believing if He wanted to, but it is not His way! I am not limiting God, I am describing to you the plan and method that God Himself has set forth in His Word, and if you would be saved, sinner, you have got to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for yourself. I say it reverently: the Holy Spirit won't believe for you. The Holy Spirit may put it into your heart and give you the desire to believe. If you have the desire it is because He has put it there, but He

won't believe for you: believing is a human act. It is the sinner himself, in all his wretchedness and need, coming to Christ, as a drowning man clutches a straw, and as the old hymn says—"Just as I am without one plea, But that thy blood was shed for me."

O sinner, Christ is saying to you tonight, "O fools and slow of heart to believe all." You do believe much as you sit there. There are some of you who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. There are some of you who believe that He is the only Savior who can save any sinner. You believe that, then why not believe all? Why not believe in Him for yourself? Why not trust His precious blood for yourself; and why not tonight? God is ready to save you now if you believe on Him. The blood has been shed, the sacrifice has been offered, the atonement has been made, the feast has been spread. The call goes out to you tonight, "Come, for all things are now ready." And I say again, the devil will tell you as you are sitting there, "There is no need for me to come tonight; I will just wait till God gets ready to come and save me." How do you know that while you are waiting death may not come and smite you down. "Boast not thyself of tomorrow for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." The Holy Spirit saith, "Today if ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts." Yes, man can "harden" his heart: God says so; and God calls to you: "Harden not your heart." That is something you do yourself—not the devil—you do it. God is speaking to you through His Word tonight. O may His grace forbid that He shall say our text to any of you after you have left this room—O God forbid that you should be among those "fools" who believe not all. You do believe that Christ is God's appointed Savior for sinners, why not your Savior? O may the Spirit draw you by the cords of love to that One who has said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out."

Preached by Arthur W. Pink in Sydney, Australia—1927.

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