

Alarm to the Unconverted

Joseph Alleine, 1671

The Marks of the Unconverted

While we keep aloof in general statements, there is little fruit to be expected; it is the close hand-fight that does execution. David is not awakened by the prophet's hovering at a distance in parabolic insinuations. Nathan is forced to close with him, and tell him plainly, 'You are the man!' [2 Sam 12:7] Few will, in words, deny the necessity of the new birth; but they have a self-deluding confidence that the work is not to be done *now*. And because they know themselves to be free from that gross hypocrisy which takes up religion merely for a color to deceive others, and for covering wicked designs, they are confident of their sincerity, and do not suspect that more close hypocrisy, in which the greatest danger lies and by which a man deceives his own soul. But man's deceitful heart is such a matchless cheat—and self-delusion so reigning and so fatal a disease—that I do not know which is the greater—the difficulty, or the necessity of the undeceiving work that I am now upon. Alas for the unconverted, they must be undeceived—or they will be undone! But how shall this be effected?

'Help, O all-searching Light, and let Your discerning eye disclose the rotten foundation of the self-deceiver. Lead me, O Lord God, as You did the prophet, into the chambers of imagery, and dig through the wall of sinners' hearts, and reveal the hidden abominations that are lurking out of sight in the dark. O send Your angel before me to open the sundry wards of their hearts, as You did before Peter, and make even the iron gates fly open of their own accord. And as Jonathan no sooner tasted the honey but his eyes were enlightened, so grant, O Lord, that when the poor deceived souls with whom I have to do shall cast their eyes upon these lines, their minds may be illuminated, and their consciences convinced and awakened, that they may see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and be converted, and You may heal them.'

This must be premised before we proceed, that it is most certain that *men*

may have a confident persuasion that their hearts and states are good—while yet they are unsound. Hear the Truth Himself who shows, in Laodicea's case, that men may be wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked—and yet not know it. Yes, they may be confident they are rich, and increased in grace (Rev 3:17). 'There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes—and yet are not washed from their filthiness' (Prov 30:12). Who better persuaded of his state than Paul, while he yet remained unconverted? (Rom 7:9). So that they are miserably deceived who take a *strong confidence* for a *sufficient evidence*. Those who have no better proof than barely a strong persuasion that they are converted—are certainly as yet strangers to conversion.

But to come closer. As it was said to the adherents of Antichrist, so here—some of the unconverted carry their marks in their *forehead* more openly, and some in their *hands* more covertly. The apostle reckons up some upon whom he writes the sentence of death, as in these dreadful catalogues which I beseech you to attend to with all diligence: 'For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.' (Eph 5:5-6). 'But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death' (Rev 21:8). 'Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor 6:9-10). Woe to those who have their name written in this catalogue. Such may know, as certainly as if God had told them from heaven, that they are unsanctified, and under an impossibility of being saved in this condition.

I. OPEN sinners.

There are then these several classes that, past all dispute, are unconverted; they carry their marks in their foreheads.

[1] The **immoral**. These are ever reckoned among the goats, and have their names, whoever else is left out, in all the forementioned catalogues.

[2] The **covetous**. These are ever branded for idolaters, and the doors of the kingdom are shut against them by name.

[3] **Drunkards**. Not only such as drink away their reason—but withal, yes, above all, such as are too strong for strong drink. The Lord fills His mouth with woes against these, and declares them to have no inheritance in the kingdom of God! (Isa 5:11-12,22; Gal 5:21).

[4] **Liars**. The God who cannot lie has told them that there is no place for them in His kingdom, no entrance into His holy hill; but their portion is with the father of lies, whose children they are, in the lake of burnings! (Rev 21:8,27; John 8:44; Prov 6:17).

[5] **Swearers**. The end of these, without deep and speedy repentance, is swift destruction, and most certain and unavoidable condemnation (James 5:12; Zech 5:1-3).

[6] **Railers** and backbiters, who love to take up a reproach against their neighbor, and fling all the dirt they can in his face, or else wound him secretly behind his back (Psalm 15:1,3; 1 Cor 5:11).

[7] **Thieves**, extortioners, oppressors, who grind the poor, or defraud their brethren when they have opportunity. These must know that God is the avenger of all such (1 Thess 4:6). Hear O you false and purloining and wasteful servants; hear, O you deceitful tradesmen, hear your sentence! God will certainly shut His door against you, and turn your treasures of unrighteousness into the treasures of wrath, and make your ill-gotten silver and gold to torment you, like burning metal in your flesh! (James 5:2-3).

[8] All who do ordinarily live in the profane neglect of God's worship, that do not hear His Word, who do not call on His name, who restrain prayer before God, who do not mind their own nor their families' souls—but live without God in the world! (John 8:47; Job 15:4; Psalm 14:4; Psalm 79:6; Eph 2:12 and Eph 4:18).

[9] Frequenters and lovers of vain company. God has declared that He will be the destroyer of all such, and that they shall never enter into the hill of His rest! (Prov 9:6 and Prov 13:20).

[10] Scoffers at religion, who make a scorn of holy living, and mock at the messengers and diligent servants of the Lord, and at their holy profession, and make themselves merry with the weakness and failings of professing Christians. 'Hear, you despisers,' hear your dreadful doom! (Prov 19:29; 2 Chron 36:16).

Sinner, consider diligently whether you are not to be found in one of these ranks, for if this is the case, you are in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity; for all these do carry their marks in their foreheads, and are undoubtedly the sons of death. And if so, the Lord pity our poor congregations. O how small a number will remain when these ten sorts are left out.

Sirs, what efforts you make to keep up your confidence of your good state when God from heaven declares against you, and pronounces you in a state of damnation! I would reason with you, as God with them, 'How can you say, I am not polluted? See your way in the valley; know what you have done' (Jer 2:23). Man, is not your conscience aware of your tricks of deceit, of your secret sins, of your way of lying? Yes, are not your friends, your family, your neighbors, witnesses to your profane neglect of God's worship, to your covetous practices, to your envious and malicious behavior? May they not point at you as you go, 'There goes a gaming prodigal; there goes a drunken Nabal, a companion of evildoers; there goes a railer, or a scoffer, or a loose-liver!' Beloved, God has written it as with a sunbeam in the Book by which you must be judged—that these are not the marks of His children; and that none such, except renewed by converting grace, shall ever escape the damnation of hell.

O that you would now be persuaded to repent and turn from all your transgressions, or else iniquity will be your ruin (Ezek 18:30). Alas, for poor hardened sinners. Must I leave you at last where you are? Must I leave the drinker still at his bar? Must I leave the malicious still in his venom? However, you must know that you have been warned, and that I am clear of your blood; and whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear, I will leave these Scriptures with them, which will prove either as thunderbolts to awaken them, or as searing-irons to harden them. 'Surely God will crush the heads of his enemies, the hairy crowns of those who go on in their sins.' 'He who, being often reprov'd, hardens his neck, shall

suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' 'Because I have called, and you refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, I will laugh at your calamity—when your destruction comes as a whirlwind' (Psalm 68:21; Prov 29:1; Prov 1:24-27).

II. SECRET sinners.

And now I imagine many will begin to bless themselves, and think all is well, because they cannot be reproached with these grosser evils. But I must tell you that there is another sort of unsanctified people, who carry their mark not in their foreheads—but more secretly and covertly. These frequently deceive themselves and others, and pass for good Christians, when they are all the while unsound at heart. Many pass undiscovered until death and judgment bring all to light. These self-deceivers seem to come even to heaven's gate with confidence of their admission, and yet are turned away at last (Matt 7:22). I beseech you deeply to lay to heart and firmly retain this awakening consideration—that multitudes perish by the hand of some secret sin, that is not only hidden from others—but from lack of observing their own hearts—is hidden even from themselves. A man may be free from open pollutions, and yet die at last by the hand of some unobserved iniquity; and there are these **twelve hidden sins**, through which souls go down by numbers into the chambers of eternal death.

These you must search carefully for, and take them as black marks wherever they are found, revealing a graceless and unconverted state; and as you love your lives, read carefully with a holy jealousy of yourselves, lest you should be the people concerned.

[1] **Gross wilful ignorance** (Hos 4:6). O how many poor souls does this sin kill in the dark, while they think truly they have good hearts, and are all set for heaven. This is the murderer which dispatches thousands in a silent manner, when they suspect nothing, and do not see the hand which destroys them. You shall find, whatever excuses you make for ignorance, that it is a soul-ruining evil (Isa 27:11; 2 Thess 1:8; 2 Cor 4:3). Ah, would it not have grieved a man's heart to see that dreadful spectacle when the poor Christians were shut up in a barn, and a butcher came, with his hands warmed in human blood, and led them one by one, blindfold, to a block

where he slew them one after another, by scores, in cold blood? But how much more should your hearts bleed to think of the hundreds that ignorance destroys in secret and leads blindfold to the block! Beware that this is not your case. Make no plea for ignorance; if you spare that sin, know that it will not spare you! Would a man keep a murderer in his bosom?

[2] Secret reserves in closing with Christ. To forsake all for Christ, to hate father and mother, yes, a man's own life for Him, 'This is a hard saying' (Luke 14:26). Some will do much—but they will not have that religion which will save them. They never come to be entirely devoted to Christ, nor to be fully resigned to Him. They must have the sweet sin; they mean to do themselves no harm; they have secret exceptions for life, liberty, or estate. Many take Christ thus, and never consider His self-denying terms, nor count the cost; and this error in the foundation mars all, and ruins them forever (Luke 14:28-33).

[3] Formality in religion. Many rest in the externals of religion and in the outward performance of holy duties. And very often this most effectually deceives men, and more certainly undoes them than open profaneness; as it was in the Pharisee's case. They hear, they fast, they pray, they give alms—and therefore will not believe their case is bad. Whereas, resting in the work done, and coming short of the heart-work and the inward power and vitality of religion, they fall at last into the burning, from the flattering hope and confident persuasion of their being all set on the way to heaven. Oh dreadful case, when a man's religion shall serve only to harden him, and effectually to delude and deceive his own soul!

[4] The prevalence of wrong motives in holy duties. This was the bane of the Pharisees. Oh how many a poor soul is undone by this, and drops into hell before he discerns his mistake! He performs his 'good duties' and so thinks all is well—but does not perceive that he is actuated by carnal motives all the while. It is too true that even with the really sanctified, many carnal ends will often creep in; but they are the matter of their hatred and humiliation, and never come to be habitually prevalent with them, and bear the greatest sway. But when the main thing that ordinarily moves a man to religious duties is some carnal end—as to satisfy his conscience, to get the reputation of being religious, to be seen by men, to show off his

gifts and talents, to avoid the reproach of being a profane and irreligious person, or the like—this reveals an unsound heart. Oh Christians, if you would avoid self-deceit, see that you mind not only your actions but your motives.

[5] Trusting in their own righteousness. This is a soul-ruining mischief. When men trust in their own righteousness they do indeed reject Christ's. Beloved, you had need be watchful on every hand, for not only your sins—but your duties may undo you. It may be you never thought of this; but so it is, that a man may as certainly perish by his seeming righteousness and supposed graces—as by gross sins; and that is, when a man trusts to these as his righteousness before God, for satisfying His justice, appeasing His wrath, procuring His favor, and obtaining His pardon. This is to put Christ out of office, and make a Savior of our own duties and graces. Beware of this, O professing Christians; you are much in duties—but this one fly will spoil all the ointment. When you have done most and best, be sure to go out of yourselves—to Christ; reckon your own righteousness as filthy rags (Phil 3:9; Isa 64:6).

[6] A secret enmity against the strictness of true religion. Many moral people, punctilious in their formal devotions, have yet a bitter enmity against strictness and zeal, and hate the life and power of true religion. They do not like this forwardness, nor that men should make such a stir in religion. They condemn the strictness of religion as singularity, indiscretion, and intemperate zeal, and with them a zealous preacher or fervent Christian is but a wild enthusiast. These men do not love holiness as holiness (for then they would love the height of holiness), and therefore are undoubtedly rotten at heart, whatever good opinion they have of themselves.

[7] The resting in a certain degree of religion. When they have so much as will save them, as they suppose, they look no farther, and so show themselves short of true grace, which always sets men aspiring to perfection (Phil 3:13; Prov 4:18).

[8] The predominant love of the world. This is the sure evidence of an un sanctified heart. 'If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him' (1 John 2:15). But how often does this sin lurk under the fair cover of profession. Yes, such a power of deceit is there in this sin that many

times, when everybody else can see the man's worldliness and covetousness, he cannot see it himself—but has so many excuses and pretenses for his eagerness after the world, that he blinds his own eyes and perishes in his self-deceit! How many professing Christians are there, with whom the world has more of their hearts and affections than Christ, 'who mind earthly things', and thereby are evidently after the flesh, and likely to end in destruction (Rom 8:5; Phil 3:19). Yet ask these men, and they will tell you confidently they prize Christ above all; for they do not see their own earthly-mindedness for lack of a strict observance of the workings of their own hearts. Did they but carefully search, they would quickly see that their greatest satisfaction is in the world, and that their greatest care and main endeavor are to get and secure the world—which are the certain signs of an unconverted sinner. May the professing part of the world take earnest heed lest they perish by the hand of this sin unobserved. Men may be, and often are, kept off from Christ as effectually by the inordinate love of lawful comforts, as by the most wicked lives.

[9] Reigning malice and envy against those that disrespect them, and are injurious to them. Oh how do many who seem to be religious, remember injuries and carry grudges, rendering evil for evil, loving to take revenge, wishing evil to those who wrong them. This is directly against the rule of the Gospel, the pattern of Christ, and the nature of God. Doubtless, where this evil is kept boiling in the heart, and is not hated, resisted, and mortified—but habitually prevails, that person is in the very gall of bitterness, and in a state of death (Matt 18:32-35; 1 John 3:14-15).

[10] Unmortified pride. When men love the praise of men more than the praise of God, and set their hearts upon men's esteem, applause, and approbation—it is most certain that they are yet in their sins, and strangers to true conversion (John 12:43; Gal 1:10). When men do not see, nor complain, nor groan under the pride of their own hearts—it is a sign they are stark dead in sin! Oh how secretly does this pride live and reign in many hearts, and they know it not—but are total strangers to themselves (John 9:40).

[11] The prevailing love of pleasure. This is a black mark. When men give the flesh the liberty that it craves, and pamper and please it, and do not deny and restrain it; when their great delight is in gratifying their

bellies and pleasing their senses; whatever appearances they may have of religion—all is unsound. A flesh-pleasing life cannot be pleasing to God. 'Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh', and are careful to keep it under control, as their enemy (Gal 5:24; 1 Cor 9:25-27).

[12] Carnal security, or a presumptuous confidence that their condition is already good. Many cry, 'Peace and safety', when sudden destruction is coming upon them. This was that which kept the foolish virgins sleeping when they should have been working—upon their beds when they should have been at the markets. They did not perceive their lack of oil until the bridegroom was come; and while they went to buy, the door was shut! And oh that these foolish virgins had no successors! Where is the place, yes, where is the house almost, where these do not dwell? Men are willing to cherish in themselves, upon ever so slight grounds, a hope that their condition is good—and by these means perish in their sins. Are you at peace? Show me upon what grounds your peace is maintained. Is it Scripture peace? Can you show the distinguishing marks of a sound believer? Can you evidence that you have something more than any hypocrite in the world ever had? If not, fear this peace more than any trouble; and know that a carnal peace commonly proves the most mortal enemy of the soul, and while it smiles and kisses and speaks fairly—it fatally smites, as it were, under the fifth rib.

By this time I think I hear my readers crying out, with the disciples, 'Who then shall be saved?' [Matt 19:25; Mark 10:26; Luke 18:26] Set out from our congregations all those ten ranks of the **profane** on the one hand, and then take out all these twelve classes of **self-deceiving hypocrites** on the other hand—and tell me whether it is only a remnant that shall be saved. How few will be the sheep that shall be left, when all these shall be separated and set among the goats. For my part, of all my numerous hearers, I have no hope to see any of them in heaven that are to be found among these twenty-two classes that are here mentioned, except by sound conversion they are brought into another condition.

And now, *conscience*, do your work! Speak out, and speak home to him who hears or reads these lines. If you find any of these marks upon him, you must pronounce him utterly unclean. Do not take a lie into your

mouth. Do not speak peace to him to whom God speaks no peace. Do not let self-love or carnal prejudice bribe or blind you. I summon you from the court of heaven to come and give evidence. As you will answer it at your peril, give a true report of the state and case of him who reads this book. Conscience, will you altogether be silent at such a time as this? I adjure you by the living God that you tell the truth. Is the man converted—or is he not? Does he allow himself in any way of wickedness—or does he not? Does he truly love, and please, and prize, and delight in God above all things—or not? Come, give a definite answer.

How long shall this soul live in uncertainty? O conscience, bring in your verdict. Is this man a new man—or is he not? How do you find it? Has there passed a thorough and mighty change upon him—or not? When was the time, where was the place—or what were the means by which this thorough change of the new birth was wrought in his soul? Speak, conscience; or if you cannot tell the time and place, can you show Scripture evidence that the work is done? Has the man ever been taken off from his false foundation, from the false hopes and false peace in which once he trusted? Has he been deeply convinced of sin, and of his lost and undone condition, and brought out of himself, and off from his sins—to give himself up entirely to Jesus Christ? Or do you not find him to this day under the power of ignorance—or in the mire of worldliness? Have you not found upon him the gains of unrighteousness? Do you not find him a stranger to prayer, a neglecter of the Word, a lover of this present world? Do you not sometimes catch him in a lie? Do you not find his heart fermented with malice—or burning with lust—or going after his covetousness? Speak plainly to all the forementioned particulars. Can you acquit this man, this woman, from being in any of the twenty-two classes here described? If he is found in any of them, set him aside; his portion is not with the saints. He must be converted and made a new creature—or he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Beloved, do not be your own betrayers. Do not deceive your own hearts, nor set your hands to your own ruin by a willful blinding of yourselves. Set up a tribunal in your own breasts. Bring the Word and conscience together. 'To the law and to the testimony.' [Isa 8:20] Hear what the Word concludes of your state. Oh follow the search until you find how the case stands. Make a mistake here—and you perish! And, such is the treachery of the

heart, the subtlety of the temper, and the deceitfulness of sin—all conspiring to flatter and deceive the poor soul; and so common and easy it is to make a mistake, that it is a thousand to one that you will be deceived, unless you are very careful and thorough and impartial in the inquiry into your spiritual condition.

Oh therefore be diligent in your work; go to the bottom, search with candles; weigh yourself in the balance, come to the standard of the sanctuary; bring your coin to the touchstone. Satan is a master of deceit; he can draw to the life; he is perfect in the trade; there is nothing which he cannot imitate. You cannot wish for any grace—but he can fit you with a counterfeit. Be jealous; trust not even your own heart. Go to God to search you and try you, to examine you and prove your thoughts. If other helps do not suffice to bring all to an issue—but you are still at a loss, consult some godly and faithful minister or Christian friend. Do not rest until you have put the business of your eternal welfare out of doubt.

'O Searcher of hearts, set this soul searching, and help him in his search.'