

## CFBC Hymns Class 18

### Joseph Hart (Come, Ye Sinners)

***Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light.”***

***“If you tarry till you’re better, you will never come at all.”***  
*Joseph Hart*

***“So, what gives a sinner warrant to believe in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation? Is it the quality or length of the sinner’s conviction, contrition, or repentance? No. The warrant for believing in Christ cannot be anything in the sinner. The warrant for faith in Christ is Christ himself—Christ alone.”***  
*Sinclair Ferguson*

### **Joseph Hart (1712-1768)**

January 2012 | by Nigel Faithfull

<https://www.evangelical-times.org/22790/joseph-hart-1712-1768/>

Joseph Hart was born in London 300 years ago. He became a pastor and hymn-writer, his most notable hymns being ‘Come ye sinners, poor and wretched’, ‘A Man there is, a real Man’, and ‘How good is the God we adore’.

Having parents who were Calvinistic Independents, “I imbibed”, says Hart, “the sound doctrines of the gospel from my infancy; nor was I without touches of heart, checks of conscience, and meltings of affections, by the secret striving of God’s Spirit with me while very young; but the impressions were not deep, nor the influences lasting”.

He was educated in the classics, loved literature and could be seen, head bowed, foraging among the dusty volumes of the bookstalls at Moorfields. Warm-hearted, but highly-strung, he was assiduous in his studies and went on to teach the classics, which he cherished.

Distress...

***In 1734, aged about 21, he began to have serious concerns about his soul. 'The Spirit of bondage distressed me sore'. He tried fasting, mortification of fleshly lusts and strict attendance on religious ordinances to gain favour with God, but this was just a superficial reformation.***

He resorted to taverns and theatres, and received the moniker 'Mr Hearty' from his drinking companions. ***After seven years, a severe domestic affliction led him to 'sink deeper and deeper into conviction of my nature's evil, the wickedness of my life, the shallowness of my Christianity and the blindness of my devotion'.***

***George Whitefield and John Wesley were now causing a stir in the country by their open air evangelistic preaching. Hart still called himself a Calvinist and would have heard Whitefield, who preached regularly at Moorfields from April 1738 until setting sail for America the following year.***

***In November 1739, Wesley preached in Bristol from Romans 8, declaring his belief in perfection in this life and universal redemption, and opposing the Calvinist position. This sermon was subsequently published in 1740 as Free grace.***

***It so affected Hart that, in 1741, he published The Unreasonableness of Religion.*** He argued that reason expects God to accept us on the basis of our good works, whereas religion teaches our acceptance is on the basis of the 'righteousness of another, freely bestowed and given me, without the least regard to my own personal either merit or demerit'.

Antinomianism

***But his views were distinctly antinomian. He said, 'Having (as I imagined) obtained by Christ a liberty of sinning, I was resolved to make use of it, and thought the more I could sin without remorse, the greater hero I was in faith'. He later confessed: 'I committed all uncleanness with greediness'.***

***Hart published scholarly translations from the Greek of classical authors Phocylides (1744) and Herodian (1749), yet his biographer Thomas Wright observes that during this period, 'With all his erudition, the Bible was as yet a sealed book to him.***

***He had still something to learn which mountains of Hebrew and oceans of Greek were incapable of imparting’.***

***The year 1751 marked some attempt ‘to reform a little and to live in a more sober and orderly manner’. Holding to the doctrines of free grace and justification by faith, Hart was confident in his good state with God.***

In about 1752 he married Mary (1726-1790), who was probably the sister of John Hughes, a Baptist minister who eventually succeeded Hart in his pulpit.

***Hart resumed reading the Scriptures, but saw no necessity for Christ’s death.***

In 1744, Whitefield preached at Plymouth. His preaching seriously affected Andrew Kinsman, who later became Hart’s most devoted friend. In 1754, Whitefield invited Kinsman to fill his pulpit at the London Tabernacle, where Hart’s parents heard him gladly and often invited him to their house.

***Whitefield returned from America in 1755, and Joseph Hart became alarmed under his searching preaching and convicted of his sins. He became despondent that he had experienced no revelation from God.***

Trust

***Then, as he cried out to God in prayer, a voice seemed to say to him, ‘Do you choose the visionary revelations of which you have formed some wild idea, or to be content with trusting to the low, despised mystery of a crucified Man?’ Hart, with much comfort, made the latter choice. He was deterred from seeking fresh revelations by the verse which was impressed on his heart: ‘That which thou hast already, hold fast till I come’ (Revelation 2:25).***

***‘The week before Easter, 1757, I had such an amazing view of the agony of Christ in the garden, as I know not well how to describe. I was lost in wonder and adoration, and the impression it made was too deep, I believe, ever to be obliterated ... It was upon this I made the first part of hymn 1, “On the Passion”.’***

***He was still not at peace: ‘The convictions I now laboured under were not like those legal convictions I had formerly felt, but far worse, horrible beyond expression. I looked upon myself as a gospel sinner; one that had trampled underfoot the blood of Jesus, and for whom there remained no more sacrifice for sin’.***

***He now keenly remembered the error of his antinomian ways and warned others,*** ‘For they who say, “Let us sin that grace may abound”, their damnation is just.’

***He attended Moorfields and became personally acquainted with Whitefield. Finally, on Whit Sunday 1757, he was converted after hearing a sermon on Revelation 3:10, preached at the Moravian chapel in Fetter Lane, London.***

Comfort

He records of this experience: ‘I was hardly got home when I felt myself melting away into a strange softness of affection, which made me fling myself on my knees before God. My horrors were immediately dispelled, and such light and comfort flowed into my heart as no words can paint. The Lord, by his Spirit of love came not in a visionary manner into my brain, but with such divine power and energy into my soul that I was lost in blissful amazement’.

***Hart records: ‘Tears ran in streams from my eyes. I threw my soul willingly into my Saviour’s hands; lay weeping at his feet, wholly resigned to his will, and only begging that I might, if he was graciously pleased to permit it, be of some service to his church and people’.***

Later that year he wrote the hymn, A Man there is, a real Man. He published the first edition of his Hymns in 1759, listed in the order in which he wrote them. By 1825 there had been 23 editions, and many more since.

***More trials were to follow. His eldest son was troubled with epileptic fits, and his son Daniel died aged just three in 1763.*** He penned this verse on God’s testing providences:

Gold in the furnace tried  
Ne’er loses aught but dross;  
So is the Christian purified  
And better’d by the cross.

For those likewise afflicted, he prescribes prayer as the cure:

If pain afflict, or wrongs oppress;  
If cares distract, or fears dismay;  
If guilt deject; if sin distress;  
The remedy’s before thee, Pray!

***Hart strenuously defended the doctrines of grace in his preaching at the Jewin Street Chapel (Independent). And, if incapacitated through illness, 'He made it his invariable rule', said Augustus Toplady, 'not to let an Arian, an Arminian, or any unsound preacher occupy his pulpit. His usual saying on those occasions was, "I will keep my pulpit as chaste as my bed".'***

Spirituality

Only one of his sermons remains. It is on Matthew 2:2, preached on Christmas morning 1767, and copied down in shorthand. Sadly, all his letters apart from one to his nephew are lost. In this, he encourages his nephew to hold out to the end and be saved: 'As to your fears of falling back again, they are no signs that you will fall, but rather the contrary; for none depart from God while they have any fears of departing from him'.

***Early in 1768, Mrs Hart fell ill and remained an invalid. Joseph Hart was also in much pain. John Hughes later said to the congregation, 'You are witnesses that he preached Christ to you, with the arrows of death sticking in him'.***

***In his last hours, he confessed, 'I know myself to be a child of God, and an heir of glory'. He entered glory at his house in the Strand on 26 May 1768, aged 56. His remains were interred at Bunhill Fields, along with those of John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe and John Owen. The funeral was attended by 20,000 mourners, with Kinsman giving the oration.***

'Hart's hymns', said a Mr H. Belcher, 'are diamond fields. They sparkle with great thoughts. He is the most spiritual of the English hymn writers'.

Let us all remember in the midst of this world's allurements, that, as Joseph Hart wrote, 'None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good'.

Nigel Faithfull

### **Excerpts...Review of Sinclair Ferguson's "The Whole Christ"**

Page numbers in 'The Whole Christ' in parentheses

It doesn't take long as a Christian before questions start to simmer in your heart about grace, law, and assurance of salvation. It may take even less time as a pastor to discover how often your own sheep wonder and even worry about such complexities from week to week. "How sorry must I be for my sin in order to receive God's mercy? How repentant is repentant enough?"

...The Preacher in Ecclesiastes testifies that there is nothing new under the sun (Eccl 1:9), and Sinclair Ferguson affirms the Preacher's conclusion by reminding us of the Marrow Controversy from the 1700s and why it still sets us straight today.

## SYNOPSIS

Do we forsake sin in order to come to Christ? Answer carefully, pastors—the tenor of your preaching hangs in the balance. This is the great question that occupied the presbytery of Auchterarder in 1717. The question itself was ignited by Edward Fisher's controversial book *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645, 1648; reprinted 2015, Rosshire, UK: Christian Focus), which sketches an imaginary but loaded conversation between Evangelista, Nomista, and Neophytus. As it circulated like a cyclone through the Scottish Kirk, Thomas Boston made even more waves when he weighed his anchor in the storm by affirming just what *The Marrow* had asserted: we do *not* in fact forsake sin *in order* to come to Christ. His stance drew criticisms of antinomianism, which were met with countercharges of legalism, and the waves of that storm have rippled down to our own day. In fact, they're still churning.

But Boston was right. When Jesus tells us in Matt 11:28-30 “*Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest,*” Ferguson notes that “to ‘labor’ and to be ‘heavy laden’ are not qualifications for coming to Christ. They are reassurances that none is disqualified from coming to him by weakness and unworthiness. . . . The gospel makes clear that it was to the disqualified that [Jesus] delighted to offer himself” (52). Anything contrary Ferguson labels “false preparationism” (57) or “conditionalism” (65), which slips under the radar in tacit assumptions like “you may know these benefits [of Christ]—if you are among the elect. You may receive forgiveness—if you have sufficiently forsaken sin. You may know the message of grace—if you have experienced a sufficient degree of conviction of sin” (57).

***So, what gives a sinner warrant to believe in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation? Is it the quality or length of the sinner's conviction, contrition, or repentance? No. The warrant for believing in Christ cannot be anything in the sinner. The warrant for faith in Christ is Christ himself—Christ alone. Paul said that while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6-8). Ferguson asks, “What conditions were met in us in order for God to send his only Son into the world to die for sinners? None” (65).***

The brooding pastoral concern behind this issue is whether “the chief focus, the dominant note of the sermons I preach (or hear) is ‘Jesus Christ and him crucified’? Or is the dominant emphasis . . . focused somewhere else, perhaps on how to overcome sin, or how to live the Christian life, or on the benefits to be received from the gospel?” (50).

***Thus Ferguson suggests we say to sinners: “I do not offer Christ to you on the grounds that you have repented. Indeed I offer him to men and women who are dead in their trespasses and sins” (65). If you’re only willing to offer the gospel to people who have made themselves eligible for it, then you’ll be left with no one to offer it to at all.***

***Another way to frame the issue is to ask the question: “how is evangelical repentance related to faith?” (100) While keeping them together, Thomas Boston still affirmed that “gospel repentance doth not go before, but comes after remission of sin, in the order of nature,” so that, as Ferguson puts it, “faith then directly grasps the mercy of God in [Christ], and as it does so the life of repentance is inaugurated as its fruit” (101).***

***We should all be this clear. We do not repent in order to be forgiven. We repent because we believe in Christ, and we’re united with Christ. If repentance can precede faith, “either logically or chronologically,” then it ceases to be evangelical repentance (101) and begins to resemble Catholic penance—a work performed to merit grace.***

One of Ferguson’s best insights is that legalism and antinomianism share the same root. Eve disobeyed God because she suspected He was forbidding her too much and permitting her too little—her legalistic view of God drove her antinomian rebellion against Him (p.84).”

So how do I know if I’m a practical legalist? One sign is if I get irked when God honors a fellow servant with prominence or notoriety, one who we deem as less worthy than self, because “deep down we still think that grace should always operate on the principle of merit” (127). That’s hard for all of us to hear. But Ferguson deepens the incision: “Every form of jealousy . . . means my sense of personal identity and worth has become entwined with my performance and its recognition rather than being rooted and grounded in Christ and his de-merited grace” (128).

But what if I'm a practical antinomian and don't realize it? Ferguson counsels us to look for "an over-realized personal eschatology, as though the strong and subtle influence of sin had been destroyed" (142). ...So "the deepest response to antinomianism is not 'you are under the law' but 'you are despising the gospel and failing to understand . . . that . . . faith-union [with Christ] leads to the requirements of the law being fulfilled in you through the Spirit" (153-154, see also 168). Thus, the whole gospel cures both legalism and antinomianism with the same medicine, because in the gospel God shows how undeniably generous he really is by freely giving us what matters most to him—his only Son, Jesus Christ.

It's this assurance—that God has given us in His Son all we need for peace of conscience and peace with God—that grows into an assurance that if we ourselves are in Christ, then it really is well with our souls. This is how Evangelista puts it to Neophytus in *The Marrow*, 'It seems you do not want a ground for your believing, but for your believing that you have believed" (196). The seed of even this subjective assurance is included in true gospel faith, contrary to *The Marrow's* critics and Catholic dogma. To feed that seed, Jesus sends His spirit into our hearts so that we ourselves cry out in our dire distress, "Abba, Father!" which Ferguson notes is "an instinct . . . absent from the unbeliever's consciousness" (Rom 8:15; 209).

Yet such assurance grows slowly, because as Calvin says,

The godly heart feels in itself a division because it is partly imbued with sweetness from its recognition of divine goodness, partly grieves in bitterness from an awareness of its calamity; partly rests upon the promise of the gospel, partly trembles at the evidence of its own iniquity; partly rejoices at the expectation of life, partly shudders at death. This variation arises from imperfection of faith, since in the course of the present life it never goes so well with us that we are wholly cured of the disease of unbelief. (194)

***This is why the practical syllogism—the logic of deducing assurance from evidences of grace—while still legitimate, will never feel reassuring if we seek evidences apart from faith in Christ himself (214). For even when the Christian pleads his case using his evidences, "Satan opposeth with all his might; sin and law assist him; many flaws are found in his evidences; the truth of them all is questioned; and the soul hangs in suspense as to the issue" until the Spirit comes and testifies by taking the stand himself (206, quoting John Owen).***



***And so we are reminded once more that everything we have from God, including our assurance and even the evidences that bolster it, we have only in union with Christ—the whole Christ, Totus Christus (46, 228).***

## **EVALUATION**

...We need to get this right, because “Christians associate the character of God with the character of the preaching they hear—not only the substance and content of it but the spirit and atmosphere it conveys” (72). If the aroma (Ferguson calls it “tincture”) of your preaching is that the sinner has to find some warrant in himself in order to come to Christ in the first place, then he’ll go rummaging through all his pockets trying to find money to buy Christ for himself. But those pockets are empty. Brother, don’t make Isaiah roll over in his grave (Isa 55:1).

<https://www.9marks.org/article/book-review-the-whole-christ-by-sinclair-ferguson/>

### **Excerpts from “All the Fitness He Requires? Spurgeon the Evangelist”**

Spurgeon’s Sermon #336, “Struggles of Conscience” from September, 1860... shows Spurgeon’s great zeal in tearing down any obstacle in the way of a person coming to Christ, including the thought that a person doesn’t “feel” the greatness of their sins, doesn’t feel a particular type of repentance as was characteristically defined in the Puritan age.

In our day the evil has taken another, and that a most extraordinary shape. Men have aimed at being self-righteous after quite an amazing fashion; they think they must feel worse, and have a deeper conviction of sin before they may trust in Christ. Many hundreds do I meet with who say they dare not come to Christ, and trust Him with their souls, because they do not feel their need of Him enough; they have not sufficient contrition for their sins; they have not repented as fully as they have rebelled! Brothers and Sisters, it is the same evil, from the same old germ of self-righteousness, but it has taken another and I think a more crafty shape. Satan has wormed himself into many hearts under the garb of an angel of light, and he has whispered to the sinner, “Repentance is a necessary virtue. Stop until you have repented, and when you have sufficiently mortified yourself on account of sin, then you will be fit to come to Christ, and qualified to trust and rely on Him.”

While reading along I thought of the well-known hymn “Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy”, sung often at the local church. One verse ends with the line “all the fitness He requires, is to feel your need of Him.” The teaching at the local church, in the standard Reformed Baptist tradition, occasionally points out that part of that hymn, and how this is the only fitness necessary to come to Christ. Spurgeon at this point was clearly going further, arguing against any “standard” of what we must feel when we come to Christ.

In the very next paragraph Spurgeon answered my question about that hymn, with the full story even there: that excerpt from this particular hymn only includes the first part of the line.

Let me counsel you, then, to never quote part of a hymn, or part of a text—  
quote it all!—  
“All the fitness He requires  
Is to feel your need of him—  
This He GIVES YOU,  
Tis His Spirit’s rising beam!”

So that particular misunderstanding has been with the church for some time (that particular version of the hymn dates to 1759). The modern-day gospel-lite evangelical view is probably in the opposite direction from Spurgeon’s day, but (at least some) Reformed churches today continue the Puritan tradition of reacting in the opposite extreme.

Spurgeon’s point here is well-taken, a clear distinction in understanding the “feeling” someone has upon coming to Christ:

And I think I know the reason of its great commonness. In the Puritan age, which was noted certainly for its purity of Doctrine, there was also a great deal of experimental preaching, and much of it was sound and healthy. But some of it was unscriptural, because it took for its standard what the Christian felt, and not what the Savior said—the inference from a Believer’s experience, rather than the message which goes before any belief....These good Brothers have taken their own experience—what they felt before they came into the Light of God—as the standard of what every other person ought to feel before he may put his trust in Christ and hope for mercy. There were some in Puritan times who protested against that theology, and insisted that sinners were to be bid to come to Christ just as they were—with no preparation either of feeling or of doing. At the present time there are large numbers of Calvinistic ministers who are afraid to give a free invitation to sinners. They always garble Christ’s invitation thus—“If you are a sensible sinner you may come.”

Just as if stupid sinners might not come! They say, "If you feel your need of Christ, you may come." And then they describe what that feeling or need is, and give such a high description of it that their hearers say, "Well, I never felt like that," and they are afraid to venture for lack of the qualification. Mark you, the Brothers speak truly in some respect; they describe what a sinner does feel before he comes, but they make a mistake in putting what a sinner feels, as if that were what a sinner ought to feel!

What the sinner feels, and what the sinner does, until he is renewed by Grace, are just the very opposite of what he ought to feel or do! We are always wrong when we say one Christian's experience is to be estimated by what another Christian has felt. No, Sir, my experience is to be measured by the Word of God! And what the sinner should feel is to be measured by what Christ commands him to feel, and not by what another sinner has felt!

<https://scripturethoughts.wordpress.com/2012/07/12/all-the-fitness-he-requires-spurgeon-the-evangelist>

### **Excerpts from Spurgeon's Sermon "The Warrant of Faith"**

Charles Haddon Spurgeon September 20, 1863

Scripture: 1 John 3:23

***The WARRANT OF BELIEVING is the point upon which I shall spend my time and strength this morning. According to my text, the warrant for a man to believe is the commandment of God. This is the commandment, that ye "believe on his Son Jesus Christ."***

Self-righteousness will always find a lodging somewhere or other. Drive it, my brethren, out of the ground of our confidence; let the sinner see that he cannot rest on his good works, then, as foxes will have holes, this self-righteousness will find a refuge for itself in the warrant of our faith in Christ. It reasons thus: "You are not saved by what you do but by what Christ did; but then, you have no right to trust in Christ unless there is something good in you which shall entitle you to trust in him." Now, this legal reasoning I oppose. I believe such teaching to contain in it the essence of Popish self-righteousness. ***The warrant for a sinner to believe in Christ is not in himself in any sense or in any manner, but in the fact that he is commanded there and then to believe on Jesus Christ.*** Some preachers ...had a fear of preaching the gospel to any except those whom they styled "sensible sinners," and consequently kept hundreds of their hearers sitting in darkness when they might have rejoiced in the light. They preached repentance and hatred of sin as the warrant of a sinner's trusting to Christ.

According to them, a sinner might reason thus—"I possess such-and-such a degree of sensibility on account of sin, therefore I have a right to trust in Christ." Now, I venture to affirm that such reasoning is seasoned with fatal error. Whoever preaches in this fashion may preach much of the gospel, but the whole gospel of the free grace of God in its fulness he has yet to learn.

Others say that the warrant for a sinner to believe in Christ is his election. Now, as his election cannot possibly be known by any man until he has believed, this is virtually preaching that nobody has any known warrant for believing at all. If I cannot possibly know my election before I believe—and yet the minister tells me that I may only believe upon the ground of my election—how am I ever to believe at all? Election brings me faith, and faith is the evidence of my election; but to say that my faith is to depend upon my knowledge of my election, which I cannot get without faith. is to talk egregious nonsense.

***...the sole and only warrant for a sinner to believe in Jesus is found in the gospel itself and in the command which accompanies that gospel, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."***

***...since true repentance of sin is the work of the Spirit, any man who has repentance is most certainly saved, because evangelical repentance never can exist in an unrenewed soul. Where there is repentance there is faith already, for they never can be separated. So, then, I am only to preach faith to those who have it. Absurd, indeed! Is not this waiting till the man is cured and then bringing him the medicine? This is preaching Christ to the righteous and not to sinners. "Nay," saith one, "but we mean that a man must have some good desires towards Christ before he has any warrant to believe in Jesus." Friend, do you not know what all good desires have some degree of holiness in them? But if a sinner hath any degree of true holiness in him it must be the work of the Spirit, for true holiness never exists in the carnal mind, therefore, that man is already renewed, and therefore saved.***

***...To tell the sinner that he is to believe on Christ because of some warrant in himself, is legal, I dare to say it...legal...I lay it down to be legal for this reason: if I believe in Jesus Christ because I feel a genuine repentance of sin, and therefore have a warrant for my faith, do you not perceive that the first and true ground of my confidence is the fact that I have repented of sin?***

***If I believe in Jesus because I have convictions and a spirit of prayer, then evidently the first and the most important fact is not Christ, but my possession of repentance, conviction, and prayer, so that really my hope hinges upon my having repented; and if this be not legal I do not know what is.*** Put it lower. My opponents will say, "The sinner must have an awakened conscience before he is warranted to believe on Christ." Well, then, if I trust Christ to save me because I have an awakened conscience, I say again, the most important part of the whole transaction is the alarm of my conscience, and my real trust hangs there.

***If I lean on Christ because I feel this and that, then I am leaning on my feelings and not on Christ alone, and this is legal indeed. Nay, even if desires after Christ are to be my warrant for believing, if I am to believe in Jesus not because he bids me, but because I feel some desires after him, you will again with half an eye perceive that the most important source of my comfort must be my own desires. So that we shall be always looking within.***

***"Do I really desire? If I do, then Christ can save me; if I do not, then he cannot." And so my desire overrides Christ and his grace. Away with such' legality from the earth!***

***Again, any other way of preaching than that of bidding the sinner believe because God commands him to believe, is a boasting way of faith.***

***...The gospel Command is a sufficient warrant for a sinner to believe in Jesus Christ. The words of our text imply this—" This is the commandment." My brethren, do you want any warrant for doing a thing better than God's command to do it? ...Surely the Lord's Word is enough. Brethren, the command to believe in Christ must be the sinner's warrant, if you consider the nature of our commission.***

***You cannot tell me you are not fit; there is no fitness wanted, the Command is given and it is yours to obey, not to dispute.***

<https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-warrant-of-faith/#flipbook/>

## **Dialogue between Derek Thomas and Ligon Duncan on Joseph Hart and “Come, Ye Sinners”**

**Dr. Duncan:**

*Derek, looking at the text of this hymn as a hymn of call and of invitation to sinners, the first thing that strikes me is it does not congratulate the sinner on his ability: it grants all the ability to Jesus Christ. The refrain is, “He is able, He is able, He is willing, doubt no more.” None of the emphasis is on the sinner’s power and ability,..it’s on the Savior’s power and ability.*

**Dr. Thomas:**

*...The will is bound to our natures, and our natures are dead in trespasses and sins. It’s doing evangelism on the grounds of personal moral inability...that we are bidden to come... and yet we cannot come. So how can we be saved? By the ability of Christ. So, “He is able, He is able, He is able, He is willing, doubt no more.”*

**Dr. Duncan:**

I remember sitting in systematic theology class at the Free Church College in Edinburgh when Donald MacLeod got to the section on faith and spent an entire day on the warrants of faith: that is, What are the compelling reasons for the sinner to put his or her trust in the savior? I had never heard a lecture on this. Now, I went to evangelical institutions, but it seems to me that Hart is walking through the warrants of faith here. Why should you put your trust in the Savior? Because He has pity joined with power, and He is able and He is willing. That’s the first line. But he doesn’t stop, he keeps on going. And what does he say in the second line as a warrant for faith?

**Dr. Thomas:**

Come, ye needy, come and  
welcome, God’s free bounty glorify;  
True belief and true repentance,  
every grace that brings you nigh  
Without money, without money,  
Come to Jesus Christ and buy

**Dr. Duncan:**

And so he tells you that God is able from His bounty to pour out the faith and repentance that you need.

In fact, every grace that you need He is able to pour out, and you can come and buy it without money. Now he's harkening to one of your favorite Old Testament prophets when he says that! Isaiah, right?

**Dr. Thomas:**

Correct. And it's being answered here so marvelously that the answer to that does not lie with trying to reinvent an idea that we somehow are able, that somehow there is some inner strength that lies within ourselves if we could only just find it; that it is entirely the work of Christ. We cast ourselves on His mercy and power.

**Dr. Duncan:**

So we're first told to realize that Christ is powerful and able and willing, and then that God in His gracious bounty is ready to pour out everything that we need — repentance and faith, with all other graces. And then in the third stanza we're told...

**Dr. Thomas:**

Oh, it's my favorite stanza...  
Come, ye weary, heavy laden,  
bruised and broken by the fall;  
If you tarry till you're better,  
you will never come at all

Those are wonderful, wonderful lines.

**Dr. Duncan:**

"Not the righteous, not the righteous" Don't you love that? How can you preach that any better? You know, "Let me say it one more time: Not the righteous; sinners Jesus came to call."

You remember Rabbi Duncan (the famous Scottish minister who had grown up in a Christian home but had rejected the faith, went to Aberdeen University, didn't even believe in God)...tells us that the warrant (compelling reason) that got hold of him was the point of Hart's verse here. He said, "It's by my sin that I get hold of Christ. JohnDuncan is a sinner. Jesus came for sinners."

Jesus came for JohnDuncan was how he reasoned, and that's how he came to put his trust in Christ. And so this warrant is to say Don't say that you'll come when you're better, because Jesus didn't come for people who are better. He came for people who weren't better; He came for sinners.

**Dr. Thomas:**

And that what we're being offered here is not reformation, but regeneration.

**Dr. Duncan:**

And then the fourth stanza says:

Let not conscience make you  
linger, nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness He requireth is  
to feel your need of Him;  
This He gives you, this He gives you  
Tis the Spirit's rising beam

**Dr. Thomas:**

Well, it's profound, and it's so eighteenth century theology! The whole issue of conscience was so important, It's important in the Bible, how that moral arbiter within us that either condemns us, excuses us... "Let not conscience make you linger," so your conscience is condemning you. You feel that you are a sinner, you know that you are a sinner, but don't let that make you linger.

**Dr. Duncan:**

In fact, he says the fact that you feel and know that you are a sinner is the first light of the Spirit breaking forth in your heart.

**Dr. Thomas:**

"The Spirit's rising beam." It's a beautiful phrase.

**Dr. Duncan:**

It reminds you of *And Can It Be?* where "Thine eye diffused a quickening ray." He's deep downcast in the dungeon of sin, and "Thine eye diffused a quickening ray." It's a similar kind of scene where the Spirit sends this beam of light.

**Dr. Thomas:**

"You're a sinner, and there's nothing I can do to save myself." It's the cry of the Philippian jailer: "What must I do to be saved?" And there's nothing that he can do but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Dr. Duncan:**

Right. And then the fifth stanza answers to the power of the Savior to be able to address this:

"Lo! th'incarnate God, ascended,  
pleads the merit of His blood;  
Venture on Him, venture wholly,  
let no other trust intrude...  
None but Jesus, none but Jesus,  
can do helpless sinners good."



**Dr. Thomas:** This is an incredibly well-written hymn.

<https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/radio-lectures/hymns-of-the-faith-come-ye-sinners-poor-and-wretched/>

### **Come, ye sinners**

1. Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus, ready, stands to save you,  
Full of pity, joined with power.  
He is able, He is able;  
He is willing; doubt no more.

2. Come ye needy, come, and welcome,  
God's free bounty glorify;  
True belief and true repentance,  
Every grace that brings you nigh.  
Without money, without money  
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

3. Come, ye weary, heavy laden,  
Bruised and broken by the fall;  
If you tarry 'til you're better,  
You will never come at all.  
Not the righteous, not the righteous;  
Sinners Jesus came to call.

4. Let not conscience make you linger,  
Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness He requires  
Is to feel your need of Him.  
This He gives you, this He gives you,  
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

5. Lo! The Incarnate God, ascended;  
Pleads the merit of His blood.  
Venture on Him; venture wholly,  
Let no other trust intrude.  
None but Jesus, none but Jesus  
Can do helpless sinners good.

## Faith and Repentance

by Sinclair Ferguson

When the gospel is proclaimed, it seems at first sight that two different, even alternative, responses are called for. Sometimes the summons is, “Repent!” Thus, “John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ‘Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt. 3:1–2). Again, Peter urged the hearers whose consciences had been ripped open on the day of Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38). Later, Paul urged the Athenians to “repent” in response to the message of the risen Christ (Acts 17:30).

Yet, on other occasions, the appropriate response to the gospel is, “Believe!” When the Philippian jailer asked Paul what he must do to be saved, the Apostle told him, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). But there is no mystery or contradiction here. Further on in Acts 17, we discover that precisely where the response of repentance was required, those who were converted are described as believing (Acts 17:30, 34).

Any confusion is surely resolved by the fact that when Jesus preached “the gospel of God” in Galilee, He urged His hearers, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:14–15). Here repentance and faith belong together. They denote two aspects in conversion that are equally essential to it. Thus, either term implies the presence of the other because each reality (repentance or faith) is the *sine qua non* of the other.

***In grammatical terms, then, the words repent and believe both function as a synecdoche—the figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole. Thus, repentance implies faith and faith implies repentance. One cannot exist without the other.***

***But which comes first, logically? Is it repentance? Is it faith? Or does neither have an absolute priority? There has been prolonged debates in Reformed thought about this.*** Each of three possible answers has had advocates:

First, W. G. T. Shedd insisted that faith must precede repentance in the order of nature: “Though faith and repentance are inseparable and simultaneous, yet in the order of nature, faith precedes repentance” (*Dogmatic Theology*, 2.536). Shedd argued this on the grounds that the motivating power for repentance lies in faith’s grasp of the mercy of God.

If repentance were to precede faith, both repentance and faith would be legal in character, and they would become prerequisites for grace.

Second, Louis Berkhof appears to have taken the reverse position: “There is no doubt that, logically, repentance and the knowledge of sin precede the faith that yields to Christ in trusting love” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 492).

***Third, John Murray insisted that this issue raises***

***“...an unnecessary question and the insistence that one is prior to the other is futile. There is no priority. The faith that is unto salvation is a penitent faith and the repentance that is unto life is a believing repentance ... saving faith is permeated with repentance and repentance is permeated with saving faith.” (Redemption—Accomplished and Applied, p. 113).***

This is, surely, the more biblical perspective. ***We cannot separate turning from sin in repentance and coming to Christ in faith. They describe the same person in the same action, but from different perspectives. In one instance (repentance), the person is viewed in relation to sin; in the other (faith), the person is viewed in relation to the Lord Jesus. But the individual who trusts in Christ simultaneously turns away from sin. In believing he repents and in repenting believes. Perhaps R. L. Dabney expressed it best when he insisted that repentance and faith are “twin” graces (perhaps we might say “conjoined twins”).***

But having said this, we have by no means said everything there is to say. Entwined within any theology of conversion lies a psychology of conversion. In any particular individual, at the level of consciousness, a sense of either repentance or trust may predominate. What is unified theologically may be diverse psychologically. Thus, an individual deeply convicted of the guilt and bondage of sin may experience turning from it (repentance) as the dominant note in his or her conversion. Others (whose experience of conviction deepens after their conversion) may have a dominant sense of the wonder of Christ’s love, with less agony of soul at the psychological level. Here the individual is more conscious of trusting in Christ than of repentance from sin. But in true conversion, neither can exist without the other.

The psychological accompaniments of conversion thus vary, sometimes depending on the dominant gospel emphasis that is set before the sinner (the sinfulness of sin or the greatness of grace).

This is quite consistent with the shrewd comment of the Westminster Divines to the effect that faith (that is, the trusting response of the individual to the word of the gospel) “acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof [of Scripture] containeth” (WCF 16.2).

***In no case, however, can real conversion take place apart from the presence of both repentance and faith, and therefore both joy and sorrow. A “conversion” that lacks all sorrow for sin, that receives the word with only joy, will be temporary.***

Jesus’ parable of the sower is instructive here. In one type of soil, the seed sprouts quickly but dies suddenly. This represents “converts” who receive the word with joy—but with no sense of fallow ground being broken up by conviction of sin or any pain in turning from it (Mark 4:5–6, 16–17). On the other hand, a conversion that is only sorrow for sin without any joy in pardon will prove to have been only “worldly grief” that “produces death” (2 Cor. 7:10). In the end, it will come to nothing.

***This, however, raises a final question: Does the necessity of repentance in conversion constitute a kind of work that detracts from the empty-handedness of faith? Does it compromise grace? In a word, no.*** Sinners must always come empty-handed. But this is precisely the point. By nature, my hands are full (of sin, self, and my own “good deeds”). However, hands that are full cannot hold on to Christ in faith. Instead, as they take hold of Him, they are emptied. That which has prevented us from trusting Him falls inevitably to the ground. The old way of life cannot be retained in hands that are taking hold of the Savior.

***Yes, repentance and faith are two essential elements in conversion. They constitute twin graces that can never be separated.*** As John Calvin well reminds us, this is true not only of the beginning but of the whole of our Christian lives. We are believing penitents and penitent believers all the way to glory.

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/faith-and-repentance/>