

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Personal Counselling

BY JOHN GWYN-THOMAS

TO deal with this subject here is, I find, beset with difficulties. Time is limited, so that statements that could be amplified and, if need be, verified by references to Scripture will be simply asserted and left. Many terms will be likewise left undefined for the same reason. Moreover, because of the public nature of this assembly I am not able to use the detailed illustrations I could use in a more private gathering. On a more personal note, what I have to say in this paper is more of an act of fellowship than that of a lecturer seeking to give instruction to those less learned than himself. God has called me to be a pastor. I believe God has called you to be pastors. I am seeking to share with you some of the things I believe God has taught me, trusting that we may all become better pastors to the glory of God and the well-being of His Church.

* * * *

The dictionaries say that to counsel is to advise. But for the minister of God to counsel goes beyond the rôle of a passive adviser. It involves guiding, warning, instruction, and comforting His people. The relationship is not merely that of adviser and advised but of shepherd and sheep, friend and friend, brother and brother. It is an act of fellowship whereby we share one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.

It is necessary in these days to declare with considerable emphasis that such counselling is an integral part of the ministry, a part which must not be minimized or avoided. For an ordained man to be faithful to his calling he ought to be an effective counsellor. As an ordained priest of the Church of England he is called upon and given authority at his ordination "to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word and to use both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as the whole, within your cures as need shall require and as occasion shall be given". The ordained man who promised to do this "with all faithful diligence" must inevitably be involved in counselling. I labour this point for there is a subtle defence mechanism at work among us which says, "I am a theologian", or "I am an organizer", or "I am an evangelist", or "I am a preacher", or some other self-imposed label which is used as an excuse for avoiding this demanding yet essential part of our ministry. I am pleading that all ordained men, particularly those in parish life, should think of themselves as called to be pastors and that this pastoral approach should permeate the whole of our ministry.

Let me deal with three questions which may immediately come to mind. Firstly, how can we find time for this work? Secondly, are we qualified to do this task? Thirdly, how do you get in touch with people in need of counselling, as opposed to the many who call on us for

a variety of other reasons. Let us look at the question of time. This is a matter of priorities. What is the purpose of our ministries? Surely the spiritual counselling of needy people is of primary importance. We must learn to say no to secondary matters. We must guard against both our own disinclination to take this task and the acceptance of work which we prefer to this demanding part of our ministries. To admit that we have no time—is to admit that we have allowed our ministries to become what they ought not to be. Surely this is a question of doing some serious self-examination, particularly in the use of our time and, if necessary, the re-education of our congregations as to the nature of our ministry.

The second and third questions are related. The basic qualification for pastoral work is the personal experience of regeneration and of the work of the Holy Spirit in our own lives. Without this experimental knowledge of God there can be no foundation upon which to build and to develop into a true spiritual counsellor. May I suggest three different requirements, though not exclusive of one another, in this vexed question of "am I qualified"?

Firstly, the hinge upon which all other pastoral skills turns is love, warm and hearty love, for the Lord Jesus Christ—"the indispensable prerequisite for genuine pastoral care" as it has been called. Let me break down this love into more manageable terms, for our love for the Lord Jesus Christ is demonstrated, as He said, in the mundane tasks of keeping His commandments. The commandments are essentially concerned with human relationships. Under this "umbrella-word" of love let me give priority to a genuine interest in and love for people. It is not enough to love theology. It is not enough to love ritual and tradition—catholic or otherwise. It is not enough to love preaching. People must count—it is for people that Christ died. Let us make no mistake that it will soon be realized by our congregations if we regard them as objects of care or as nuisances who disturb our studies or who interfere with our planned programmes or who are troublesome interrupters of our post-prandial slumbers! Observe our Lord's interest in people of all classes and His constant willingness to be at the disposal of those in need. This love for people will show itself in a friendliness which will make us approachable to those in need. To be very practical, I must add trustworthiness and accessibility. Unless we are trustworthy, people will not confide in us. Unless we are accessible, they will have no opportunity to confide in us. Some of us make it appear that we are so busy that our people fear to come to consult us despite their needs. For good measure, I include a further facet of love, namely, patience. Patience to listen and to go on listening. Perhaps, if we all studied 1 Corinthians 13 as often as and in conjunction with Romans 1-11 we would see that we are all without excuse in these things.

The second qualification is that the counsellor must know his Bible. By this I mean that he should have a sound knowledge of the Scriptures so that he can refer to promises, examples, and to various teaching passages as required. We cannot all be top-ranking theologians, but we all ought to possess a working knowledge of the main branches of theology. It is well to remember that some of the greatest theologians

were driven to study theology by their desire to be better pastors. Theological learning is not an end in itself, it should be the means, amongst other things, to enable us to be more diligent and more proficient pastors. There is no more pitiful figure in the life of the Church than the theologian without any pastoral concern. The Church desperately needs pastorally-minded men who can base their work upon the Scriptures, and this lies within the scope of all of us.

My third ingredient in the qualifications of a counsellor presupposes what I have already said. It is an ingredient as difficult to describe as it is to define. I call it "spiritual insight". I mean the ability to discern the subtleties of sin and its progress and its effects in the spiritual life of man. It is an insight into the mind of a person with a troubled conscience. In fact we may call it the enlightenment by the Holy Spirit into the work of grace in man and particularly in dealing with the tortuous effects of sin. The acquisition of this faculty comes, I suggest, from the study of the Bible, and particularly of biblical characters; from the study of the application of doctrine in the practical portions of the Epistles; from the personal dealing of the Holy Spirit with sin in our own hearts; and, of course, from experience in dealing with people. These sources are open to all and I do not believe that a man called to be a minister should hide under excuses, but rather face the implications of his call and plunge in faith into this part of his calling. The psychological side of our training has already been dealt with by a previous speaker.

This leads me to the third question concerning how these people come to us. Once more I suggest three sources. Firstly, people come to realize our interest in their spiritual difficulties by the nature of our preaching. So much pastoral work can be and ought to be done in sermons. Witness the work of the Puritan pastors, and in our own day that well-known book on "Spiritual Depression" by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. We need to ask ourselves if our sermons are adequate both in length and content to deal with important spiritual problems and whether or not we should tackle spiritual things at a deeper level than we do at present. If our sermons do not go beyond the ABC of the Gospel and do not come to grips with the difficult task of living as a Christian in a hostile environment with all its problems, little wonder that our congregations think we are not even aware of their needs. Sermons without application are essays and not sermons. It is when our people are grappling with the application of the Faith that their problems arise. Secondly, Christian friends and doctors who know us and come to see that we are willing to help and show some signs of being competent in these things will send needy Christians along to see us. I believe that as we regain the confidence of the medical profession there will be more of our parishioners referred to us. My third chief source of inquirers flows from the normal visiting of parishioners. There is still much value in the parish system and, unquestionably, it provides the pastorally-minded incumbent with more than enough work in this field. Once people know that you are concerned and can help, the news soon spreads, and the problem is not how to find them but in what order to see them!

In order to make this paper an act of true fellowship I now propose to set out certain principles which I employ in counselling. The first task is the obvious one, namely, to ascertain from the inquirer what is his or her essential need—diagnosis. The method adopted is normally listening to what might be called the “ case history ”, asking questions and evaluating the replies, at the same time learning all we can from the manner of speech and the emotional reactions shown while this interchange is proceeding. From this work of diagnosis we need the relevant spiritual and biblical background to enable us to make judgments. As an example, I suggest that we ought to have in mind the signs of the new birth, how to recognize conviction of sin, the difference between repentance and remorse, the place of the Lord Jesus Christ in the thinking of the inquirer, and the need of a full committal to Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. Obviously our inquirer may not use any of these terms. We are searching for signs of the reality for which they stand.

It is my own conviction that a great deal of spiritual trouble is caused in the life of the Church by inadequate attention to repentance. Repentance is not a passing feeling which must be seized upon lest it be engulfed in worldliness or doubts. It is a change of mind, a change of disposition, an abiding principle. In Acts 11 : 18 it is called “ repentance unto life ”. In Acts 20 : 21 it is “ repentance towards God ”. Thus I would look for such signs as a humbling of the person concerned before God, a sorrow for sin, a hatred of self, an amazement at the sinfulness of sin, an open and unreserved confession of sin towards God, a turning to Christ for forgiveness. Therefore, if I found a desire to be careful in life and not to continue in sin, I would be encouraged to think that this was a sign of genuine repentance. Similar signs would be the absence of self-excusing, the determination to find God at any price, a restitution of goods if necessary, and a diligent turning to prayer and the Scriptures. Surely these are all signs of the work of the Holy Spirit in a man. We ought to look for them and to find them and if not, to wait, and to work and pray for them.

If the inquirer is not at peace and we are not satisfied with his repentance, what next? Surely, if we have cleared up difficulties and doubts and this uncertainty still exists, I suggest we should rely on the means of grace. Turn him again to prayer, to the Word of God, to hearing the Gospel preached. This is tantamount to saying, “ act in faith ”. If the Holy Spirit is really at work His aim is conversion. Trust Him to do His work, you cannot rush Him. Believe the promises : “ if you seek Me with all your hearts you shall find Me ”; and again, “ draw nigh unto God and He will draw nigh unto you ”; again, “ he that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out ”. If the seeker is genuine, God through His Spirit will reveal Christ to him. Beware lest we act in unbelief and think that we must force a decision, fearing that if we commit a person to the means of grace that grace will not be forthcoming. I remind you in all seriousness, brethren, God desires the salvation of souls more than you or I do. I might mention here a case where in one of the prisons of this country I was faced with this alternative, either to try to hurry a decision in the short time I was allowed or to urge the prisoner, after showing him the meaning of repentance, to

turn to the means of grace, and to pray that God would meet him and reveal the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour to him. God was faithful and today this man is an active member of his local church. I believe that we can be guilty of failing to trust the promises of God, and, in our unbelief we attempt to force decisions before the work of the Holy Spirit in conviction and in enlightenment is complete. The result is false "births" and many who say, "I tried it, but it did not work". Time is always God's and never more so than when dealing with an inquirer.

In this connection I believe that we too often treat sin as a "gentlemanly virtue". In our dealings with people there are times when we need to be firm in exposing the subtlety and hypocrisy of sin. The true seeker is not put off, he knows that what we say is true. Our pride and self-righteousness may put him off, but if he knows we are only seeking to help him face the truth about himself, we will not turn him away. Rather he will be more convinced about the genuineness of our message for he will see that we are concerned with the truth, even if it is unpleasant to him. In dealing with a person who is dominated by a particular sin—for example, stealing, homosexuality, or drug-addiction—it is vital to relate this particular sin to his general sinfulness. Such a sin must be seen to be a symptom of a sinful nature. Repentance must cover the whole of our beings and not only a particular sin. The aim is to bring about, by God's grace, conviction of sin, repentance for sin, and not for one troublesome sin.

At times I believe it is right and scriptural to test a declaration of repentance. John the Baptist did. I think that we, too, ought so to do in cases where there has been a public scandal or a criminal act or if it will strengthen the inquirer. Again, I must say that in my experience this will not deter the genuine seeker. It will put off those who want the name of Christianity without Christ and His Cross.

It will be apparent from the above that I still believe that Christianity is a supernatural religion. The work of repentance and the giving of faith is the work of the Holy Spirit. My own counselling is based on this fact. I believe we are but "workers together with God", under-shepherds, midwives, called to help in difficult births. We must never forget that we cannot cause regeneration, we cannot give repentance, we cannot open the eyes of the spiritually blind, and we cannot give faith. To be confused on these points will vitiate our counselling. It is a sad fact, but a true one, that our Lord Himself could only weep over Jerusalem when it had rejected Him, and similarly He could only grieve over the departure of the rich young ruler. There are times when our work will meet with rejection and we, too, will understand something of His sadness. It is as important to know what we cannot do, as it is to know what we can do.

Our congregations, whatever their size, contain a fair percentage of Christian people who are in need of spiritual help in one form or another. In thinking of them it is wise to be clear about our aims. Generally speaking, we are to be "helpers of their joy", so that from their first love of the Lord Jesus Christ to their deathbeds, their walk through this world is one of faith, glorifying to God, and of fruitful service in His Kingdom. During their pilgrimage God's purpose for our people, as it is for us, may be described as "the universal renovation of our natures

by the Holy Spirit into the image of God through Jesus Christ ". This is what used to be called sanctification. With these truths in mind we can employ three facets of our spiritual life which we will always use in our counselling. One, the nature of a Christian, two, the sources available to a Christian, and three, the enemies to be encountered by a Christian.

We must never forget that it is the whole man that is involved in becoming a Christian and it is this whole man, a rational being, with the will and feelings that is the subject of salvation. Romans 6 : 17 tells us that Christians " have obeyed (the will) from the heart (the emotions) the form of doctrine (the understanding) which was delivered to you ". One of the most common causes of trouble and unhappiness in the lives of Christians is lack of balance. Too often appeal is made to the emotions at the expense of the understanding. Or pressure is placed upon the will without first having dealt with the understanding. I believe it is a vital principle of counselling that we must deal with our Christian inquirer through the understanding. A modern pastor has written : " truth is received through God's greatest gift to man, the mind, the understanding ". Both heart and will are always to be approached indirectly through the understanding—" Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind " (Romans 12 : 3). Our Lord's prayer was : " sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth ". Moreover, if you observe our Lord's treatment of people you will see that this was His method. His aim was, and ours too must be, a response of the whole man ; not an emotional response but of the whole personality. This cannot be effective unless " we obey from the heart the form of doctrine delivered unto us ".

The Christian is still a fallen man. Oh the agony of many of our people because they have never been taught that their old fallen and corrupt natures were not sanctified in one stroke at their conversion. Part of our task will be to enlighten them that regeneration does not obliterate our temperaments or mortify all our evil dispositions. Yet the Christian is a new man, regenerate, redeemed. He is forgiven, restored, justified, at peace with God, the heir of salvation and a citizen of heaven. These are the truths about a Christian of which we shall have occasion to remind them, and indeed to insist upon, to counter fears and doubts, and to reassure the tempted and the tried, and to uplift those cast down by sin and Satan. Notice how often St. Paul has to tell the Christians of the first century, despite their weaknesses and trials, to remember what they are in Christ : " know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost " ? Again : " Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ . . . but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ " (Eph. 2 : 12f.).

What are our resources to help our flock ? We often call them the " means of grace ". Briefly, I suggest the knowledge of what a Christian is, namely, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Bible and its promises, the Church with its ordered worship and sacraments, its fellowship, prayer, Christian books, Christian friends, and, not least, our Christian duties according to our callings. All these are available to help in time of need. I predict that if you take your counselling seriously you will have occasion to call upon all of them.

A wise physician of the body knows the enemies which attack it. The more he knows the sooner he will be able to provide the antidote. We all can reel off the enemies of the soul in three words—the world, the flesh, and the devil. Although we may be tempted to minimize this conflict, it is obvious that both our Lord and St. Paul found that they were called upon to fight the good fight of faith against an adversary who was sometimes a roaring lion and at other times an angel of light. Not to realize that the Christian life is a battle is to be blinded to the real nature of the spiritual life in which we and our people are inevitably involved.

* * * *

It is against this background, briefly summarized, that I approach the problems met in counselling Christians.

The obvious must be stated again ; the first task in such counselling is one of diagnosis. As we listen to our troubled inquirer we must be seeking the source of disharmony. Is it a failure to understand some aspect of Christian truth ? Are the emotions controlling the situation ? Is it sheer disobedience and therefore a matter of the will ? Are all these three factors involved ?—and so on. Frequently, and quite quickly, we will be able to understand the problem without much difficulty. On other occasions it will only be after repeated visits and much heart searching and unravelling that the root of the trouble will be laid bare.

We must work from the symptoms to the disease. It is impossible for me to give a complete list of symptoms of spiritual decline. Neither is it possible to make a list where one symptom does not run into another. Man's personality is a complex one and one defect usually involves other faculties as well. However, bearing these things in mind, here is a list of symptoms which we may find among ourselves and our congregations.

- depression
- unhappiness
- sense of desertion
- lack of assurance
- failure to conquer sinful habits—this can cover a multitude of human frailties from impurity to laziness !
- lack of joy
- no growth in grace, i.e., a consciousness of being spiritually stagnant
- lack of zeal
- little concern for holiness
- prayerlessness
- the Scripture become meaningless
- no interest in evangelism
- fearfulness
- a variety of neurotic symptoms, e.g., tension
- bitterness
- grumbling
- no purpose in life
- general confusion—realizing that something is wrong but not sure what it is
- panic over adverse circumstances
- matrimonial difficulties
- etc., etc.

I can only suggest, in the time available, some of the reasons for these dishonouring symptoms of spiritual defeat. Again as in the physical realm so often one weakness sets up and opens the door to others, causing a complex situation. However, for the sake of brevity and clarity, I mention some of the causes of such symptoms separately.

1. *Failure to understand the nature of Christianity*

Surprisingly this is a particularly frequent source of trouble, and especially the failure to understand the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. Allied to this there is a misunderstanding of the cost of being a Christian. Unbalanced preaching which fails to compass the whole counsel of God is often the direct cause of such misunderstanding and the consequent confusion in life. Because our people do not understand this conflict within them they become unhappy, despondent, and full of doubts as to their relation to God. This state of mind can lead to irritability, disharmony, and even bitterness towards other Christians who apparently are not troubled in the same way. I am thinking of a middle-aged woman, brought up amongst evangelicals, converted at sixteen, whose soul was in the grip of bitterness yet a regular church attender. It was ignorance of these truths which was largely responsible for her condition. Our Lord never minimized the cost of discipleship ; we do so at our peril.

2. *Faith and its place in the Christian life*

Many of our people do not understand the nature of faith and that the Christian life is a life of faith. They have not realized that faith, a living faith, is consistent with doubt, temptation, fears, and, at times, the feeling of being deserted.

Faith is an activity of the new man in Christ and involves the whole personality. Intellectually, it is the assent of the mind to facts ; emotionally, it is trust, confidence, and love ; volitionally, it is the commitment of life to God in Christ. Faith must be exercised by being applied and appropriated. Faith is not static, it is not always present in the same degree, and it grows by love. Too often we have given the impression that there is only one act of faith and that is at conversion. In the same way we have given the impression that there is only one act of repentance, again at conversion. The Bible teaches us that faith at conversion is but the beginning of a life of faith. Indeed the Bible is not relevant to many because it is not used as a textbook of faith. Christianity must be relevant to the details of daily life or it is irrelevant. Faith and obedience are the links between the life of God and man. The work of the Holy Spirit is to enable us daily to act in the multitude of daily decisions on the basis of what we are in Christ and what He would therefore do in our situation. I know of no other way in which the Christian life can be progressive, dynamic, and challenging.

Let me at this point, state that a large proportion of those we counsel are people in sorrow, those facing difficult domestic circumstances, those full of fear, and those facing serious illnesses and death. Their problems are basically related to their faith—faith in the promises of God ; therefore, faith in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed

to us in the Scriptures. "What is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see" (Hebrews 11: 1, NEB). With such faith our task is to help them to see their total situation through the eyes of faith. We must therefore be men of faith who can speak with conviction concerning eternal realities and so become instruments of the Holy Spirit to uplift the downcast, to allay the fears of the fearful and to comfort the dying.

Associated with this question of faith is that of the importance of the Scriptures as the means to enable us to grow in the knowledge of God in Christ. To meet new situations there is the need for growth in faith and faith grows supremely by the knowledge and love of God; and then, by the enlargement of experience, by the example of others, by prayer, and by spending time in God's presence. We need, therefore, to note well how the weakness of faith has so many deadening repercussions in the life of a believer—so often with consequences which dishonour God and harm the witness of the Church.

3. *Problems in the prayer life of our people*

Many are floundering because what ought to be the very breath of life to them has become a ritual. They have not understood the relation between prayer, sanctification, and service; nor the place of faith in prayer. There are conditions of prayer involving holiness of life, obedience, and faith. James 4: 3 says; "you ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions". Or again, prayer can be a "let-out"—we pray for people instead of witnessing when we ought to be doing both. In this subject then there is a rich field for teaching and thereby removing the magical attitude to prayer which is foreign to the Scriptures. Again I ask, do we really believe that the means of grace are, in reality, God's way of giving Himself to men? Many of our people need help in these matters.

4. *Lack of discipline and of self-examination*

It may be that by the nature of our preaching and by our anxiety to win people or not to offend members of our congregation we have neglected teaching the wholesome habit of self-examination. Consequently, sin is not taken seriously and the need of discipline is minimized. Here the basic trouble may be that we have a very liberal doctrine of sin and a humanistic confidence in human nature. The truth is that no Christian can take liberties with his nature and no Christian can grow in grace unless, like St. Paul, "he dies daily". This means obedience and obedience implies knowledge of the Word of God and this implies faith in the Word of God and in Him Who gave it to us "for instruction, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness". We must conduct our self-examination in the light of God's Word and help our flock to do likewise.

5. *Intellectual difficulties*

It is a fact that some of our folk believe and are Christians. At the same time they are troubled about various intellectual questions relating to the Church, its faith, and the Scriptures. They cannot live in the fulness of joy without facing these questions. There are means

within our grasp either to equip ourselves to meet these intellectual difficulties or to get in touch with those who can. It is certain we *must* endeavour to meet our people in this their need.

6. *Personality defects*

Some who come to us have definite weaknesses in personality. We must help them to see the relation between regeneration and temperament and to see their weaknesses in the light of their general sinful condition, at the same time assuring them that their situation is basically no different from any other Christian. As John Owen says, "if grace doth not change nature I do not know what it doth". However, these brethren will need frequent reassurance and encouragement. They are our brethren in Christ, and those who are strong are called upon to help those who are weak. At this point I again merely mention that there are instances when we must ask ourselves if the root of the problem in such cases is physical or psychological.

* * * *

I must leave this brief glance at some of the causes of the problems met in counselling. The next question is how do we deal with them?

Firstly I suggest that unlike some in the medical profession it is our duty to help our people to understand their problems and not to keep them in the dark with an air of mystery and superior knowledge. In quite a few instances, especially with the more intelligent, once the position has been made clear they themselves know what to do to overcome their problem.

Secondly, I suggest the next vital step is to give directions relating to the problem in question—directions or instructions as to how to overcome the particular spiritual weakness involved. Obviously such directions will vary according to the nature of the problem. Such directions will contain the following—guidance as to the use of the means of grace, advice concerning temptations and how to deal with them, and exhortation to perform the duties of one's calling. I am not thinking of vague well-meaning but trite sayings; I *do* mean clear, definite, and detailed instructions. Now in order that our directions might be meaningful we must, without fail, establish the sinfulness of the sin in question. We none of us like to accept the wickedness of our besetting sins. It is the same device, which is popular at the moment, for the adulterer to refer to his "affairs" rather than his adulteries; or a fornicator to speak of "making love" rather than of fornication. The terms are used to gloss over any moral tones and so avoid the guilt and the truth concerning the nature of their sinful activities. It is imperative that we call a sin by its proper name so that sin is seen to be sin! In this connection it is also vital that we destroy "the rational defence" made for our sins—for example, "It is my nature", "My wife doesn't love me", "It is too deeply rooted", "Circumstances are against me", etc., etc. These so-called reasons must be dealt with and destroyed. I commend to you our Lord's example in John 8 when dealing with the Pharisees, or St. Paul's treatment of those who say "let us sin that grace may abound", in Romans 6. The fact is that the persons concerned should be convinced that they are

without excuse, absolutely without excuse. There can be no real improvement until this point is reached for there can be no real repentance. In the same way fears must be faced. The Scriptural authority for this is 1 Corinthians 10 : 13 : " No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it ". There are numerous biblical examples to be referred to if necessary in this connection.

The first direction would be concerned with marking the occasions of sin. The time to deal with all temptations is at their outset, the thin edge of the wedge. This is largely a matter of common-sense. You can't have a clean mind if you read filthy books and watch dirty plays. You court temptation if you keep the wrong company, over-indulge, and ignore the place of discipline in life. It may be necessary to go into all these details to help a brother in sin.

Secondly, and related to the above, I would suggest a check on the use of time. We may laugh at the wise saying, that the devil finds work for idle hands ; but let us not forget that idle hands imply an idle mind. Surely here is the opportunity to bring up prayer, Bible study, Christian service, profitable reading, and the acceptance of our vocation. I particularly draw attention to Christian duties : God's calling to do our mundane tasks unto Him whatever that task may be. All Christians have a vocation and God is using it in their lives for His glory and the perfecting of His people.

Thirdly, in some cases it will be necessary to put a barrier between the person and his besetting sin. A man with a broken leg is given crutches until he can walk normally again. The newly converted homosexual or drunkard may need you as a friend until he is established in the new life in Christ. You may need to see him weekly for months. This weekly interview will be a help to him to fight against his temptation. I need not remind you that faithful physicians take endless pains to heal the body of its infirmities. We claim that spiritual health is more important—are we to be shamed by their diligence, patience, and compassion to those in their care ?

In my own experience in helping a particular homosexual, I saw him twice weekly for three months and weekly for five months. He was converted within fourteen days of our first interview. At the end of eight months he was living a life that he had not lived since he was a lad of fourteen years of age—a period of forty years. This same person was rejected by a well-known criminal sexologist as being incurable.

Fourthly, we may advise our tried fellow-Christians to cry immediately to the Lord for help when temptation comes to them. This has a double value. It is a direct appeal to God for help and also it transfers their attention to God and thereby away from the onrush of temptation—arrow prayers have their place !

Fifthly, to help and to assure our troubled Christians we may well use our own testimonies. It is not necessary to go into minute details but to use our experience to indicate that we understand something of their problems and can testify that the grace of God has been sufficient in our lives. Incidentally, this may also help our fellow-Christians to

see that we do not speak down to them in self-righteousness. Let us not forget the only difference between us is one of degree and not nature. If you do betray this attitude it is obvious you do not know yourself and therefore will not be much use in helping others.

Finally, confront your brothers in Christ with the glory of His salvation. Remind them of His regeneration, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and all the resources of grace. This is the positive stirring-up of Christians to accept and to realize and to live in the light of God's saving work in Christ. Tell them what they are in Christ—urge them to grasp God's proffered grace, to fight the good fight of faith, to pray and not to faint, to endure hardness, and to quit themselves as men.

Then, when they leave your study, pray for them, carry them in your prayers, watch over them, seek them out if they are not in church, and, by every means, demonstrate your love and friendship towards them.

I close with an appeal. It is just this. We live in days when the Church of England is actively and rightly concerned with new services ; when the councils of the church deliberate at length over new and necessary canons ; when volumes are written and much emotion is displayed over the cause of unity—and the Lord may be in this too. But I humbly suggest that unless God makes us into pastors we may find ourselves with new services, new laws, and perhaps even new churches—but our congregations, which are the reason for the existence of these things, will consist of spiritually sterile, joyless Christians, shallow believers, ineffective witnesses, and we ourselves “like sounding brass and tinkling cymbals”. If ever the glory of the Church of England should be in its pastoral concern for its people, that time is now. May God help us all to serve our great and glorious Shepherd, so that His Name shall be magnified and His troubled sheep live lives on earth that reflect the wonder of His saving power that they may be to His glory and used to the extension of His Kingdom !
