

soul in quest of a personal Redeemer. God's presence may be in the church in its collective capacity, and yet many hearers of the Gospel know nothing of an indwelling Saviour. By very many, I fear, the outward organization of the visible church is regarded as a joint-stock company, where religion is dealt out to the many because of the merits of the few. Once a man is enrolled as an adherent he is entitled to share in all the spiritual benefits that are supposed to belong to the society of which he is a member. The minister and officials transact all the business, and disburse the revenue, just as an insurance and banking company pay the profits to their shareholders. We do not perhaps hear such language applied to churches, but the indifference of thousands in our land proves that the idea of individual responsibility is forgotten, and personal effort to secure salvation woefully neglected.

It is not to be denied that God often blesses wicked men for the sake of the good. But it is also equally true that he never yet saved a man because of the piety of his neighbour. Such a doctrine of imputation has no place in the scheme of grace. If a man is to gain the friendship of his Maker, and share in all those blessings that flow from union to Christ, he must personally seek his favour and an interest in his death. Men are saved always as individuals, not as churches or nations. To secure peace and pardon, each man for himself must put forth all the powers and capabilities of which his nature is susceptible.

Seeking the Lord should also be the first duty of life. "They that seek me early shall find me." "Early will I seek thee." "With my spirit within me will I seek thee." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Many act as if religious obligations were the last that should be fulfilled. If a man, after de-

voting his time and talents, his intellect and substance through a long lifetime to the world, can find a little leisure to look after the things of eternity, so far well; but to make the safety of the soul the paramount concern of his life seems to many the very height of fanaticism. A man who starts in life looking upon the tremendous issues of the future world as of first importance, and the concerns of the present as only secondary, is esteemed far from wise and prudent. Now, supposing that the question of time in no way interfered with the result, and that salvation was sure in any case, what do you think of the man who gives the last moments or years of his existence to the service of his maker as a return for the mercies of a lifetime? Judged by the low standard of honour that passes current in the world, such conduct merits the contempt of all high-minded men. And yet there are, no doubt, some here to-day who are acting after such a fashion. Year after year, O, impenitent sinner, you have depended upon the bounties of Providence; blessings undeserved, nay unexpected, have been lavished upon you with unsparing liberality. Nature and grace have combined to crown your days with loving kindness. God by his servants, his Word and his Spirit has appealed to your reason and your conscience; but you have withstood every argument and refused every overture. And it is only when in sight of the judgment seat and great white throne that you reluctantly yield to his demands and give yourself to his service. Such conversions are emphatically "mean conversions." God may accept such a man; but not with the favor and regard that he bears towards those who have for their entire life on earth devoted themselves to the pursuit of piety and the advancement of his cause on earth.

The language of the text denotes that seeking the Lord is a work which