

reason to mourn for hearers such as these. They are those who would enter into the gate which leadeth unto life, if it were not strait, and follow Jesus, if they need not take up their cross. They have listened with attention and pleasure to the word of God—they have admired its beauty and mercifulness—they have felt perhaps uneasy at their state, and anxious to escape from the condemnation which they are conscious they deserve—they catch eagerly at the free mercy of the gospel offered to all penitent sinners, through faith in Jesus Christ. "*They receive the word with joy;*" they even become zealous defenders of the doctrine they have received, and either condemn or pity those who have false or imperfect notions of the truth. But they have not *counted the cost*. As long as there is nothing to suffer, or no occasion to deny themselves, all is well; but "*when tribulation or persecution ariseth—in time of temptation—they fall away.*"

The temptations which try their faith are of two kinds. Either they are outward persecutions which follow the consistent profession of the gospel, and which, though, God be thanked, they are comparatively uncommon in our day, are still, in the shapes of displeasure and alienation of friends, detriment to business, and the galling lash of ridicule, sufficient to scare many an unstable Christian from the course his better thoughts approve. But the great persecutor of all men, and in all ages, is Satan. He knows that our faith, unless fruitful in obedience, is vain, and he therefore strives, through the medium of our own passions and corrupt will, to tempt us from the ways which God commands. It is thus that most acts of obedience require, at first, at least, an act of self-denial; and this it is which causes the falling away of those who are represented by the seed "*which fell on the rock.*" As long as the gospel speaks of promises and privileges, such persons hear it gladly; but when it speaks of duties—when it insists upon holiness, the cutting off the right hand, and plucking out the right eye, in the shape of some bosom sin, "*by-and-bye they are offended.*" Some of you recollect the time when you heard and read the word gladly, and took delight in prayer, and even felt some joy and peace in believing; and you formed good resolutions; but when temptation came you broke them. The seed fell on the rock, and though it sprang up, it had no root. Your hearts, though warmed by the gospel, were not softened. They need softening now; and though you cannot do it yourselves—though the preacher and the word itself cannot do it—yet there is One, the Holy Spirit, who "can take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and can give you an heart of flesh."* As you value your hopes of eternal life, then, which is the heritage of those only "who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality,"† ask humbly for grace in fervent, persevering prayer. Plead the merits of your Redeemer at the mercy-seat of God, and claim the promise of the Comforter which He has given us. But be careful, by no one act, or word, or thought—by trusting in your own strength, or following your own inclinations instead of God's

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

† Rom. ii. 7.