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## THE MAN IN THE IRON CAGE

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THE MAN in the cage raises more questions than it answers. This room in the house of the Interpreter is not without its difficulties and may transport the modern evangelical mind into strange and uncharted territory. The general twenty-first century view of living the Christian life is like a revolving door which includes a cycle of easy sinning, convenient repentance, accommodating grace and benign forgiveness. We may tend to think that the Puritan theology of Bunyan's day featured an over-scrupulous kind of spiritual navel-gazing calling for a personal watchfulness that might appear a bit extreme today. Yet at the same time we must admit a strong degree of admiration for this kind of pursuit of a holy life as shown in Puritan thought.

There is a gloom and despair that hangs like a pall over this room in the Interpreter's house. The man in the iron cage represents a formerly good man turned bad. He refers to his earlier life as one who was a "fair and flourishing professor" both in his eyes and also in the eyes of others. He alleges that his secretly sinful life caused God in anger to abandon him and the Spirit to depart. His heart is now so hardened that he cannot repent.

The Scriptures are replete with both promises and warnings. The Apostle Paul tells us, "Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise, thou also shall be

cut off" (Romans 11:22).

In any assembly of God's people there will be at least two groups represented: those who are in a state of grace and who possess the Kingdom of Heaven, and those who profess to be regenerate and who go through all the motions but are void of saving biblical religion ("Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof," 2 Timothy 3:5). For the most part both groups walk, talk and act the same—the true state of the heart is known only to God alone. Notice that the writer to the Hebrews addresses "brethren": "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God ... . For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:12, 14). In fact, the words of warning throughout Scripture are predominantly directed toward "brethren" (see Hebrews 6:1–4; 1 Corinthians 10:1–13; Hebrews 3:12; 2 Peter 1:10). It seems that *if* they depart from the living God, they really were not brethren to begin with, as it says in 1 John 2:19.

The man in the cage apparently was one of these "brethren" who abandoned the faith and indulged himself in his sins and now cannot find himself back on the Way. The questions then still remain: Was he ever really saved? Is he reprobate? Has God bypassed him? Has he grieved the Spirit for the last time? The Interpreter says, "Ask him."

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